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

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3. From Hebrew to Yiddish historiography

3.1 Politics of translation

Hebrew was the nearly undisputed language of Jewish historiography until the sixteenth century. This is not surprising, since Hebrew was in these times the language of the literate class and the language of religion. This combination resulted in Hebrew historiography, which was produced by the literate class and religiously legitimated. The two main branches of Jewish historiography in the Middle Ages, namely the Sephardi chains of tradition and the Ashkenazi Crusader chronicles, both had a religious function in authorizing the rabbinic hierarchy and in remembering martyrs. This holds true for the most important medieval history book, *Sefer Yosippon.*

The Ashkenazi world was in medieval and early modern times characterized by 'internal biligualism', in that Hebrew and Yiddish were used alongside each other for different domains.[110] Hebrew was used in the liturgical domain, for daily prayers, synagogue services and study hours, and functioned as a language of communication between rabbis and some lay leaders of Jewish communities. Yiddish served as the daily spoken language for family life, economic transactions and divertissement. Not all Yiddish speakers were conversant in Hebrew, but all who mastered Hebrew knew and used Yiddish.[111]

In the early modern period the relation between the Hebrew and Yiddish domains gradually changed due to at least two major influences.[112] First, the book printing revolution had significant and lasting influence on Jewish cultures, resulting in the entrance of Sephardic books into the Ashkenazi world, the spread of important texts to a larger audience and the

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[110] Shlomo Berger, Aubrey Pomerance, Andrea Schatz, Emile Schrijver, 'Speaking Jewish – Jewish speak: introduction' in: idem eds., *Speaking Jewish – Jewish speak. Multilingualism in western Ashkenazic culture* [Studia Rosenthaliana 36] (Leuven/Paris/Dudley MA 2003) VII-XV; the term 'internal bilingualism' is coined by Max Weinreich in his famous essay: 'Ineveynikste tsveysprakhikayt in Ashkenaz biz der haskole: faktn un bagrifn', *Di Goldene Keyt* 35 (1959) 3-11; an English version in: 'Internal bilingualism in Ashkenaz' in: Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg eds., *Voices from the Yiddish* (Ann Arbor 1972) 279-288; Chava Turniansky, *Between holy and profane: language, education and knowledge among Eastern European Jews* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv 1994) esp. 81-87.
[111] Jean Baumgarten, 'Bilingualism and the development of Old Yiddish literature' in: idem, *Introduction to Old Yiddish literature*; ed. and transl. by Jerold C. Frakes (Oxford 2005) 72-81.
[112] On the fluidity of the borders between Hebrew and Yiddish, and the role of Yiddish in the formation of a distinct Ashkenazi identity: Shlomo Berger, 'Functioning within a diasporic third space: the case of early modern Yiddish', *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 15 (2008) 68-86.

invention of a new Jewish canon and library.[113] The traditional Hebrew texts were now published alongside new Hebrew books. Often the same publishers began printing Yiddish books, not only medieval Yiddish genres, such as *mayse bikher*, but also adding new genres to the Yiddish domain.[114] Many of these works still had a close relationship to Hebrew texts: they explained the weekly *parasha*, the text of the *siddur* and *makhzor* or introduced readers to Ashkenazi *minhagim*. Some books were translations from Hebrew originals, although often with significant appropriations, for a new audience; others were written directly in Yiddish.[115]

Second, the position of the vernacular in relation to canonical languages, such as Latin, changed in many European societies. Throughout Europe the Bible was translated into the vernacular and spread among a much larger public than before. Many other books were translated from Latin, and growing numbers of texts were written primarily in vernacular. The Dutch Republic was among the European regions where Latin was largely replaced by the local vernacular, in this case the Dutch language. Although the position of Hebrew in Jewish communities was a different one than Latin in Christian society, all this influenced Ashkenazi societies, resulting in a growing turn to Yiddish. The supremacy of Hebrew, however, was never questioned or threatened. The first Yiddish books were printed by Christian publishers, who also promoted vernacular books for their Christian audiences.[116]

Among the texts translated from Hebrew into Yiddish were history books. The Hebrew originals and their Yiddish translations enjoyed widespread popularity and most books were republished several times. The history of these translations and the subsequent adaptation to a new public has yet to be written, with the exception of a study into the 'Ashkenization' of *Shevet Yehudah*.[117] Here I present a short survey of this crucial stage in the *Werdegang* from Hebrew to Yiddish historiography. As is the case for Yiddish literature in general, also Yiddish

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[113] Moshe Rosman, 'Innovative tradition: Jewish culture in the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth' in: David Biale ed., *Cultures of the Jews. A new history* (New York 2002) 519-570; Elchanan Reiner, 'Beyond the realm of the Haskalah – changing learning patterns in Jewish traditional society', *Simon-Dubnow-Institut Jahrbuch/Yearbook* 6 (2007) 123-133.

[114] Shlomo Berger, 'Yiddish on the borderline of modernity – language and literature in early modern Ashkenazi culture', *Simon-Dubnow-Institut Jahrbuch/Yearbook* 6 (2007) 113-122, there 116.

[115] Berger, 'Speaking Jewish', IX-X.

[116] Shlomo Berger, *Yiddish and Jewish modernization in the 18th century* (Hebrew) [Braun lectures in the history of the Jews in Prussia 12] (Ramat Gan 2006); Jean Baumgarten, 'Printing, distribution, and audience of Yiddish books' in: idem, *Introduction*, 38-71, there 40-48; Leo Fuks, 'Amsterdam, a yidisher literatur-tsenter in 17tn un 18tn yohrhundert', *Di Goldene Keyt* 115 (1985) 183-194, there 191-192; idem, 'Zum Einfluß der niederländischen Kultur auf die jiddische Literatur des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts' in: H.-J. Mueller and W. Röll eds., *Fragen des älteren Jiddisch. Kolloquium in Trier 1976, Vorträge* (Trier 1977) 74-77. Irene Zwiep has demonstrated the changing role of Yiddish in the domain of grammar: Zwiep, 'Adding the reader's voice: early-modern Ashkenazi grammars of Hebrew', *Science in Context* 20 (2007) 2, 163-195.

[117] Michael Stanislawski, 'The Yiddish *Shevet Yehudah*: A Study in the "Ashkenization" of a Spanish-Jewish Classic' in: E. Carlebach, J. Efron and D. Myers eds., *Jewish history and Jewish memory. Essays in honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi* (Hanover/London 1998) 134-159.

historiography is – what Marion Aptroot in the case of Yiddish Bible translations has termed – 'a translation based tradition'.[118] Only on the solid structure of translations, original Yiddish historiography could develop.

The translation of Hebrew history books began with the Yiddish edition of *Sefer Yosippon*. In 1546 Michael Adam, a Jewish convert to Christianity, published, at Froschauer's Zürich-based printing firm, his translation of the work, for which he had used the 1510 Hebrew edition by Tam ibn Yahya of Constantinople. Two years previously Adam had published the first Yiddish Torah translation in two editions, one for Jews and one for Christians (Cremona 1544). The only difference between the editions were the title pages and the prefaces, each of which was directed at a different audience.[119] That *Yosippon* was the second text translated, following the Torah, is an indication of how important and successful it was.

Despite Adam's religious convictions, his Yiddish *Yosippon* edition became quite popular. It was republished in Prague in 1607 and Amsterdam in 1661, although without Adam's introduction and with his name omitted from the title pages, thus turning the edition into an anonymous work. In Frankfurt am Main a slightly revised version was printed by Seligman Reis in 1692 and reprinted there in 1708. This version mentioned only the Hebrew edition and completely ignored the earlier Yiddish editions, although it followed the Adam edition in adding a small appendix on how to read and write Yiddish. Reis occasionally added to the main text, not only in the Yiddish but also the Hebrew editions, but marked his additions with an icon (a small hand).[120] Amelander prepared a new revision of Adam's edition, as we shall see in Chapter 5, and published it as the first volume of his envisioned series of history books. After 1743 the printing of Yiddish editions of *Yosippon* continued into the twentieth century.

The same story can be told about the Sephardi history book *Shevet Yehudah*. In 1591, several decades after the first Yiddish edition of *Yosippon*, an anonymously translated Yiddish edition of *Shevet Yehudah* was published, in Krakow by Isaac ben Aaron Prostitz. This translation was in many ways adapted to the Ashkenazi reading public, to such a degree that

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[118] Marion J. Aptroot, *Bible translation as cultural reform. The Amsterdam Yiddish Bibles (1678-1679)* [unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Oxford 1989], esp. chapter 3.
[119] Chava Turniansky, 'Le-toledot ha-tayts-humash – humash mit hibur'in: *Iyunim be-sifrut devarim she-ne'emru be-erev le-kavod Dov Sadan be-mele'ot lo shemonim ve-hamesh shanah* (Jerusalem 1988) 21-58; Nokhem Shtif, 'Mikhael Adams dray yidishe bikher', *Filologishe shriftn* 2 (1928) 135-168; Jean Baumgarten, 'Yiddish Bibles' in: idem, *Introduction*, 82-127, there 104-105.
[120] *Sefer Yosippon* [Yiddish] (Frankfurt am Main 1708) 4a-4b (Yiddish introduction), 364a (appendix on Yiddish).

Michael Stanislawski has labeled it the 'Ashkenization' of the Sephardic classic. The Yiddish translation stressed, more than did the Hebrew original, God's providence and the traditional theology of Jewish sins underlying the history of suffering; it also defended the Talmud and omitted passages about Christian miracles and conversions of Jews to Christianity. The translator was unquestionably highly successful in his task, and his edition was reprinted in Amsterdam, in 1648[121]; in Sulzbach, in 1700; and in Fürth, in 1724. Reworked translations appeared in 1700 in Amsterdam and in 1810 in Ostrog. A completely new translation was printed in Hrubieszow in 1818.[122]

A final example is David Gans' *Zemah David*.[123] Because many Jewish men and women were unable to read the Hebrew original, Zalman Hena (Hanau) decided to prepare a Yiddish edition, albeit one without the introduction, indices and years in the page margins. He recommended the book to his audience, arguing that in reading it they would become familiar with both Jewish and non-Jewish history and thus enlarge their knowledge. Moreover, reading the book would also result in לושטיגהייט, divertissement.[124] In adding this somewhat 'frivolous' benefit to the traditional catalogue of benefits of history, Hena – and the Frankfurt rabbi who provided an haskama to the edition – opted for a different track than had most other historians and editors of history books.[125] The edition saw the light of day in Frankfurt am Main in 1698.[126] Hena's Yiddish edition of David Gans' history book was, unlike the other Yiddish translations of Hebrew historiography, not particularly successful. After the first edition no other Yiddish versions were published until 1788, although Hebrew editions

[121] This edition was characterized by the linguist Jac. van Ginneken as the oldest known example of 'Dutch Yiddish', although it is questionable if one can speak of a separate 'Dutch Yiddish' in the seventeenth century; Jac. van Ginneken, *Handboek der Nederlandsche taal*. Vol. III (Nijmegen 1919) 14-15.

[122] Stanislawski, 'The Yiddish *Shevet*', on the different editions: 134, 147 n.4; on the 'Ashkenization' of the book: 140-146.

[123] More translations could be mentioned, such as the Yiddish rhymed version of Nathan Neta Hanover's *Yeven Mezulah* in 1655, two years after the Hebrew original, and another translation a few decades later, Amsterdam 1689; Israel Zinberg, *Old Yiddish literature from its origins to the Haskalah period* [A history of Jewish literature 7] (Cincinatti/New York 1975) 231.

[124] David Gans, *Zemah David* [Yiddish] (Frankfurt am Main 1698), 1b, introduction by Zalman Hena.

[125] David Myers even labelled this new benefit of history as an openness to the developing culture of leisure in Europe; Myers, *Resisting history*, 15.

[126] Hena is in most bibliographies linked with the early maskil Solomon Zalman Hanau, author of the Hebrew grammar *Binyan Shlomo*, but this is surely a false identification. Solomon Zalman Hanau was born in 1687 in Hanau and thus would have been 11 years old when he supposedly published the Yiddish *Zemah David*, which, regardless of how brilliant he was, is most unlikely. The publisher Zalman Hanau should therefore be distinguished from the grammarian and early maskil. Steinschneider still put a question mark behind the name 'Salman Hanau', but the catalogues of the main university libraries all name Solomon Zalman Hanau as the editor, following the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* s.v. Gans, David ben Solomon (see www.worldcat.org); Moritz Steinschneider, *Die Geschichtsliteratur der Juden*, 109. For more on Solomon Zalman Hanau, see: Feiner, *Jewish Enlightenment*, 39-41; Andrea Schatz, 'Vorgeschrieben und umgeschrieben. Die 'neue heilige Sprache' der jüdischen Aufklärer' in: Michael Brenner ed., *Jüdische Sprachen in deutscher Umwelt: Hebräisch und Jiddisch von der Aufklärung bis ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen 2002) 19-27.

continued to be printed. Zinberg assumed that the work's 'arid, protocol-like tone' was the reason that it did not appeal to a larger public.[127]

The process of translating Hebrew history books into Yiddish illustrates several things. First, these Yiddish translations all functioned alongside Hebrew editions, which were reprinted repeatedly in the same period.[128] The editors of the Yiddish editions were highly conscious of this, and never sought to replace the Hebrew editions. It is telling that for the Frankfurt *Yosippon* edition of 1708 the main point of reference in discussing the new edition's innovations was not earlier Yiddish editions, on which it heavily relied, but the Hebrew edition. The Yiddish translations, in short, cannot be understood without the Hebrew editions next to them.

Second, the Yiddish translations had a different audience than did the Hebrew editions. Most Yiddish editions used the same words to characterize their intended audience: 'ordinary householders, men and women' (*Shevet Yehudah* 1591); the 'ordinary man who is not versant in the holy tongue', as well as ordinary women (*Zemah David* 1698); or simply the גימיינן פאלק (ordinary people; *Yosippon* 1708). These qualifications were not specific for Yiddish translations of history books, but were standard for many Yiddish books.

As Jean Baumgarten has demonstrated, these characterisations describe the middle strata of Jewish communities, the *mevinim*, those who were able to read but did not have enough time or education to study Hebrew books. The appeal of Yiddish books reached further, however, because they were not only intended to be read by oneself, on one's own, but also collectively, as was common in synagogue and beth ha-midrash. The 1591 Yiddish *Shevet Yehudah*, for example, clearly states that 'everyone should buy it in order to read it with his wife and children.'[129]

The audience was described in gender-precise wordings. For some Yiddish books, such as *tkhines* or the *Tsene u-Rene*, women are mentioned as the primary readers, although it is clear that men used these books no less.[130] In the case of Yiddish translations of history books

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[127] Zinberg, *Old Yiddish*, 231; the second Yiddish edition of *Zemah David* was printed in Frankfurt am Main 1788.
[128] Hebrew editions of *Sefer Yosippon* were published in Mantua, in 1474; Constantinople, in 1510; Basel, in 1541; Venice, in 1544; Krakow, in 1588 and 1599; Frankfurt am Main, in 1689; Gotha, in 1707 and 1710; Amsterdam, in 1723; Prague, in 1784; Hebrew editions of *Shevet Yehudah* appeared in Amsterdam, in 1655 and 1709; Fürth, in 1724; and finally, of Gans' history book a considerable larger number of Hebrew than Yiddish editions saw daylight: Frankfurt am Main, in 1692 and 1698; Offenbach 1768, Fürth 1785.
[129] Baumgarten, 'Printing', 67-71; idem, 'Prayer, ritual and practice in Ashkenazic Jewish society' in: Berger, *Speaking Jewish*, 121-146, there 122; citation after: Stanislawski, 'Yiddish *Shevet*', 138.
[130] Chava Weissler, '"For women and for men who are like women": the construction of gender in Yiddish devotional literature', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5 (1989) 2, 7-24.

women are depicted as the second category after the *ba'ale-batim* who were not accustomed to read whole books in Hebrew. History, unlike halakha or kabbalah, was apparently not considered a male-specific domain but one that was useful for men, women and children alike.

However, the fact that these Yiddish editions were printed for a different social group within Ashkenazi culture than were the Hebrew ones, should – once again – not mislead us. Although the rabbinic elite occasionally voiced critical considerations of Yiddish publications, Yiddish literature as such was not directed against the Hebrew domain or its primary readers – the scholarly, mainly rabbinic elite. It is notable that not all Yiddish translations began with a Hebrew introduction – such introductions willingly or unwillingly underscoring the supremacy of Hebrew language - and that some also included a haskama from a local rabbi, in which people were encouraged to read the book. The haskama also protected the publisher by granting him exclusive rights to publishing the book for a certain period of time.[131]

Third, as the pioneering study of Stanislawski has demonstrated, the translators did not slavishly reproduce the Hebrew originals but in fact worked deliberately on the popularization of history books, within an Ashkenazi context. The paratext changed, addressing a new audience via a work's title page, propaganda rhymes, introduction(s) and typography. Although there remains room for discussion about the supposed secular or heterodox nature of a belletristic history such as *Shevet Yehudah*,[132] the Yiddish translation eliminated any potential sources of anxiety about a disturbing of traditional theological ideologies. *Shevet Yehudah* changed from a Sephardic work into an Ashkenazi one, in tone, language and contents. By omitting the stories of (mass) conversions of Jews to Catholicism, the translator deleted the entire story of the Marranos and transformed the Sephardim into faithful Jews who, like the Ashkenazim of the Crusader chronicles, preferred to die for the *kiddush ha-shem*.[133] Thus, via omission (*Shevet Yehudah* 1591) or addition (*Yosippon* 1708) of material, Yiddish translations became suitable for the new Ashkenazi audience.

Fourth, nearly all the history books translated into Yiddish were successful. Except for *Zemah David*, these history books were republished frequently in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, accounting for their wide popularity of history among Ashkenazi Jews. Places where the new editions were printed followed the rise of new centers of Jewish publishing: after Zürich cities such as Frankfurt, Amsterdam, Krakow and Sulzbach took over.

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[131] David Gans, *Zemah David* (Frankfurt 1698) 1b.
[132] Cf. Yerushalmi, 'Clio and the Jews'; Yitzak F. Baer, 'He'arot hadashot lesefer *Shevet Yehudah*', *Tarbiz* 10 (1934-1935) 152-179.
[133] Stanislawski, 'Yiddish *Shevet*', passim.

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The Yiddish editions were each time printed in the heart of the Jewish book industry, attesting to their popularity and apparent commercial success.

Amelander entered this tradition of editing a Hebrew history book in Yiddish translation when he prepared his *Yosippon* edition of 1743. As we will see in Chapter 5 the edition was presented as a response to the immense interest in history among Amsterdam Jewry. Also, the language of the earlier Frankfurt 1708 edition was considered old fashioned and difficult to understand. As will be demonstrated in paragraph 5.2.5 Amelander's *Yosippon* edition did not perfunctorily follow the Frankfurt edition, but resumed the catalogue of illustrations that had characterized the first Zürich 1546 edition and the Amsterdam 1661 edition. In contrast to the other Yiddish translations of Hebrew history books, Amelander's *Yosippon* edition does not include a Hebrew introduction – although it does feature a haskama in Hebrew by the Amsterdam Ashkenazi chief rabbi Aryeh Leib - but instead presents two introductions solely in Yiddish: one by Amelander and one by his publishers. The short treatise on how to read and write Yiddish is also omitted. This evidences the self-confidence that Amelander and his publishing partners had in publishing books in Yiddish and can be interpreted as a subsequent step on the way from Hebrew to Yiddish historiography.

The publishers of the 1743 Amsterdam edition reflected on the translation process of *Yosippon* from Hebrew into Yiddish. They attributed it to the significant nature of the book that 'our ancestors' had undertaken the efforts to translate it, in order that everyone - men, women and children - would be able to know the history of God's miracles.[134] The definition of the audience can be interpreted both as a description of the practice of *Yosippon* reading in Ashkenazi circles and at the same time as the intended public. It is clear that the publishers wanted to reach the whole family with their edition. Unlike earlier Yiddish translations of Hebrew history books the audience is not further qualified as 'the ordinary man or woman', a sign that the educated class was not excluded. The haskama reinforces this impression, as such an addition was not common for Yiddish books and translations. The inclusion of children would have widened the audience even further.

The edition of *Yosippon* and the publication of *Sheyris Yisroel* were envisioned as a combined project and therefore presented to the public as a single book project. However, it is significant that Amelander first opted to revise *Yosippon*, thereby becoming acquainted with Jewish historiographical literature and styles, and that only thereafter, as a second step, did he

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[134] *Yosippon* (Amsterdam 1743) vi.

write the first Yiddish-language history book, without a preceding or at least parallel Hebrew edition.[135] The success and apparent status of Yiddish editions of well-known Hebrew history books helped pave the way for Amelander. After joining that tradition, he gained the courage to publish his own Yiddish universal history book.

3.2 The start of Yiddish history writing in Amsterdam

Amelander, of course, was not the first to write history in Yiddish in Amsterdam. In the decades before *Sheyris Yisroel* was published several others had attempted to bring historiography from the Hebrew to the Yiddish domain, by translation or by authoring original Yiddish history texts.

In her pioneering survey article 'Yiddish historiography in the time of the Dutch Republic', Rena Fuks-Mansfeld rightly stresses the broader context of Yiddish publications with explicit interest in both history and contemporary society. Many of these publications could be qualified as expressions of a historical consciousness among Dutch Ashkenazim, which should be distinguished from proper history writing. Fuks-Mansfeld notes, for example, the short-lived Yiddish press and the Yiddish almanacs (*luhot*), which included short chronologies of Jewish history.[136] In the context of this chapter, it is worthwhile to examine the genre of pamphlets, in which translation played a major role, before turning to original history writing in Yiddish.

In the years leading up to publications of *Sheyris Yisroel* at least two Yiddish pamphlets dealing with contemporary history were published. These two pamphlets were both translated into Yiddish, albeit not from Hebrew but from Dutch and Portuguese, respectively. This is yet another demonstration of the fact that the interest in history among the Amsterdam Ashkenazim was influenced not only by the Hebrew historiographical legacy but also by historical interest in Dutch society at large. Furthermore, as the second pamphlet was originally written in Portuguese, it becomes again clear that the Ashkenazim shared the same interest with their Sephardic co-religionists, who also authored history books and historical pamphlets, as seen in Chapter 2.

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[135] The only printed book which could possibly be considered as a predecessor to Amelander's work is Alexander ben Moses Ethausen's Yiddish history from the patriarchs to the destruction of the Temple in 70, *Beth Yisrael* (Offenbach 1713; second edition: Amsterdam 1724). Chone Shmeruk and Israel Bartal, 'Contemporary Jerusalem by R. Alexandre ben Moshe Ethausen' [Hebrew], *Shalem* 4 (1984), 445-458.
[136] Fuks-Mansfeld, 'Yiddish historiography', 9-11.

The first pamphlet, translated from Dutch into Yiddish by the prolific school teacher and author Joseph Maarssen, is an anonymous account of the 'Aansprekersoproer' (undertakers' revolt) of 1696 in Amsterdam. This revolt had been a response to an attempt by city authorities to impose funeral reforms. The revolt struck the Jewish quarter, as one of the four looted houses belonged to the Sephardic family De Pinto.[137]

The other pamphlet was translated from Portuguese, although it was written by an Ashkenazi, namely the Amsterdam printer Uri Phoebus Ha-Levi. In this small booklet Ha-Levi narrates the founding myth of the Amsterdam Sephardic community and the role his grandfather Moses Uri Ha-Levi of Emden had played in the return of the Iberian *conversos* to Judaism. The pamphlet saw the light of day in 1710 or 1711 and was titled *Narração da vinda dos judeos espanhoes a Amsterdam*; a Yiddish translation appeared most probably at the same time. Unfortunately, of the Yiddish pamphlet only the title page of the second print has survived.[138]

The importance of both pamphlets in the creation of Yiddish historical writing is attested by the fact that Amelander, in his *Sheyris Yisroel*, used both as sources for his chapters on Amsterdam Jewish history. Although the second pamphlet, by Uri Phoebus Ha-Levi, has more of a historical character than does the first, about the 'Aansprekersoproer' (this pamphlet could even be labeled as journalism), for Amelander both were important and unique sources in composing his historical narrative.

The genre of pamphlets, with its often contemporary political component, is nevertheless, like the Yiddish almanacs, more an expression of historical consciousness than proper history writing. Somewhere between expressions of historical consciousness and historiography there should probably be situated another important source about Dutch Jewish history. It is a history book which has been lost, and so it is unclear if it was ever printed for distribution and whether it was written in Hebrew or Yiddish. The author, Maharim Maarssen,

[137] Joseph Maarssen, *Ayn bashraybung fun der rebeliray tsu Amsterdam* (Amsterdam 1707); the only copy is kept in the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the pamphlet is a translation of: anonymus [Pieter Rabus], *Historie van den Oproer, te Amsterdam voorgevallen, door des Stads Gr. Achtb. Overheid en trouwe Borgers loffelijker wijze gestild, zedert den 31sten January 1696* (Amsterdam and Rotterdam 1696); on the pamphlet: Fuks and Fuks-Mansfeld, 'Joodse geschiedschrijving', 148-149; on Maarssen's writings: Jacob Shatzky, 'Di hakdomes tsu Yoysef Maarssens khiburim' *Yivo Bleter* 13 (1938) 5-6, 377-389; and: Marion Aptroot, 'Yiddish and the German standard in the letter writing manuals of Yousef ben Yankev Maarssen' in: Jerold C. Frakes and Jeremy Dauber eds., *Between two worlds: Yiddish-German encounters* [Studia Rosenthaliana 41] (Leuven 2009) 13-27.
[138] The Portuguese pamphlet was reprinted in 1768, and a critical edition was published by Jacob S. da Silva Rosa: Uri Phoebus Halevi: *Narração da vinda dos judeos espanhoes a Amsterdam* (Amsterdam 1933). On the Yiddish translation: Fuks and Fuks-Mansfeld, 'Joodse geschiedschrijving', 140, 149-151; Mirjam Gutschow, *Inventory of Yiddish publications from the Netherlands, c. 1650-c. 1950* (Leiden etc. 2007) 112 no. 405.

was related to Joseph Maarssen, and so the use of Yiddish should not be excluded.[139] The author had been in the service of the Portuguese Jewish merchant Francisco Gomes da Costa and wrote a book on the early history of Jews in Amsterdam. We know of his book only through *Sheyris Yisroel*, as therein Amelander twice refers to Maarssen's book: first, in describing the inauguration of the Esnoga, the renowned Sephardic synagogue; and in citing Maarssen *in extenso*, in relating how the Amsterdam Ashkenazim started on Rosh Hashana 1635 with their own minyanim. The book would therefore have been written after the inauguration of the Esnoga in 1675.[140]

The most immediate predecessor to *Sheyris Yisroel* is a Yiddish chronicle written by the sexton and trustee (*shamash ve-ne'eman*) of the Amsterdam Ashkenazi kehillah, Leyb ben Oyzer or Levi Asser Rosenkrants (died 1727).[141] His chronicle, which was transmitted in manuscript, consists of two parts. The first is a Yiddish translation of the Hebrew *Toledot Yeshu ha-notzri* - in Yiddish, *Gezeyres Yeshu ha-notsri* - a medieval 'counter-gospel' on the life of Jesus. Thereafter followed the *Bashraybung fun Shabse Tsvi*, the story of the pseudo-Messiah Shabtai Zvi, who around 1666 had upset large parts of the Jewish world with his claims, before his conversion to Islam under governmental pressure.[142] Leyb ben Oyzer included in his narrative a translation and adaptation into Yiddish of a Dutch booklet on Shabtai Zvi, written by Thomas Coenen, a Dutch Reformed pastor in Shabtai Zvi's hometown, Smyrna.[143] Leyb ben Oyzer also presented his own findings, stemming partly from his personal experiences as a crypto-Sabbatean until at least 1706 or at last 1711, when some of Shabtai Zvi's followers had expected an all-revealing return of the supposed messiah. In total the manuscript consists of five parts, with the major part being the Shabtai Zvi narrative; this is preceded by the Jesus story and continued by two more stories on Sabbateanism after Shabtai Zvi's defection to

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[139] Fuks-Mansfeld even stated simply that the book was written in Yiddish, as it is quoted by Amelander in Yiddish. Amelander, however, also cited in the same way Hebrew books. Fuks-Mansfeld, 'Yiddish historiography', 10.
[140] *SY* ed. 1743, 132v, 134r.
[141] Leyb ben Oyzer was married to the daughter of Wolf Hijman Schats, the first chazzan of the Great Synagogue since 1671. For more genealogical material, consult: http://stenenarchief.nl/genealogie/gezin/humo1_ashk/F1281/I1627/ (consulted 17 November 2010). For an introduction to his work: L. Fuks, 'Sabatianisme in Amsterdam in het begin van de 18e eeuw. Enkele beschouwingen over Reb Leib Oizers en zijn werk', *Studia Rosenthaliana* 14 (1980) 1, 20-28. Leyb ben Oyzer is also known to have written a song for Shabbat Channukah, *Ezkera rahamekha be-shir uve-simhah*, recognizable by the acrostic used by the author; Jaap Meijer, *Het Jonas Daniël Meijerplein. Bezinning op drie eeuwen Amsterdams Jodendom* (Amsterdam 1961) 84.
[142] This second part of the chronicle was published by Zalman Shazar in a bilingual Yiddish-Hebrew edition: *Sipur ma'asei Shabtai Zvi. Bashraybung fun Shabse Tsvi* (Jerusalem 1978); critical reviews on this edition appeared by: Jozeph Michman in *Studia Rosenthaliana* 13 (1979) 2, 243-244; and Chava Turniansky in: *Kiryat Sefer* 54 (1979) 161-166.
[143] Thomas Coenen, *Ydele verwachtinge der Joden getoont in den persoon van Sabethai Zevi, haren laetsten vermeynden Messias* (Amsterdam 1669).

Islam, and by a final story, on the Joseph Della Reina legend.[144] The chronicle had been written from the deception in 1711 until 1718, when Leyb ben Oyzer finished the work, although at the end he promised the write about yet another related story, concerning R. Yosef ben Tzur, which is not included in the manuscript.[145]

In his preface, Leyb ben Oyzer makes clear that he wrote his chronicle to warn his readers about similar events in which individuals had claimed – or might someday claim - to have divine inspiration and to be the messiah. Throughout the chronicle the author consistently separates – with the wisdom of hindsight – between what had seemed to happen and what had in fact happened. The miracles are reduced to tricks and the prophecies to the work of Satan. In the end, for Leyb ben Oyzer the framework via which he interprets the whole history of Shabtai Zvi is metaphysical and a demonstration of the power of the 'sitra achara', the other, evil side. This kabbalistic concept helped Leyb ben Oyzer to make understandable why so many Jews, including himself and various prominent rabbis, had believed in Shabtai Zvi. On the final page, however, he concludes that after forty years no other conclusion can be made except than that it had been מעשה שטן, both the work of Satan and a story of Satan.[146]

The connection made between the traditional Jewish source on Jesus and the Shabtai Zvi narrative is telling. Leyb ben Oyzer envisioned that his history would function in the same way as the *Toledot Yeshu* had done thus far: to provide readers a counter-narrative to believers in either Jesus or Shabtai Zvi, and as a lesson from history for similar occasions in the future. Before presenting his own story, Leyb ben Oyzer first used the authority of a traditional source, not in Hebrew but in a Yiddish translation.[147] It is an indication that translation of Hebrew sources into Yiddish was only a first phase, to be followed by original Yiddish works. Amelander did exactly the same, in that he first published a revised edition of the Yiddish *Sefer Yosippon*, before presenting his own *Sheyris Yisroel*.

Although Shabtai Zvi was a Sephardi, Leyb ben Oyzer's chronicle is decisively Ashkenazi. It is not only written in Yiddish and therefore directed at an Ashkenazi reading

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[144] The stories on (crypto-) Sabbateanism after Shabtai Zvi's conversion stemmed from Leyb ben Oyzer's own investigations; the final narrative he received in Hebrew, as he stated, from the Amsterdam Sephardic Haham Solomon ben Jacob Ayallon (1655-1728) – someone who had also been involved in Sabbateanism. Shazar ed., *Bashraybung*, 198-199.
[145] For the story of R. Yosef ben Tzur, see: Raphael Patai, *The Messiah texts* (Detroit 1988) 34-36.
[146] Shazar ed., *Bashraybung*, 212.
[147] On the Yiddish *Toledot Yeshu*, see: S. Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin 1902; repr. Hildesheim 1977) 27-30.

public, it is likewise a deliberate Ashkenaziation of the Shabtai Zvi history. Leyb ben Oyzer stressed the Ashkenazi contribution to the Sabbatean movement, the false messiah's Ashkenazi contacts and next to Coenen used primarily Ashkenazi sources or eyewitnesses. The affair in the Amsterdam Sephardic community around Nehemiah Hayyon in 1713, of which he must have been personally intimately informed, was left out of his chronicle. Radensky therefore labeled Leyb ben Oyzer's chronicle as the product of 40 years of pride in the Ashkenazi contribution to the movement, even after the author became a disillusioned former sympathizer.[148]

This chapter has demonstrated that translations from Hebrew historiographical classics into Yiddish paved the way for original history writing in Yiddish. Until publication of Amelander's *Sheyris Yisroel* these translations constituted the great majority of historical texts available in Yiddish. No less important, however, was contemporary non-Jewish historiography, as evidenced by the translation from Dutch pamphlets and booklets in late seventeenth-early eighteenth century Amsterdam. Leyb ben Oyzer's historical work, although having a small scope and a clear ideological agenda, is in both presentation (together with a translated classic) and usage of sources (Dutch alongside Jewish ones) comparable to Amelander's much larger project a few decades later. Although we know that several manuscript copies of Leyb ben Oyzer's chronicle circulated, no direct connection can be made with Amelander. The chapter in *Sheyris Yisroel* on Shabtai Zvi made use of various sources, but not Leyb ben Oyzer's narrative. The fact that Leyb ben Oyzer's and Amelander's work independently used the same methods is further indication of the importance that Yiddish translations of Hebrew sources played in the shift towards Yiddish historiography.

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[148] Paul Ira Radensky, 'Leyb ben Ozer's "Bashraybung fun Shabsai Tsvi": An Ashkenazic appropriation of Sabbatianism', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 88 (1997) 1/2, 43-56.