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### Links in a chain: Early modern Yiddish historiography in the northern Netherlands (1743-1812)

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**Publication date**  
2012

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

Wallet, B. T. (2012). *Links in a chain: Early modern Yiddish historiography in the northern Netherlands (1743-1812)*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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## 2. Jewish historiographical traditions

Within the corpus of Jewish literature, historiography held but a small place through the centuries. It is difficult to speak of a continuous tradition of history writing, as is the case with halakhah. History writing was mostly produced in the shadow of other, more popular genres and was often an unintended result of literary activity in other fields, like polemics or liturgy. However, over the course of centuries a small corpus of Jewish historical texts was written and transmitted from generation to generation, eventually resulting in a canon of Jewish historiography which served as a model for Jewish history writers. Amsterdam Yiddish historiography was influenced by these history books, with their divergent methods and ideas about history, and so a short introduction into the major Jewish historiographical works and traditions is helpful. As chapter 6 will demonstrate, many of these previous Jewish historical works were integrated in Amelander's Jewish universal history book *Sheyris Yisrael*.

### 2.1 Decline of ancient Jewish historiography

It is a classic debate among Jewish historians and theologians why Jewish historiography nearly disappeared after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Until that moment, history writing had a fixed place within Jewish literature, with a rather clear profile. The tendentious, religious motivation was obvious: such texts were meant to show readers how God was involved in the history of Israel and that just as He had acted in the past, so He would act in the present. Divine involvement is shown to be ultimately determining the shape and course of the historical process. This attitude is clear in the historical narratives throughout the Hebrew Bible, in Tora, Nevi'im and Ketuvim. One other specific feature of biblical historiography is the importance attached to genealogical categories, explaining the origins and politics of peoples in terms of descent from different ancestors. Finally, popular storytellers' motifs, literary tropes and metaphors were used in the construction of the narratives, like divine tests and the success of the unpromising.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> On the specific nature of biblical historiography a vast body of scholarship exists, here it suffices to mention: Baruch Halpern, *The first historians. The Hebrew Bible and history* (San Francisco 1988); J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; London 2006) 61-83. Momigliano has shown how the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, as expressions of post-exilic Jewish historiography, are influenced by Persian historiography in the use of autobiographical elements and archival documents; Arnaldo Momigliano, 'Eastern elements in post-exilic Jewish, and Greek, historiography' in: idem, *Essays in ancient and modern historiography* (Oxford 1977) 25-35.

The authors of the books of the Maccabees continued the biblical tradition of history writing, by showing how God had restored Jewish cult and autonomy. The oeuvre of Flavius Josephus is traditionally regarded as the closing of ancient Jewish historiography. Josephus wrote about both biblical times and his own period, during which Israel, after a fierce military struggle, lost its autonomy, its capital and its cult, and suffered the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Hereafter, Jewish literature primarily dealt with halakhah and 'aggada, resulting in compendia such as the Mishna, Tosephta, Midrashim and finally in the Talmuds Bavli and Yerushalmi.

Various explanations have been posited for this decline in Jewish historiography. The first is a political explanation, and was offered by scholars like the various nineteenth-century *Wissenschaftler des Judentums*. Classical historiography is defined as the history writing of political entities and personalities. Thus, the biblical books are chronicles of the kings of Israel and Judah, and relate their wars and policies. Likewise, the books of the Maccabees describe the power struggle between the Hellenistic Syrian kings and the Jewish clan of the Maccabees. Finally, Josephus dealt with the last stage of the Jewish political entity and its disappearance. This type of historiography was for the most part written on behalf of kings and rulers to legitimise their authority and to memorialize their deeds for subsequent generations. Viewed from this perspective, Jewish historiography simply ends with the disappearance of the single Jewish political entity. Without Jewish sovereigns, reason advocates of this explanation, there is no Jewish historiography.

A second explanation is based on religious convictions, and we can distinguish a Jewish and a Christian variant of it. The Jewish variant holds that Jewish history can only be written in the Land of Israel. Furthermore, between the fall of the Temple and the coming of the Messiah there is the diaspora period, which is not worth recording and documenting. This intermezzo of diaspora is not considered a vital element of Jewish history. The Christian variant is much the same: after the rejection of Jesus as Messiah, the Jewish people went into the diaspora and became a nation outside history. As Hegel argued, in adhering to Old Testament traditions and not accepting Jesus the Jewish people ossified and became a living anachronism. That such a people did not produce historiography is, in this view, thus considered perfectly understandable, as they are no longer part of history.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Shlomo Avineri, 'The Fossil and the Phoenix: Hegel and Krochmal on the Jewish Volksgeist' in: Robert L. Perkins, *History and System: Hegel's Philosophy of History* (Albany 1984) 47-64.

Although there was clearly a decline in the production of Jewish historiography, it did not vanish entirely. Whereas the political narratives disappeared, two religiously significant genres still addressed history writing. The mainly Sephardic genre of *shalshelet ha-qabbalah*, which proved the purity of the rabbinic tradition, had roots in the Mishna tractate *Avot* and was regularly actualised. The second genre, martyriology, was especially popular in Ashkenaz around the time of the Crusades, and presented the braveness and *qiddush ha-Shem* of the Jewish victims.<sup>51</sup>

## 2.2 *Shalshelet ha-qabbalah* and Jewish historiography

The classic example of this tradition is the letter of Rab Sherira Gaon (986), in which he presents a sequence for the Saboraim and Geonim. The purpose of this genre was to show the legitimacy of the *qabbalah* and to provide authority for contemporary rabbis being the spiritual children of the great leaders of Israel. The genre also had polemical purpose, namely to counter the Karaite claim concerning corruption of the Biblical tradition through the rabbinical one.<sup>52</sup>

Although this *shalshelet ha-qabbalah* is certainly not historiography in the true sense of the word, it could take forms in which the importance of the given information rises above the theological and polemical purpose. Often the names of sages and rabbis are presented with biographical details. Another important offspring of this tradition is that the same principle was used for general or secular history. R. Abraham ibn Daud of Toledo wrote not only a *Sefer ha-Qabbalah* (ca. 1160), in which he concentrates on the transmission of the rabbinic tradition, but also a history of the Roman emperors until the early seventh century.<sup>53</sup>

*Shalshelet ha-qabbalah* was not an isolated Jewish genre. Robert Bonfil has stressed its parallels with the Christian type of historiography, in which apostolic succession held an important place. Both the Jewish and the Christian authors sought to link their contemporary religious authorities, be they rabbis, bishops or popes, to earlier authoritative leaders, such as Moses or the Apostles.<sup>54</sup> In the Christian historiography Eusebius made this the central point of his *Ecclesiastical History* (312). In this church history Eusebius concentrated on the doctrinal

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<sup>51</sup> On the differences between Sephardic and Ashkenazic traditions of historiography: Ivan G. Marcus, 'History, story and collective memory: narrativity in early Ashkenazic culture', *Prooftexts* 10 (1990) 365-388.

<sup>52</sup> Fred Astren, *Karaite Judaism and historical understanding* (Columbia SC 2004) 47-64.

<sup>53</sup> Lionel Kochan, *The Jew and his history* (London/Basingstoke 1977) 24.

<sup>54</sup> Bonfil, 'How Golden Was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?' in: A. Rapaport-Albert ed., *Essays in Jewish historiography* (Atlanta 1991) 78-102; Gerson D. Cohen in his introduction to *Sefer ha-qabbalah* also noted the similarity to the Islamic notion of *isnad al-hadith*: Abraham ben David ibn Da'ud, *Sefer ha-qabbalah. A critical edition with a translation and notes to the Book of Tradition* (London 1969) i-lvii.

controversies and showed how the orthodox stance had won the dispute with pagans and heretics. Eusebius presented the orthodox doctrine as the original doctrinal tradition, which had been kept pure despite all heretical attacks.<sup>55</sup> Amram Tropper recently added to this diachronic comparison a synchronic one, by arguing for the common origin of the Jewish and Christian ‘chain of tradition’ in the Hellenistic succession list. This succession list was an important means for the Greek intellectual movement of the Second Sophistic (60-250), because it showed the continuity of Greek intellectual disciplines from the high point of the Greeks until the present.<sup>56</sup>

Whatever the background of the *shalshelet ha-qabbalah* tradition was, the tradition was unquestionably influential in the development of Jewish historiography. Later chronicles, such as David Gans’ *Zemah David* and Amelander’s *Sheyris Yisroel*, used and adopted this principle in their descriptions of both Jewish and general history. But the genre was also one of the sources of the tradition of ‘successor chronicles’, because just as the chain of the rabbinic tradition had to be verified from time to time, so too the chronicles needed to be continued – for whatever reasons – by other chronicles.<sup>57</sup> Chapter 7 will further develop this argument.

### 2.3 *Sefer Yosippon*

One can hardly overestimate the importance of *Sefer Yosippon* to Jewish historiography. For centuries, until the end of the eighteenth century, most Jews and Christians believed that Flavius Josephus had authored the work and that it was the Hebrew version of the Greek and Latin editions of his oeuvre. However, the author was in fact a Jew from Southern Italy, who – according to David Flusser - wrote the book in 953.<sup>58</sup> He compiled the book (written in biblical and midrashic Hebrew) from the Apocrypha of the Vulgata, especially the two books of the Maccabees, and from the Latin edition of Josephus (known as *Hegesippus*). *Yosippon*

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<sup>55</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, ‘Pagan and Christian historiography in the fourth century A.D.’ in: idem, *Essays in ancient and modern historiography* (Oxford 1977) 107-126, there 110-117.

<sup>56</sup> Amram Tropper, *Wisdom, Politics, and Historiography. Tractate Avot in the Context of the Graeco-Roman Near-East* (Oxford etc. 2004); and: idem, ‘The fate of Jewish historiography after the Bible: a new interpretation’ *History and Theory* 43 (May 2004), 179-197.

<sup>57</sup> The concept was also of influence to family chronicles, like *Megillat Ahimaaꝰ*; Wolfram Drews, ‘Koordinaten eines historischen Bewußtseins in der mittelalterlichen jüdischen Historiographie. Das Beispiel des Ahimaaꝰ von Oria’ in: Klaus Hödl ed., *Historisches Bewusstsein im jüdischen Kontext. Strategien – Aspekte – Diskurse* (Innsbruck etc. 2004) 13-28, there 18.

<sup>58</sup> The debate on the dating of *Sefer Yosippon* has been meticulously analysed in: Steven Bowman, ‘Dates in *Sefer Yosippon*’ in: John C. Reeves and John Kampen eds., *Pursuing the text. Studies in honor of Ben Zion Wacholder on the occasion of his seventieth birthday* (Sheffield 1994) 349-359.

describes the biblical era up to the fall of Masada. For a long period this book was the most significant history book within the Jewish communities, besides the historical narratives within the Hebrew Bible.<sup>59</sup>

As a true counterpart to Josephus's *oeuvre*, *Yosippon* starts with the Creation of the world and of Adam. Much attention is paid to the genealogies from Genesis, which the author connects to contemporary nations. In recording the story of the Tower of Babel, he jumps to the history of Babylonian Jews. The topic the author is truly interested in, however, is the period from Babylonian exile until the fall of Masada. *Yosippon* documents not only Jewish history but also much of the history of nations which the Jews had to contend with: the Babylonians, Greeks and Romans. Thus, *Yosippon* presents much legendary material about Alexander the Great.<sup>60</sup>

The author's methodology has been described as careful with his sources, faithfully rendering the material he found and supplying the necessary corrections. At the same time, he applied midrashic methods to his narrative such as word plays, expanding the meaning of his original source by making allusions and re-using phrases in a literary style. His purpose was not just to inform Jews on their history, but ultimately morally didactic: from history lessons were to be learned.<sup>61</sup> Thanks to *Yosippon*, Jewish and non-Jewish history were presented alongside each other among the medieval Jewish communities. The book was soon translated into other languages, including Arabic, Slavic and Yiddish, and was read by a non-Jewish public.<sup>62</sup>

#### 2.4 Crusade chronicles

A sudden rise in Jewish historical writing occurred around the time of the Crusades. Both the First and Second Crusades aroused immense enthusiasm among European Christians. Many

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<sup>59</sup> David Flusser, *The Josippon [Josephus Gorionides], edited with an introduction, commentary and notes* (Jerusalem 1978-1980) 1-2 [Hebrew]; idem, 'Josippon, a medieval Hebrew version of Josephus' in: Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata, *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity* (Leiden 1987) 386-397. On the manuscript history of *Yosippon*, see as well: Jacob Reiner, 'The original Hebrew *Yosippon* in the Chronicle of Jerahmeel' *Jewish Quarterly Review* LX (1969) 2, 128-146. On the influence of *Sefer Yosippon* on medieval Jewish historiography: Saskia Dönitz, 'Sefer *Yosippon* und die historiographische Tradition des Mittelalters' in: Annelies Kuyt and Gerold Necker eds., *Orient als Grenzberreich? Rabbinisches und außerrabbinisches Judentum* [Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes LX] (Wiesbaden 2007) 169-182.

<sup>60</sup> W. Jac. van Bekkum, 'Alexander the Great in medieval Hebrew literature', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 49 (1986) 218-226.

<sup>61</sup> Steven Bowman, 'Sefer *Yosippon*: History and Midrash' in: Michael A. Fishbane ed., *The Midrashic imagination: Jewish exegesis, thought, and history* (New York 1993) 280-294.

<sup>62</sup> Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A social and religious history of the Jews* [2<sup>nd</sup> edition, revised and enlarged]: *High Middle Ages, 500-1200. Volume VI: Laws, Homilies, and the Bible* (Philadelphia 1958) 188-198.

people decided to join the Crusades and departed to liberate Jerusalem from Muslim rule. One side effect of this response to the pope's invitation was vehement anti-Jewish violence. In most places the authority of the ruler, whether worldly or clerical, was strong enough to restrain such sentiments before the local Jewish community was struck. But especially in the Rhineland, Jews became victims of crusading masses, and entire communities were murdered: Speyer, Worms, Mainz, Trier and Cologne.

The stories of these communities were later narrated in several chronicles. The victims of the First Crusade, in 1096-7, are remembered in three Hebrew chronicles. The *Mainz Anonymus*, for which no date or place of composition is known, was written by one author and describes the fate of the *kehillot* of Speyer, Worms and Mainz.<sup>63</sup> The *Solomon bar Simson Chronicle*, from 1140, was written in Mainz and is a compilation of earlier compositions. It covers the same communities and details the end of the Trier and Cologne communities.<sup>64</sup> The last work, the *Eliezer bar Nathan Chronicle*, named after its author, who lived from 1090 until approximately 1170, is the only one of the three chronicles for which there is more than one manuscript: in this case, a fourteenth-, a seventeenth- and two eighteenth-century-handwritten copies. This chronicle is a reworking of the Solomon bar Simson chronicle, with additions about the Trier and Cologne events that differ remarkably from Solomon's account.<sup>65</sup> The Eliezer bar Nathan chronicle most influenced the Jewish memory of the First Crusade, as it was used by Joseph ha-Kohen in his *Emek ha-Bakha*, which was subsequently incorporated into David Gans' *Zemah David*.<sup>66</sup>

Only one chronicle, *Sefer Zekbirah* (Book of Remembrance), by Rabbi Ephraim of Bonn (1133-after 1196), documents the impact of the Second Crusade (1146) on Ashkenazic Jewry. The author was the head of the *beth din* in Bonn and wrote, in addition to this chronicle, *piyyutim* and responsa. Four copies of *Sefer Zekbirah* remain, in the same manuscripts as Eliezer bar Nathan's chronicle. The work describes the massacres of the Jewish communities of

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<sup>63</sup> Shlomo Eidelberg ed., *The Jews and the Crusaders, the Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades* (Madison 1977) 95. For a close examination of this source, see: Robert Chazan, 'The Mainz Anonymus: Historiographic Perspectives' in: Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, David N. Myers eds., *Jewish History and Jewish Memory, Essays in Honor of Yosef Haim Yerushalmi* (Hannover NH 1998) 54-69.

<sup>64</sup> Eidelberg, *Jews and Crusaders*, 15.

<sup>65</sup> Eidelberg, *Jews and Crusaders*, 73-75.

<sup>66</sup> The chronicles are published and edited: Abraham Habermann ed., *Sefer gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Zarfat* (Jerusalem 1945); an English translation is provided by: Shlomo Eidelberg ed., *The Jews and the Crusaders, the Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades* (Madison 1977); an German edition and translation: Adolf Neubauer and Moritz Stern eds., *Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgung während der Kreuzzüge* (Berlin 1892); Eva Haverkamp ed., *Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgungen während des Ersten Kreuzzugs* [Monumenta Germaniae historica 1] (Hannover 2005). On the rendering of the First Crusade account from Solomon bar Simson over Joseph ha-Kohen to David Gans: Robert Chazan, *In the year 1096. The First Crusade and the Jews* (Philadelphia 1996) 118-120.

Bacharach, Würzburg, Ham and Sully. Prose and liturgical poems give this chronicle a special quality. The author lived during the time of the Second Crusade and is accurate in his descriptions. His inaccuracies are relatively minor.<sup>67</sup>

The qualification ‘martyriology’ is often given to this corpus of chronicles, as the purpose of such chronicles is to demonstrate how the Rhineland Jews, rather than accepting baptism and saving themselves from torture and death, died for the *qiddush ha-Shem*, the sanctification of the Name.<sup>68</sup> Robert Chazan has argued that this emphasis on martyrdom and human bravery was typical for the new sensibility in Europe. The ‘Renaissance of the twelfth century’ shaped a new understanding of human possibilities and a new stress on the importance of human decisions. This resulted, in the Christian world, in the heroism of the Crusades, whereas the parallel effect among the Jewish victims was one of martyrdom. The chronicles offer clear evidence for this reasoning. In contrast to earlier Jewish historiography, the immediate role of God is small. Of course, the subject of God undergirds these histories, but the main attention is on the human heroes and villains.<sup>69</sup>

This new type of historical narratives was part of a larger Jewish parallel to the Renaissance of the twelfth century. New types of more analytical bible commentary and Talmudic exegesis, together with the pietistic spirituality of the Chasidei Ashkenaz, were also elements of this process. However, only the innovations within Talmudic exegesis, made by the so-called Tosaphists, proved lasting. As a result of the persecutions and harsher governmental treatment towards them, Jews were gradually removed from the vibrant Northwestern part of Europe and resituated in the Central and Eastern regions of the continent. This migration severed the Jewish connection with the emerging Renaissance civilisation, once more isolating Jewish culture.<sup>70</sup>

While the parallels with Christian historiography, such as the Latin *Gesta Francorum*, are striking,<sup>71</sup> the differences with earlier Jewish historiography are clear. Biblical and rabbinical models of martyrdom, like the story of Daniel and his friends in the furnace, were now used to interpret the events of 1096. But the depiction of God’s involvement in the sacrifice of the martyrs of 1096 is radically different from its earlier models. This is also true for the 1054

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<sup>67</sup> Eidelberg, *Jews and Crusaders* 117-119.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Lena Roos, “God wants it!”: *The ideology of martyrdom of the Hebrew Crusade Chronicles and its Jewish and Christian background* (Uppsala 2003).

<sup>69</sup> Chazan, *1096*, 92-104; Robert Chazan, *God, humanity, and history, the Hebrew First Crusade narratives* (Berkeley etc. 2000) 191-210.

<sup>70</sup> Chazan, *God, humanity, and history*, 212-215.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Chazan, ‘Latin and Hebrew Crusade Chronicles: Some Shared Themes’ in: Susan J. Ridyard ed., *The Medieval Crusade* (Woodbridge 2004) 15-32.

South Italian family chronicle *Megillat Abima'az*<sup>72</sup> and, to a lesser extent, *Sefer Yosippon*. The latter definitely influenced the authors of the Crusader chronicles. The biblical Hebrew style and the theme of suicide – as in the narratives on the conflagration of the Temple and the mass suicide at Masada - left traces in the chronicles. But the depth of the human characters, and the more detached role of God, are stark contrasts.<sup>73</sup>

However, being innovative in historical perception does not mean that the Crusader chronicles were not deeply rooted in Jewish tradition. The interpretational model of the massacres was primarily biblical. Via parallel incidents in the Bible the authors tried to understand what was happening and to connect the recent past to sacred history, thereby interpreting these traumas as a continuation of that history.<sup>74</sup> The Jews regarded the struggle between Christians and Muslims as the final, End of Days confrontation between Gog and Magog. Jewish suffering was thus understood to be the martyrdom that hastened the coming of the Messiah.<sup>75</sup>

The martyrs themselves were interwoven into the catalogue of Jewish heroes, thereby embedding the Crusade experiences into the familiar paradigm of Jewish history. The sense of historical continuum was the dominant one among medieval Jews. Yet it is combined in the chronicles with a realistic awareness of the complexities facing both Jews and Christians in the Crusade era. The stories are thus not merely reduced to the well-known archetypes of Jewish heroism; they are also coloured by the complex reality of various behavioural possibilities for Jews and Christians. In these texts, not all Jews are martyrs or all Christians persecutors.<sup>76</sup>

Gerson D. Cohen has demonstrated another linkage with Jewish tradition. He describes the Ashkenazic tradition as highly liturgical, with prayer and liturgy being the key to coming into contact with God. Because during services the martyrs of the Crusades were commemorated in *piyyutim*, Cohen suggests that the chronicles were written as 'liturgical

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<sup>72</sup> On this chronicle, titled by Benjamin Menahem Klar *Megillat Abima'az* while others used the confusing name *Sefer yubasin* (which is also the title of Zacuto's history): Drews, 'Koordinaten eines historischen Bewußtseins', passim; a recent study and edition: Robert Bonfil, *History and folklore in a medieval Jewish chronicle. The family chronicle of Abima'az ben Paltiel* (Leiden etc. 2009).

<sup>73</sup> Robert Chazan, *God, humanity, and history, the Hebrew First Crusade narratives* (Berkeley etc. 2000). Cohen noted also influence of Abraham ibn Daud's *Sefer ha-Qabbalah* on the Mainz *Anonymous*; Gerson D. Cohen, 'The Hebrew Crusade Chronicles and the Ashkenazic Tradition' in: Marc Brettler and Michael Fishbane eds., *Minhab le-Nabum, Biblical and Other Studies Presented to Nabum M. Sarna in Honour of his 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (Sheffield 1993) 36-53, there 38.

<sup>74</sup> David Nirenberg, 'The Rhineland massacres of Jews in the First Crusade. Memories medieval and modern' in: Gerd Althoff, Johannes Fried and Patrick J. Geary eds., *Medieval concepts of the past. Ritual, memory, historiography* (Cambridge 2002) 279-309, esp. 285-288.

<sup>75</sup> Eidelberg, *Jews and Crusaders* 10-14.

<sup>76</sup> Robert Chazan, 'Representation of events in the Middle Ages' in: Ada Rapoport-Albert ed., *Essays in Jewish Historiography, in memoriam Arnaldo Dante Momigliano 1908-1987* [History and Theory, Beiheft 27] (Middletown CT 1988) 40-55, there 46-55.

commentary'. Via reading the chronicles people would understand the prayers they recited, and thus improve their *kavanah* during the service.<sup>77</sup>

## 2.5 Anthological historiography

As Eli Yassif has demonstrated, a specific feature of medieval Jewish historiography is the anthological character of many history books.<sup>78</sup> The books were not in fact written, but are rather editions of selected sections from different kinds of sources, arranged in chronological order. The anthology was popular throughout the Jewish world. However, whereas Jews in the Muslim world concentrated on 'framework-bound anthologies', European Jews mainly edited chronological anthologies. This difference corresponds with the outside influences of respectively the Arab and the European worlds. In Europe there existed a richly developed genre of historiography; the Arab world, in contrast, produced myriad framework anthologies.

It is important to note the medieval perception of history writing. In the selection of sources the historical precedence or authority of the author was of great importance. A source's background, not its content, is what made it reliable. One who was writing a chronicle did not intend to present a new picture of the subject. Rather, he was dealing primarily with effective presentation of (all) known facts. The method for doing so was often by citing large bodies of texts from predecessors. This was the practice in both Christian and Jewish historiography.<sup>79</sup>

Examples of this anthological historiography include *Sefer Yosippon* (paragraph 2.3), the family chronicle *Megillat Ahima'az* (see n. 44), *Shevet Yehudah* and *Shalsbelet ha-qabbalah* (both discussed in the next paragraph). Eli Yassif has presented another interesting and – in the context of this chapter illustrative – example of this type of historiography: Eleazar ben Asher Halevi's *Sefer ha-Zikbronot* (Book of Remembrances). This 400-page manuscript dates from the first half of the fourteenth century, and was written in Germany. Like many chronicles of the Middle Ages, its narrative begins with the creation of the world and concludes with the End of Days and the coming of the Messiah. All major events in Jewish history up to that time are recounted, whereas the *hurban ha-bayit* functioned as its middle point, dividing the narrative into

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<sup>77</sup> Cohen, 'Chronicles and Ashkenazic Tradition' passim; cf. Susan L. Einbinder, *Beautiful death: Jewish poetry and martyrdom in medieval France* (Princeton/Oxford 2002); Adena Tanenbaum, 'Poetry and history', *Prooftexts* 24 (2004) 3, 386-400.

<sup>78</sup> Eli Yassif, 'The Hebrew Narrative Anthology in the Middle Ages' *Prooftexts* 17 (1997) 153-175.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Theo M. Riches, 'Episcopal historiography as archive. Some reflections on the autograph of the *Gesta episcoporum Cameracensium* (MS Den Haag KB75 F15)', *Jaarboek voor Middeleeuwse Geschiedenis* 10 (2007) 7-46.

“before” and “after” sections. The book is a sizable anthology, with selections from many kinds of sources, including midrashim, historical tales, local legends, hagiography, journey tales, martyrological narratives and novellas. For example, Halevi used the Crusade chronicles of Eliezer bar Nathan and R. Ephraim of Bonn. But his most important source, from which he took sizable excerpts, was *Sefer Yosippon*. In ordering and selecting the texts, Halevi demonstrated his creativity and vision. In presenting canonical and non-canonical texts alongside each other, he presented a new image of the Jewish past, along with an awareness its complexity and plurality.<sup>80</sup>

## 2.6 Sixteenth-century Jewish historiography

In the Renaissance era a new type of historiography was created in the Christian world, one which sought to imitate and emulate classical Latin and Greek examples, along with a newly developing interest in studying primary sources. This resulted in history books in which the medieval conception of history, as influenced by Eusebius and Augustine, was replaced by a more secular and political interpretation of history. No longer was the sequence of bishops and popes, and the legitimisation of their authority, the model according to which history was written. Nor was the authority of existing history books still taken for granted. Historians, in a marked contrast to the medieval custom of stressing continuity with predecessors, began to articulate a specific identity for their endeavor.<sup>81</sup>

Jews likewise authored history books during this period. In the Mediterranean region in particular Sephardic Jews wrote about Jewish history, but the characteristics of the books differed significantly. This makes deciding which works should or should not be identified as historiography problematic. As such, I will present an overview of the books and authors most frequently named as historiography.

Medieval historiographical traditions were continued in the sixteenth century. The traditional Sephardic genre of *shalshelet ha-qabbalah* was practiced by Abraham ben Samuel Zacuto, who lived in Tunis. He updated the chain of tradition in his *Sefer yubasin* (Book of Geneologies), written in 1504 but not published until 1566, in Istanbul. Interestingly, Zacuto

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<sup>80</sup> Yassif, ‘Hebrew Narrative Anthology’.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. E. Cochrane, *Historians and historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago 1981); E.B. Fryde, *Humanism and Renaissance historiography* (London 1983); Joseph M. Levine, *The autonomy of history: truth and method from Erasmus to Gibbon* (Chicago 1999).

also included a small world chronicle which addresses general history from the Creation to the sixteenth century.<sup>82</sup>

The title indicates that Gedalya ibn Yahya's book is written in the same tradition: he composed *Shalshelet ha-qabbalah* (Chain of Tradition; Venice 1587). As does Zacuto's work, this book offers more than just a continuation of the chain of tradition. It contains as well an encyclopaedia with lemmas about different topics, ranging from astronomy to angels; an essay on the relationship between classic culture and Jewish history; and a history of persecutions of Jews in Europe.<sup>83</sup>

Persecutions are also the theme of Shlomo ibn Verga's *Shevet Yehudab* (Scepter of Judah; Adrianopol 1554), a dialogue which presents a survey of the persecutions of the Jews from Roman times to the author's day. The book is structured by fictive discussions, mostly between the Spanish king and a Christian scholar, in which the narratives of persecutions are interwoven. In the book Ibn Verga searches the sense of Jewish history and Jewish suffering in particular. He was convinced that, just as in biblical times, the reason for the many persecutions had to be sins committed by Jews.<sup>84</sup> In his narrative, Ibn Verga uses historical material, fiction and tales all together. This, along with the dialogue structure, led some scholars to argue that the book is not historiography but primarily part of *belles lettres*. Although on both stylistic and historical grounds there is much to say in favour of this opinion, Ibn Verga's work nevertheless became part of the historiographical corpus after it was first printed. Later historians often used *Shevet Yehudab* as a reliable historical source on the sufferings of Jews in the *galut*.<sup>85</sup>

Whereas it is debatable whether Ibn Verga's stylistic presentation was innovative, the contents of the respective historical books written by Eliyahu Capsali and Yosef Ha-Kohen

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<sup>82</sup> An English edition is: Abraham Zacuto, *The Book of Lineage, or, Sefer Yobassin. Translated and edited by Israel Shamir* (Tel Aviv 2005). On Zacuto himself, see: Francisco Cantera Burgos, *Abraham Zacut, siglo XV* (Madrid [1935]). On his book: José Luis Lacave, 'El carácter del Sefer Yuhasin' *Boletín de la Asociación Española de Orientalistas* 6 (1970) 195-202; Eleazar Gutwirth, 'The "Sefer Yuhasin" and Zacuto's Tunisian Phase' in: Elena Romero ed., *Judaísmo hispano, estudios en memoria de José Luis Lacave Riaño II* (Madrid 2002) 765-777.

<sup>83</sup> Abraham David, 'R. Gedalya Ibn Yahya's "Shalshelet Hakabbalah" ("Chain of Tradition"): A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Historiography' *Immanuel* 12 (1981) 60-76; idem, 'Gedalia ibn Yahia, auteur de "Shalshelet ha-Qabbalah"' *Revue des Etudes Juives* 153 (1994) 1-2, 101-132; idem, 'The Spanish Expulsion and The Portuguese Persecution through the Eyes of the Historian R. Gedalya ibn Yahya' *Sefarad* 56 (1996) 1, 45-59.

<sup>84</sup> Marianne Awerbuch, *Zwischen Hoffnung und Vernunft, Geschichtsdeutung der Juden in Spanien vor der Vertreibung am Beispiel Abrahams und Ibn Vergas* (Berlin 1985) 166-173.

<sup>85</sup> So Martin Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte in jüdischen Chroniken, Hebräische Historiographie des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen 2004) 45-48. The sources used by Ibn Verga, among which Yosippon is clearly the most popular, are presented by: Fritz Baer, *Untersuchungen über Quellen und Komposition des Schebet Yehuda* (Berlin 1936). See as well: J.D. Abramsky, 'On the essence and content of *Shevet Yehudab*' [Hebrew] in: idem, *On the paths of the eternal Jew* (Tel Aviv 1985) 46-65. The best scholarly edition is still: בער (ירושלים תש"ו). ערך והקדים מברוא יצחק. הגיה וביאר עזריאל שוחט. ספר שבט יהודה, הגיה וביאר עזריאל שוחט. ערך והקדים מברוא יצחק. בער (ירושלים תש"ו).

definitely merit the qualification. Both authors presented not only Jewish history but also non-Jewish history. In fact, they presented Jewish history as part of a narrative on general history. Capsali, a rabbi from Crete, wrote two history books. The first, *Seder Eliyahu zuta* (Minor Order of Elijah), finished in 1523, is for a great part devoted to the history of the Ottoman Empire. Special attention is paid to the exile of the Sephardim from Iberia and their migration to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>86</sup> The second work, *Sippure Venezia* or *Divre ha-yamim le-malkhut Venezia*, deals with the history of nearby Venice and could be characterised as a city chronicle. It was concluded in 1517 and presents not only the history of the city but also of the yeshivot in the north of Italy.<sup>87</sup> The subjects of both chronicles characterise the peculiar situation of a Jew living on Crete, between the Islamic Ottoman Empire and Christian Venice. Capsali's sympathy lies clearly with the former.

Ha-Kohen, a Sephardi Jew established as a doctor in Genua, wrote a book in which the general history of Turkey and France enjoyed a central position: *Divre ha-yamim le-malkhe Zarfat u-malkhe vet Otoman ha-Togar* (History of the Kings of France and of the Kings of the House of Ottoman the Turk; Sabbionetta 1554). The book starts with the collapse of the Roman Empire and describes the Byzantine Empire and the rise of Islam. But the major theme of the book can be characterised as the tense relationship between Christians and Muslims. In ha-Kohen's time the Ottoman Empire was a significant threat to Christian Europe. In history ha-Kohen found the earlier phases of this story, such as the Crusades and the conquest of the Byzantine Empire by the Muslims. It is clear that ha-Kohen's sympathy, as a Jew, lies with the Ottomans, who welcomed Sephardi refugees from Spain and Portugal into their empire.<sup>88</sup> A special edition, in which the passages dealing with Jewish history were presented and new information was added (partly from Usque's Portuguese history), was written under the title *'Emeq ha-bakha* (the Vale of Tears). This edition begins its narrative where Flavius Josephus concluded and narrates Jewish history well into 1605.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibidem 62-65; cf. Charles Berlin, 'A sixteenth-century Hebrew chronicle of the Ottoman Empire, the "Seder Eliyahu Zuta" of Elijah Capsali and its message' in: idem ed., *Studies in Jewish Bibliography, History and Literature, in Honor of I. Edvard Kier* (New York 1971) 21-44.

<sup>87</sup> Ibidem 80-82; Ann Brener, 'Portrait of the rabbi as young humanist, a reading of Elijah Capsali's "Chronicle of Venice"' *Italia* 11 (1994) 37-60.

<sup>88</sup> Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, 'Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen' in: Bernard Dov Cooperman ed., *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge Mass./London 1983) 460-487; Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte* 82-104; idem, 'Joseph ha-Kohen, Paolo Giovio, and sixteenth-century historiography' in: David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri eds., *Cultural intermediaries. Jewish intellectuals in early modern Italy* (Philadelphia 2004) 67-85.

<sup>89</sup> An English edition of *'Emeq ha-bakha*: Joseph Hacoheh and the anonymous corrector, *The Vale of Tears (Emek habakha)*, translated plus critical commentary by Harry S. May (The Hague 1971); Jacobs, 'Joseph ha-Kohen', 76-77.

Much discussed is Azariah de' Rossi's *Me'or 'enayim* (Light of the Eyes). In the book's third section, *Imre Binah*, a critical method is used to date events from the Jewish past, resulting in a different chronology as in rabbinic literature. But this is only one subject discussed by de' Rossi, as he wrote in the book numerous small studies on various topics, some concerning Jewish tradition and history, others modern science and scholarship. De' Rossi was well aware of contemporary Christian scholarship and addressed the same topics, but he adopted a consistently apologetic stance. As Joanna Weinberg has concluded, De' Rossi, in his quest for the truth, mediated between the two worlds of Jewish and Christian scholarship. However, the book also questioned certain basic assumptions in Jewish tradition concerning rabbinic chronology and the historical use of *'aggadot* by using the humanist methods of Renaissance scholarship for traditional Jewish sources. This aroused heated argument, which rendered de' Rossi thereafter suspect to some of his contemporaries and to much of the general public. The very status of this book remains much discussed. Although it contains some of the most interesting and far-reaching conclusions on matters of Jewish history, the book itself is regularly labeled as not being historiography in the proper sense.<sup>90</sup>

Interesting, and less known, is the work of Benyamin Nehemya ben Elnatan: *Mi-Paulo ba-revi'i ad Pius ba-hamishi* (From Paul IV to Pius V). The author lived in the Italian town of Civitanova, near Ancona; his chronicle describes the anti-Jewish measures of Pope Paul IV, of which the author was a victim. Autobiographical elements are combined with a portrait of the pope and the consequences of his policy for the Jews. There are resemblances with the "local Purim *megillo?*", although the interest in the non-Jewish surroundings gives this work its own character. Isaiah Sonne, who edited the chronicle for publication, has demonstrated the stylistic influences of *megilat Ester* and *Sefer Yosippon*.<sup>91</sup>

The only Ashkenazi author in this period is David Gans, who lived in Prague. Gans, although he also wrote on astrology, was well aware of the changes occurring in science and was in contact with renowned intellectuals such as Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler. In his world chronicle, *Zemah David* (Sprout of Israel; Prague 1592), he describes, in separate parts,

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<sup>90</sup> The impressive English edition is: Azariah De' Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes, translated from the Hebrew with an introduction and annotations by Joanna Weinberg* (New Haven Conn./London 2001). Important contributions to the debate on De' Rossi include: Robert Bonfil, 'Some Reflections on the Place of Azariah de Rossi's *Meor Enayim* in the Cultural Milieu of Italian Renaissance Jewry' in: Bernard Dov Cooperman ed., *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge Mass./London 1983) 23-48; Joanna Weinberg, 'Azariah de' Rossi and the Forgeries of Annus of Viterbo' in: David B. Ruderman, *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (New York etc. 1992) 252-279; Yerushalmi, *Zakhor* 69-75; on Yerushalmi's treatment of De' Rossi: Peter N. Miller, 'Lost and found', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 97 (2007) 4, 502-507.

<sup>91</sup> Isaiah Sonne ed., *Mi-Paulo ba-revi'i ad Pius ba-hamishi, kbronika 'ivrit min ha-me'a ba-sheš'esre* (Jerusalem 1954) 3-18.

general and Jewish history. Among Gans' foremost sources, besides contemporary German chronicles, were the books of ibn Yahya and de' Rossi. Gans used an annalistic structure, describing the most important events, without much causal analysis. He combined religious traditionalism and veneration of the Jewish tradition with a modern scientific approach to sources and in selecting his topics. Gans did not integrate Jewish into general history, because he upheld the traditional idea that qualified the former as sacred and the latter as profane, such that they were two domains that should not be combined. However, in his Ashkenazi context, where *Me'or Enayim* had met much criticism for being too secular, the choice to present general history in itself was already remarkable.<sup>92</sup>

Whereas all the other authors still wrote in Hebrew, Samuel Usque – born to a *converso* family in Portugal - opted to write his work *Consolaçam as tribulaçoens de Israel* (Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel; Ferrara 1553) in Portuguese. His choice of language was deliberate, as the book was meant for *conversos*. Just like Ibn Verga, Usque used the dialogue as the model for his work. The three conversationalists discuss over three days the history of Jewish persecutions. The first day deals with the biblical period until the Babylonian exile; the second day until the destruction of the Second Temple; the last day accounts 37 persecutions, ranging from the seventh century to 1553.<sup>93</sup>

Evaluations of the characteristics of this sixteenth-century historiography differ significantly. There are two major topics of discussion: whether this historiography was influenced by the non-Jewish surroundings, and whether this corpus entailed an innovation within Jewish historiography. The main participants in this discussion have been Yosef Haim Yerushalmi and Robert Bonfil.

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<sup>92</sup> An excellent edition is: David Gans, *Zemah David, A Chronicle of Jewish and World History (Prague 1592)*, edited with introduction and notes by Mordechai Breuer [Hebrew] (Jerusalem 1983). An introduction to Gans as a historian offers: Mordechai Breuer, 'Modernism and Traditionalism in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Historiography: A Study of David Gans' *Tzemah David*' in: Cooperman, *Jewish Thought* 49-88; and: idem, 'R. David Gans, Author of the Chronicle Zemah David, A Typological Study' [Hebrew] *Bar-Ilan* 11 (1973) 97-118; a detailed study on the ideology behind Gans' chronicle is offered by: Ben-Zion Degani, 'The structure of the world history and the redemption of Israel in R. David Gans' 'Zemah David' [Hebrew] *Zion* (1980) 173-200. The influence of non-Jewish sources and the presentation of non-Jewish history is studied by: Jiřina Šedinová, 'Non-Jewish sources in the chronicle by David Gans, "Tsemah David"' *Judaica Bohemiae* 8 (1972) 1, 3-16; idem, 'Czech history as reflected in the historical work by David Gans' *Judaica Bohemiae* 8 (1972) 2, 74-84. Gans' scientific interests are dealt with by: André Neher, *Jewish Thought and the Scientific Revolution of the Sixteenth Century, David Gans (1541-1613) and his times* [translated from the French by David Maisel] (Oxford etc. 1986).

<sup>93</sup> For the same reason as *Shevet Yehudah*, Jacobs also categorises this work as novelistic and not historiographic; Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte* 48-49. Portuguese edition: Samuel Usque, *Consolação às tribulações de Israel, edição de Ferrara, 1553, com estudos introdutórios por Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi e José V. de Pina Martins* I-II (Lisbon 1989); English edition: Samuel Usque, *Consolation for the tribulations of Israel (consolaçam as tribulaçoens de Israel)*, translated from the Portuguese by Martin A. Cohen (Philadelphia 1965).

In Yerushalmi's opinion the sixteenth-century Jewish historiography is to be understood within intra-Jewish parameters. The predominantly Sephardic character of this corpus, written mostly by refugees from the Iberian peninsula, leads him to the thesis that it was a reaction to the 1492 expulsion and its aftermath. Unlike earlier expulsions this one produced much historiographical activity. According to Yerushalmi, 'Precisely because this expulsion was not the first but, in a sense, the *last*, it was felt to have altered the face of Jewry and of history itself.' In 1492 Jews were banned from all West European countries and driven to the East. Yerushalmi maintains that from this crisis a new sensibility for history writing would have risen.<sup>94</sup>

With this intra-Jewish explanation, Yerushalmi rejects the views of historians who explain the sixteenth-century Jewish historiography as the Jewish part of the Italian Renaissance revival of historiography. According to Moses A. Shulvass it was important that the Spanish and Portuguese Jews fled to Italy, where they observed 'that within the frame of Renaissance free society the Jew had ceased to be a passive pawn of history.' This resulted in a development of Jewish Renaissance historiography that paralleled 'that of the Italians in scope and depth.'<sup>95</sup>

According to Bonfil Yerushalmi's thesis does not accurately describe the actual historical situation. The intra-Jewish explanation does not persuade him, but he objects also to Shulvass' optimism about the character of the corpus. A detailed comparison with contemporary Italian Renaissance historiography leads Bonfil to the opinion that the Jewish historians did not succeed in adopting the new historiographical principles to Jewish history. The shift to political history was difficult to make, because a political or secular apparatus as such did not exist in Jewish society. The only interpretative model to combine Jewish and general history was the antithesis, namely history books in which persecutions and expulsions form the major part. Another possibility was to separate Jewish and general history and to write them as two separate parts, as did Gans for instance. This development marginalized the position of the Jews in European society, and so widened the gap between Christians and Jews.

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<sup>94</sup> Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, 'Clio and the Jews, , Reflections on Jewish Historiography in the Sixteenth Century' in: David Ruderman ed., *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (New York etc. 1992) 191-218, there 203.

<sup>95</sup> Moses A. Shulvass, *The Jews in the World of the Renaissance* (Leiden 1973) 295-309, there 296. A similar combination of the *gerush Sefarad* and the impact of the Renaissance is advocated by: Michael A. Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish history* (New York 1974) 17-20.

One result was the rabbinic stand to withdraw so-called “general books” from the Jewish reading corpus. Among the genres subsequently affected was historiography.<sup>96</sup>

This forms the background of Bonfil’s statement that Jewish sixteenth-century historiography was ‘the swan song of medieval Jewish historiography’. It was actually the ‘sad epilogue’ rather than an equivalent of Italian Renaissance historiography (Shulvass) or the first genuine Jewish historiography (Yerushalmi). Yerushalmi, as opposed to Bonfil, stressed the innovative character of the corpus; he considered the quantity of books adequate reason to characterise it as a ‘resurgence of Jewish historical writing’.<sup>97</sup>

However, Bonfil not only demonstrated that the corpus was very much bound to medieval historiography; he also showed that approximately ten history books in a hundred years was not much for the period in question. While the Jewish historiographical output in the Middle Ages equaled the Christian one in size, methodology and contents, it could not follow the immense rise in the production of historiography in the Renaissance era. Apart from the fact that the novelist character of some of the history books predominate to such an extent that it is difficult to call it historiography, it was also comparatively much smaller in number than was Christian Renaissance historiography.<sup>98</sup>

Bonfil and Yerushalmi regard sixteenth-century Jewish historiography as an incidental (Yerushalmi) or final (Bonfil) period, after which, until the nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, nearly no historiography was written. ‘The rupture has been complete and decisive’, Yerushalmi writes. Bonfil has added: ‘So long as Jews could not become the actors of a really “New History,” they could hardly conceive of a real historiography of their own.’ However, although the sixteenth-century experiment may have ended, Jewish historiography itself did not. Also in the early modern period, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Jews read, produced and published history books.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Bonfil, ‘How Golden’ passim; Robert Bonfil, ‘Jewish Attitudes toward History and Historical Writing in Pre-Modern Times’ *Jewish History* 11 (1997) 1, 7-40; also Martin Kohn concluded in his study of this period’s Jewish historiography that the gap between Jews and non-Jews widened: Martin Kohn, *Jewish historiography and Jewish self-understanding in the period of Renaissance and Reformation* [Ph.D. dissertation University of California, Los Angeles, 1979] esp. 194-197.

<sup>97</sup> Bonfil, ‘How Golden’ 90; Yosef Haym Yerushalmi, *Zakhor, Jewish history and Jewish memory* (Seattle 1996; 2<sup>nd</sup> printing) 57.

<sup>98</sup> Bonfil, ‘How Golden’ 226-228.

<sup>99</sup> Also Meyer described the period after the sixteenth century as two centuries with ‘no major advances in the writing of Jewish history’. On Western Europe he advanced this argument: ‘In Western Europe also there are fewer works dealing with history and no important advances. Only in the nineteenth century did Jews begin to produce integrated and comprehensive histories, not merely fragments or chains of tradition.’ Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish history*, 21.

## 2.7 Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Jewish historiography

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the interest in history among Jews remained alive. This is evident from the numerous printed editions of earlier historical literature and from the translations of these works into other languages, including Yiddish – a topic that will be addressed separately in the next chapter. New chronicles and history books were also written. In the Arabic realm Sephardi Jews wrote about the whereabouts of the Jews under Islam. In Europe both Sephardim and Ashkenazim were active in writing history. Sephardim wrote both in Hebrew and the Iberian languages, whereas Ashkenazim used Hebrew and Yiddish. This broadening of languages in writing history is characteristic of the early modern period.

In the Middle East Yosef Sambari was active. He lived in Cairo in the second half of the seventeenth century and wrote the chronicle *Divre Yosef*. The book was concluded in 1673, some years after the failure of the Sabbatean movement. Martin Jacobs has suggested that Sambari was among the followers of Shabtai Zvi, because his patron Refa'el Yosef Çelebi was an active member of the movement's Cairo branch. However, the parts dealing with the false messiah in the two manuscripts of the chronicle are deleted, so it is difficult to verify this hypothesis.<sup>100</sup>

*Divre Yosef* is presented as the second, general part of a larger chronicle. The first part is entitled *Divre habkamim*, and is supposed to have been a Jewish history in the tradition of *shalshelet ha-qabbalah*. It is not clear whether this first part was lost or never written. The second part presents an Islamic history, from the start in the seventh century until the author's own time. The book provides the names and dates of the subsequent dynasties and its rulers. Primary attention is given to the Osmanic sultans and their governors in Egypt. But within this Islamic structure attention is also given to the region's Jewish history, including leaders of the Egyptian Jewish community, a biography of Maimonides, the kabbalists of Safed, the 1492 expulsion from Spain and the rabbis of Osmanic cities.<sup>101</sup>

Sambari used Jewish and Islamic sources for his unpublished chronicle. The Jewish historiography he utilized included *Sefer yubasin*, *Shevet Yehudah*, *Divre ha-yamim*, *Seder Eliyahu zuta* and *Shalshelet ha-qabbalah*, among others. Yet he also employed various non-Jewish sources,

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<sup>100</sup> Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte* 109-114; cf. Shim'on Shtober ed., *Sefer Divre Yosef, elef u-me'ah shenot toladah Yehudit be-tsel ha-Islam le-R. Yosef b. R. Yitshak Sambari* (Jerusalem 1994) 13-18.

<sup>101</sup> Shtober ed., *Sefer Divre Yosef* passim. In the nineteenth century Neubauer already published a part of this chronicle: Adolf Neubauer, *Mediaeval Jewish chronicles and chronological notes* (Oxford 1887-1895; reprint Amsterdam 1970) 115-162.

such as the Koran, Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī's (1364-1442) *Kitāb al-mawā'iz* and *Kitāb al-sulūk*. The successor chronicle to the last book was used as well, *al-Nudjūm al-ẓāhira* by Abū 'l-Mahāsīn ibn Taghrībirdī (ca. 1409-1470). Although Sambari generally shortened the passages he copied from these books, he remained so close to the original texts that his style changes from episode to episode.<sup>102</sup>

A bit further eastwards, in Iran, Bābāi ibn Lutf and Bābāi ibn Farhād, members of the same family, each wrote a chronicle. They wrote in their daily language, Judeo-Persian. Bābāi ibn Lutf lived in the seventeenth century, in the Persian city of Kāshān. Because of a royal decree of Shah 'Abbās II he had been forced to convert to Islam. The title of his chronicle is a reference to this event: *Kitāb-i Anusi*, the Book of a Forced Convert. It was written sometime after 1661. His conversion must not have been lasting, however, as his grandson Bābāi ibn Farhād wrote as a Jew about Jewish history in Persia: this latter chronicle was entitled *Kitāb-i Sar Guzasht-i Kāshān dar bāb-i 'ibrī va goyimi-yi sāni* (the Book of Events in Kāshān Concerning the Jews; their Second Conversion). Although his grandson used the earlier chronicle as model, it is not likely that Bābāi ibn Lutf knew Muslim-Iranian or European-Jewish historiographical works. According to Vera Basch Moreen the work is 'related to the provincial forms of Iranian Muslim historiographical tradition.'<sup>103</sup>

Bābāi ibn Lutf's chronicle relates the persecution of the Iranian Jews in the period 1617-1662; this persecution was part of the larger anti-Jewish policy that prevailed in 1565-1662. The successor chronicle covers the period 1721-1731, and is in some manuscripts written after ibn Lutf's one. Both chronicles are composed as poetry. They provide a great deal of information about Iranian Jewish history, as well as a minority perspective on Persian history. Historical facts and folk tales are presented side by side.<sup>104</sup>

In Europe there continued what Shmuel Feiner has called 'traditional historiography', defined as 'the entire Jewish historical literature that had been created and had influenced Jewish society's sense of the past in the Middle Ages, in the early modern era, and in the

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<sup>102</sup> Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte* 122-127; Shimon Shtober, 'The establishment of the *Rī'āsāt al-Yahūd* in medieval Egypt as portrayed in the chronicle *Divrey Yosef*: myth or history?', *Revue des études juives* 164 (2005) 1-2, 33-54, on his sources esp. 42-45.

<sup>103</sup> Vera Basch Moreen, *Iranian Jewry's Hour of Peril and Heroism, A Study of Bābāi ibn Lutf's Chronicle (1617-1662)* (New York-Jerusalem 1987) 50-53. Until now there is not a complete edition of the chronicle. Manuscripts are in the Judeo-Persian collections of: JTS 1444; Bibliothèque Nationale Paris 1356; Ben Zvi Institute Jerusalem 916 and 917. Some parts are published in: W. Bacher, *Les Juifs de Perse au XVI<sup>e</sup> et au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles d'après les chroniques poétiques de Babai b. Lutf et de Babai b. Farhad* (Strasbourg 1907). The grandson's chronicle is published by Vera Basch Moreen, *Iranian Jewry during the Afghan invasion: The Kitāb-i Sar Guzasht-i Kashan of Babai b. Farhad (Freiburger Islamstudien)* (Stuttgart 1990)

<sup>104</sup> Moreen, *Peril and Heroism* 117.

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>105</sup> From the perspective of Bonfil's thesis, however, it should be noted that the traditional historiography of the Middle Ages was continued after a failed experiment in new political history in the sixteenth century.

The European Sephardim also wrote historiography. In Amsterdam at least two persons were involved in the activity. In 1683 there appeared *Triumpbo del gobierno popular y de la Antigüedad Holandesa* by Daniel Levi de Barrios. The work presents a history of the Portuguese Jewish community in Amsterdam and of its institutions. Although he knew earlier historiography such as Flavius Josephus, *Sefer Yosippon* and Zacuto's *Sefer yubasin*, de Barrios' main sources were archival. He used the *Livro de Bet Haim*, the register of the burials at the Sephardi cemetery in Ouderkerk aan de Amstel, as well as other administrative sources of the community. In this respect he was an innovative Jewish historian.<sup>106</sup>

Like de Barrios, David Franco Mendes (1713-1790) wrote his chronicle in Portuguese, not in Hebrew. He likewise concentrated on local history, entitling his (never published) book *Memorias succintas da consternação de nosso K[ahal] K[ados] de Amsterd[a]m*. He used primary sources, together with earlier Jewish and Dutch historiography. One source was Amelander's Yiddish chronicle *Sbeyris Yisroel*.<sup>107</sup> Franco Mendes also wrote the chronicle *Memorias do estabelecimento e progresso dos judeos portuguezes e espanboes nesta famosa citade de Amsterdam*, which covers the history of the Sephardi community in Amsterdam until 1772.<sup>108</sup>

Within Ashkenazi circles the linkage with the earlier historiography was much clearer. Some authors continued the genre of *shalsbelet ha-qabbalah*, such as R. Yehiel Heilprin of Minsk (ca. 1660- ca. 1746) in his *Seder ha-dorot* (first published in 1769). In his introduction Heilprin clearly states that he had not desired to write a new book, but was merely making a correction and update to the earlier authoritative books. The martyriological genre was also continued, often in response to pogroms or other anti-Jewish measures. Nathan Nata ben Moshe

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<sup>105</sup> Shmuel Feiner, *Haskalah and History, The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness* (Oxford-Portland, Oregon 2002) 11.

<sup>106</sup> W. Chr. Pieterse, *Daniel Levi de Barrios als geschiedschrijver van de Portugees-Israelietische Gemeente te Amsterdam in zijn 'Triumpbo del Gobierno Popular'* (Amsterdam 1968); Kenneth R. Scholberg, 'Miguel de Barrios and the Amsterdam Sephardic community', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 53 (1962) 2, 120-159.

<sup>107</sup> The chronicle was published and translated into Dutch by L. and R. Fuks, 'Een Portugese kroniek over het einde van de patriottentijd' *Studia Rosenthaliana* VII (1973) 1, 8-39.

<sup>108</sup> David Franco Mendes, *Memorias do estabelecimento e progresso dos judeos portuguezes e espanboes nesta famosa citade de Amsterdam, a Portuguese chronicle of the history of the Sephardim in Amsterdam up to 1772* [edited by L. and R. Fuks, with commentary by T.N. Teensma] (Amsterdam 1975).

Hanover wrote his chronicle *Yeven mezulah* (Abyss of Despair; Venice 1653) in order to present an account to the Jewish public of the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648-1649.<sup>109</sup>

## 2.8 *A reservoir of models and methods*

It was within this historiographical landscape that first translated Yiddish history books and consequently original Yiddish historiography came into being in the Dutch Republic in the late seventeenth century. This was a landscape in which medieval and early modern books enjoyed the same status and in which separate historiographical methods and models existed next to each other. Biblical historiography offered the early modern historians a theological understanding of history, stressing God's involvement with the Jewish people, but also served as a reservoir of narrative models, motifs and stories which could be read and applied in figurative ways.

Rabbinic and medieval historiography culminated in two genres, the Sephardic 'chain of tradition' and Ashkenazi martyriology. In both genres biblical elements were applied, such as genealogical interest and God's providence, but each was primarily an answer to contemporary conditions of Jews and in line with central cultural modes. The stress on rabbinic authorities, their orthodoxy and wisdom (*Gelebrtengeschichte*), and on the persecutions Jews were suffering in diaspora (*Leidengeschichte*) became in the centuries thereafter the two main historiographical modes. The three main functions of history writing were, thus, legitimizing rabbinic authority, remembering exemplary Jews of the past and serving as an ethical didactic for contemporary readers.

In terms of methodology Jews did not differ significantly from medieval historiography in general. As many as possible sources were collected, whereafter the author merged them into a new all-encompassing narrative. Yassif rightly stressed the anthological character of much Jewish historiography, like the influential *Sefer Yosippon*. This feature, just as the generic ones, worked as well through in early modern Jewish historiography.

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<sup>109</sup> English translation by Abraham J. Mesch: Nathan Hanover, *Abyss of Despair (Yeven Metzulah), the Famous 17<sup>th</sup> Century Chronicle depicting Jewish Life in Russia and Poland during the Chmielnicki Massacres of 1648-1649* (New York 1950). About the reliability of Hanover in comparison to other sources: Edward Fram, 'Creating a tale of martyrdom in Tulczyn, 1648' in: Carlebach, *Jewish History and Jewish Memory* 89-112; on the narrative structures in the book and its importance in forging a distinct Polish Jewish identity: Adam Teller, 'Jewish literary responses to the events of 1648-1649 and the creation of a Polish-Jewish consciousness' in: Benjamin Nathans and Gabriella Safran eds., *Culture front. Representing Jews in Eastern Europe* (Philadelphia 2007) 17-45.

Sixteenth-century Jewish historiography – although predominantly Sephardic -is already a perfect demonstration of this process. Some of the authors continued the *shalshelet ha-qabbala* tradition, others were typically the history of Jewish persecutions. Some are also clearly composed in an anthological way. Simultaneously, in this period, major difficulties were as well present in coping with politics and non-Jewish, general history. Was there a Jewish equivalent to the Renaissance-style political, secularized historiography? This same issue was no less pressing two centuries later in Amsterdam Yiddish historiography.

The Amsterdam historians had studied their classics and were well aware of the ideas, methods, models and challenges. In a creative way they not only continued the tradition of Jewish historiography but also introduced significant innovations. One of these is the change of language from Hebrew to the Jewish daily language, Yiddish. The next chapter will therefore concentrate on the first phase of Yiddish historiography, first through translating the Hebrew classics, and only thereafter through authoring original historical texts in Yiddish.