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

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## 5. A History of the Jewish World: *Sheyris Yisroel* (1743)

### 5.1 Introduction: traditional and enlightened historiography

‘You children of Israel, my brothers, this history that I have resolved to write for you, is a difficult task.’<sup>287</sup> Thus opens Menahem Man Amelander the first chapter of his history book *Sheyris Yisroel*, which first saw the light of day in 1743, in Amsterdam. He continues, and lists the difficulties an author of Jewish history will encounter due to there being hardly any historiographical traditions or even sources to rely on. Amelander nevertheless succeeded in publishing a history book which covers Jewish history from the destruction of the Second Temple until his own days.

The book became immensely popular and was republished and reworked many times, well into the twentieth century. Yet it has attracted little attention from scholars. Whereas sixteenth-century Hebrew history writing has been studied extensively, as has nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* historiography, this Yiddish work of universal Jewish history appears to have been almost entirely overlooked.

The very few mentions of *Sheyris Yisroel*, however, present conflicting interpretations, which are in line with traditional conceptions of eighteenth-century European Jewry as outlined in the previous chapter. On the one hand, there are authors who – in just a few sentences – justify their neglect of the book by arguing that it is a mere continuation of Jewish medieval historiography and, because of its traditional nature, not worth further note. Yerushalmi, in his *Zakhor*, exemplifies this interpretation.<sup>288</sup> However, other historians – notably Leo and Rena Fuks – advocate continued research into the book’s nature, presenting it as an early example of *Haskalah* writing. In this interpretation *Sheyris Yisroel* is viewed as a revolutionary work which paved the way for nineteenth-century professional history writing.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> SY ed. 1743, 1r.

<sup>288</sup> Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*; Simon Dubnow, *Weltgeschichte des jüdischen Volkes* VII (Berlin 1928) 484.

<sup>289</sup> Leo Fuks, ‘Menahem Man ben Salomo Halevi und sein jiddisches Geschichtswerk ‘Sche’erit Jisrael’ *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 100 (1981) 170-186, there 184 (‘So kann man Menahem Man gewissermaßen als einen der ersten jüdischen Aufklärer betrachten’); Fuks-Mansfeld, ‘Yiddish historiography’, 14, 19: ‘The influence of the ideas of French enlightenment, which were pervading Dutch culture at the time he wrote his book, are evident in many chapters. In this respect we can consider She’erit yisrael as one of the first works of the Jewish enlightenment, conceived and written long before the German-Jewish enlightenment started with Moses Mendelssohn and his circle. (...) Amelander might be called enlightened *avant la lettre* because of his didactic approach and his esteem for non-Jews.’ In 1972, however, both still were the opinion: ‘Hoewel Amelander zeker geen Verlichter was, maakte hij toch een optimaal gebruik van zijn mogelijkheden.’ Fuks and Fuks-Mansfeld, ‘Joodse geschiedschrijving’, 156.

In both interpretations *Sheyris Yisroel's* merit is judged from its position in the encounter between traditional Jewish life and modernity. Apart from the criticism of such a dichotomous interpretation of early modern Jewish history, as leveled in the former chapter, one might ask if this is the only criterion for interpreting and engaging a history book such as *Sheyris Yisroel*. Other sources, besides those which can be qualified as innovative or enlightened, also merit attention, including so-called traditional publications or more hybrid cultural productions. Such sources deepen our understanding of the intellectual and religious world of early modern Ashkenazic Jewry. Beyond the debate over the traditional versus enlightened nature of the book, *Sheyris Yisroel* presents a wide range of complex questions.

This chapter will provide an initial analysis into the book via studying the conception of Amelander's historical project – which also included *Sefer Yosippon* – and the philosophy of history underlying it. The first paragraphs present analysis of paratextual characteristics of both books; the next section concentrates on the philosophy of history; there follows an analysis of Amelander's concept of Diaspora; and the chapter concludes with a study of his methodology. Subsequent chapters will focus on the politics of source selection and usage and on the transmission history after the first 1743 edition.

## 5.2 *Paratextual features of Sefer Yosippon and Sheyris Yisroel*

### 5.2.1 *Paratexts of Amsterdam Yiddish books*

In early modern Europe authors and printers not only printed the text of books but also included title pages, tables of contents, prefaces, introductions, dedications, notes and appendices. The public needed to be convinced to buy and read a book or a particular edition. The narrative theorist Gérard Genette has labeled these media of communication the paratext of a book, which functioned as a threshold or vestibule to the text.<sup>290</sup> According to Genette the paratext functioned as an “undefined zone” between the inside and outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text), an edge, or, as Philippe

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<sup>290</sup> Although Genette distinguished between the peritext (anything in a book that lies outside the main text) and the epitext (the discourses outside the book itself in which it functioned), paratext has since then been used by scholars commonly only to denote the first meaning. Here it suffices to take paratext as peritext.

Lejeune put it, “a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one’s whole reading of the text”.<sup>291</sup>

Although criticism has been leveled at Genette’s concentration on the nineteenth century, his stress on paratext as expression of authorial intention (resulting in less attention to the role of reader perception) and his overly rigid distinction between text and paratext, his theory has nonetheless been productively applied throughout the field of book history.<sup>292</sup> Within the context of early modern book production, Frieder von Ammon has stressed the ‘Protean’ nature of contemporary paratexts. Paratextual features of books expanded rapidly, resulting in extensive variability of paratextual strategies, by which books could be positioned in various socio-cultural contexts.<sup>293</sup>

Shlomo Berger introduced the concept into the study of Yiddish books, and demonstrated its use for dealing with both the often bilingual, Hebrew-Yiddish nature of such paratexts and the web of considerations into which Yiddish books were placed by authors and printers. Paratexts of Yiddish books show the nature of the intended public (whether the transnational Ashkenazi market or a local one), often provide justifications for a book’s publication and can reveal elements of the author’s and/or printer’s ideology. Berger concluded that the paratexts of Amsterdam Yiddish books ‘were an indispensable instrument for promoters of books who were trying to conquer people’s hearts in a deeply conservative community, where life was still determined by a strict religious tradition.’ They show that it was of pivotal interest to publishers that the Amsterdam Yiddish books be perceived as congruent with Jewish tradition and not as revolutionary.<sup>294</sup>

It is worthwhile to start the study of Amelander’s Yiddish history book by first concentrating on several paratextual features, which served as the entrance to the text proper. Author, publishers and printers revealed, in the paratext of the 1743 *Sefer Yosippon* and *Sheyris Yisroel*, a great deal about their understanding of the historiographical project. A review of the following paratextual characteristics follows: the title page, with the various titles and meanings; the rabbinic approbation towards the project; the prefaces; the colophons; and the visual accessories that accompanied the texts.

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<sup>291</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: thresholds of interpretation* (Cambridge 1997) 2.

<sup>292</sup> William H. Sherman, ‘On the threshold. Architecture, paratext, and early print culture’ in: Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Eric N. Lindquist, Eleanor F. Shevlin eds., *Agent of change: print culture. Studies after Elisabeth L. Eisenstein* (Amherst MA 2007) 67-81.

<sup>293</sup> Frieder von Ammon, “‘Quis dubitat de illo?’ – The ‘staging’ of religious pluralization through paratexts’ in: Andreas Höfele, Stephan Laqué, Enno Ruge, Gabriela Schmidt eds., *Representing religious pluralization in early modern Europe* (Berlin 2007) 279-299.

<sup>294</sup> Berger, ‘Invitation’, citation on 56.

### 5.2.2 *The three brothers and the three crowns*

In 1743 two Yiddish history books were published in Amsterdam: the famous bestseller *Sefer Yosippon*, and *Sheyris Yisroel*, a completely new work which continued the story of Jewish history where *Yosippon* had concluded. Amelander served as editor for the first work; the second one he wrote himself. These two publications undoubtedly constitute the *pièce de résistance* of Amelander's productive professional life.

The two books were published together, in the same format, and were sold in the same way as *Magishei Minhab*, in weekly portions for subscribers.<sup>295</sup> Therefore, we should study them first as a unity, before concentrating on *Sheyris Yisroel*. In *Yosippon*, as the first of the two publications, they are introduced together to the readers by the publishers. The Amsterdam chief rabbi Aryeh Leib<sup>296</sup> gave a *haskama* for the whole project.<sup>297</sup> We will concentrate here on the project's infrastructure, underlying ideology, and conceptual framework.

Besides Amelander, the work's the editor and author, various other people were involved in the project. The situation is in fact complex, as in addition to the 'regular' printers and publishers, other people are mentioned as having been publishers. What is the case? The introduction to *Sefer Yosippon* identifies three brothers - Yohanan Gabriel Sofer (1710-1785), Mordehai Gumpel Gabriel Azijnman (1717-1782) and Shlomo Zalman (1718-1796) - as the publishers of the whole project; they are also mentioned explicitly as such by the chief rabbi. Yet on the title page, and in the introduction, the prominent publisher Naphtali Herz Rofe and his son-in-law Baruch ben Joseph Kosman are also mentioned.

That Naphtali Herz Rofe (1696-1767) was involved is not surprising. Amelander knew him well, as they had collaborated on *Kehillot Moshe* and *Magishei Minhab* and Naphtali Rofe had previously published *Shevet Musar* and the 1735 Torah edition. Naphtali Rofe was in every respect part of the small elite of the Jewish community; his grandfather, father and both his brothers had served the Amsterdam Ashkenazi community as *parnassim*. The family had made its fortune in the tobacco industry, the same industry in which the Venetian Jewish family of Naphtali's mother, Marianne Abraham Italiaander, had been active. This well-to-do

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<sup>295</sup> Introduction *Yosippon*.

<sup>296</sup> Aryeh Leib ben Saul Löwenstam (ca. 1690-1755), the son-in-law of the famous Hakham Zvi, served as Amsterdam's chief rabbi since 1740; Jac. Zwarts, 'De Nederlandsche Opperrabbijnen van het Heden en Verleden VII', *De Geïllustreerde Joodsche Post* 1 (1921) 40, 627-629.

<sup>297</sup> Introduction and *haskama*, *Yosippon*, i, v. De *haskama* was issued on 13 Elul 5502, 12 September 1742, which indicates that the project started in that year and was concluded in 1743.

position enabled Naphtali - or, as he renamed himself in Dutch society, Hartog Alexander van Embden - to be among the first, and very few, in the Dutch Jewish community to attend university. He went to Harderwijk University to study medicine, and concluded his studies on 6 February 1716, with his doctorate. Thereafter he settled as a doctor in Amsterdam; he also started a book shop and, beginning in 1726, began operating a printing firm. He published Sephardic and Ashkenazi books, in Hebrew and in Yiddish.<sup>298</sup> In this way he contributed to the creation of a new Jewish library.

Naphtali Rofe – other than Amelander – might be connected to the small *avant garde* in eighteenth-century European Jewry that Shmuel Feiner labeled ‘the early Haskalah’. This small intellectual elite shared a background in the economically better situated segment of the Jewish community; they were part of a tiny Jewish minority who had studied at university (often choosing medicine as their major area of focus), and they were driven by passion for knowledge. They wished to introduce the new things they had learned at university, particularly in the realm of the sciences, into the Jewish community. They published books, communicated with each other via letters and visits, and thereby formed the beginnings of a new ‘Jewish republic of letters’. Via dissemination of scientific knowledge they shaped a new type of rational thinking, comparable with contemporary developments in non-Jewish intellectual circles.<sup>299</sup> Naphtali Rofe certainly fits in the profile of the small intellectual elite of Amsterdam, and also shared a number of characteristics with ‘early maskilim’ as described by Feiner.

Also involved was Kosman ben Joseph Baruch (ca. 1717-1782), who had married Naphtali’s daughter Anna Hartogh van Embden. He initially assisted his father-in-law, and continued the printing firm after Naphtali Rofe became blind, in 1766. He maintained Amelander’s *magnum opus* as one of his successful titles, as we will see in a later chapter.<sup>300</sup>

Yet the initiative for the book project rested not with Naphtali Rofe or his son-in-law, but with the three brothers. In their introduction they state that they had successfully turned to the publisher for help with the publication and that they had been assisted in every respect by the well known publisher/printer.<sup>301</sup> Naphtali and Kosman stated in turn that they had been

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<sup>298</sup> Hindle S. Hes, ‘The Van Embdens. A family of printers’ *Quaerendo* 11 (1981) 1, 46-52; in February 1738 Naphtali Hertz’s business was severely damaged by a fire, destroying his house, printing shop and several thousand books. He managed, however, to reopen already after three months.

<sup>299</sup> Shmuel Feiner, ‘Early Haskalah in eighteenth-century Jewry’ [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 67 (1998) 189-240; idem, ‘Seductive science and the emergence of the secular Jewish intellectual’, *Science in Context* 15 (2002) 1, 121-135; idem, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, translated by Chaya Naor (Philadelphia 2004) 21-84.

<sup>300</sup> Hes, ‘The Van Embdens’ 49.

<sup>301</sup> Introduction Yosippon.

happy to respond positively to the brothers' query; they also noted that they had even decided to use new letters for the books.<sup>302</sup>

The brothers' role must have been primarily as financiers for the whole project. In the introduction it is stressed that they had spent much money and paid Amelander well for his services.<sup>303</sup> In early modern times the role of the publisher was a central one, whereas the author was secondary. In this case the two primary tasks of early modern publishers - arranging and paying for a book's publication - appear to have been divided over two sets of publishers: Naphtali and Kosman taking care of the first task, the three brothers the latter.<sup>304</sup> The three brothers, at least, were given prominent place in the layout of the book: they are mentioned on the title page of each book and in the *haskama* of the chief rabbi; they also had a preface to the project, in *Sefer Yosippon*, and are named in the colophon at the end of the books.

What had motivated the brothers to use their capital for the publication of these books? The key to answering this question likely concerns the strong familial networks in which Amelander was embedded. The three brothers, Yohanan Gabriel Sofer, Mordehai Gumpel Gabriel Azijnman and Shlomo Zalman were in 1743 respectively 33, 25, and 26 years old; Amelander himself was already 45. There was a gap of one generation between them, which is not surprising when we know that the brothers' father, Gabriel David Essigman (?-1767), was a maternal cousin of Amelander. It was likely this family connection that led the three brothers to assist their relative in publishing his historical work.<sup>305</sup>

For a more complete impression of the infrastructure behind the publishing of the two books, we must mention, besides the publishers and the editor/author, the printers and typesetters. The typesetters prepared the text page by page, and the printers took care of the actual printing process. The importance of family networks is again evident, as is how whole families worked together in the Jewish printing business. Listed as printers in the colophon of *Yosippon* are Jona ben Moshe Polak (1708-1764) and David ben Berman Wing, who appear to

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<sup>302</sup> Preface Hirts Levi and Kosman, SY.

<sup>303</sup> Introduction *Yosippon*. Curiously, the name of Yohanan is not mentioned with the other two on the last page of *Sheyris Yisrael*.

<sup>304</sup> On the complexity in early modern times in terminology surrounding 'publisher', 'printer' and 'bookseller', see: Peter W.M. Blayney, 'The publication of playbooks' in: John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, *A new history of early English drama* (New York 1997) 383-422, there 389-392; Berger, 'Invitation', 35-36.

<sup>305</sup> Gabriel's father, David Sofer, was married to Merle Yehiel Amelander, the sister of Amelander's mother, Rachel; this genealogy becomes clear when information from these sites is combined:

<http://shum.huji.ac.il/~dutchjew/genealog/ashkenazi/2908.htm>;

<http://shum.huji.ac.il/~dutchjew/genealog/ashkenazi/418.htm>;

[http://stenenarchieff.nl/genealogie/gezin/humo1\\_moss/F3583/15000/](http://stenenarchieff.nl/genealogie/gezin/humo1_moss/F3583/15000/);

[http://stenenarchieff.nl/genealogie/gezin/humo1\\_moss/F6479/116835/](http://stenenarchieff.nl/genealogie/gezin/humo1_moss/F6479/116835/) (consulted 2 September 2009).

have been brothers-in-law.<sup>306</sup> *Sheyris Yisroel* was printed by Jona alone. On both books he was assisted by another brother-in-law, Jitschak Eizek ben Berman Wing, as typesetter, and by Eljakim ben Wolf Puzna (or Puziner). On *Yosippon* an additional typesetter, Asher ben Zanwil Schwab, collaborated.

What could have motivated Amelander and the publishing crew to commence publishing his historical project? As we have seen in chapter 3, already in 1546 *Sefer Yosippon* had been translated from Hebrew into Yiddish by the Jewish convert Michael Adam. It soon became a bestseller and was reprinted in Prague, in 1607; Amsterdam, in 1661; and Frankfurt am Main, in 1692 and 1707.<sup>307</sup> The first reason for printing a new edition of *Yosippon* was likely because it had been 36 years since the previous one had been published. Given the popularity of the history book, the publishers must have been confident that there was a vast audience for the book. However, in their preface the publishers note other reasons for the new edition. They had noticed that within the Jewish community history had become extremely popular and that many people were reading history books. Most of these works, however, were, in the opinion of the publishers, full of idleness and lies, and thus not suited for the Jewish public. The republishing of *Yosippon*, wherein the history of the Jewish people was recounted in the same mode as biblical historiography, provided a viable alternative, sanctioned by the chief rabbi and the Amsterdam parnassim. Reading *Yosippon* would ensure that God's miracles would not be forgotten among the Jewish people.<sup>308</sup>

A further reason for the new edition of *Yosippon* was the language. This is an interesting consideration, as it shows the awareness of rapid change in the Yiddish language. The preceding 1708 Frankfurt edition – published 35 years earlier – is described as having been written in a language that had now become foreign not only to the people in Amsterdam but also to people in numerous other countries. Few people were still considered competent to read the old version. Of course there was surely some exaggeration, stemming from commercial interests, in this statement, but the language would not have been mentioned if no difference had been perceived. Moreover, this remark is one among many, as Amsterdam publishers often complained in their prefaces about the difficulty of the language in editions from elsewhere. This should be regarded as an indication of their efforts to present a Yiddish

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<sup>306</sup> [http://stenenarchief.nl/genealogie/gezin/humo1\\_moss/F4654/I6768/](http://stenenarchief.nl/genealogie/gezin/humo1_moss/F4654/I6768/) (consulted 2 September 2009).

<sup>307</sup> Nokhem Shtif, 'Mikhael Adams dray yidishe bikher', *Filologishe sbriftn* 2 (1928) 135-168; Max Erik, *Di geschikhte fun der yidisher literatur fun di elteste tsaytn biz der Haskole tekufje* (Warsaw 1928) 373-375; a short introduction and a few excerpts from the translation of Adam in: Jerold C. Frakes, *Early Yiddish texts 1100-1750. With introduction and commentary* (Oxford 2004) 259-267.

<sup>308</sup> Introduction *Yosippon*.



that was above geographical variations, even as they blamed their colleagues from elsewhere for having been overly influenced by the nature of regional variants of Yiddish.<sup>309</sup>

The book project is announced by the publishers, and likewise in the *haskama* of the chief rabbi, as consisting of three books. *Yosippon* was continued by *Sheyris Yisroel*, which was thus announced as *beleg sheni mi-Sefer Yosippon*, and was to be preceded by *Tam ve-Yashar*. As far as can be established, the project was never completed and *Tam ve-Yashar* was not printed.<sup>310</sup> The idea behind the combination of the three books was nevertheless clear. *Tam ve-Yashar* was the Yiddish edition of *Sefer Yezirah*, which described the biblical era until the period after the destruction of the First Temple.<sup>311</sup> *Yosippon* continued until the destruction of the Second Temple, at which point *Sheyris Yisroel* assumed the narrative and finished the continuous account of Jewish history until 1743. However, in the text there is already an indication that, at least when *Yosippon* was printed, *Tam ve-Yashar*, which chronologically speaking had to have been the first volume, was not yet in print. The publishers, before introducing *Tam ve-Yashar*, present *Yosippon* as the continuation of the biblical books *Divrei ha-yamim* (I and II Chronicles).<sup>312</sup> This resulted in a different series of historical books, starting with *Torah*, continued by Joshua, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles, and resulting in *Yosippon* and *Sheyris Yisroel*.

The three books could be connected to the three brothers, yet there was one more concept behind the project. The complete title of the book project was *Shlosha ketarim*, or three crowns, a reference to a passage from the Mishna, tractate Pirkei Avot 4:13, wherein R. Shimon bar Yochai states: ‘There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of Kehunah [priesthood], and the crown of malkhut [kingdom]; but the crown of a good name [*keiter shem tov*] excels them all.’ This passage had played an important role in rabbinic political thought. The three crowns were considered to represent the three historical layers of political and religious authority in biblical Israel – and as such were normative for contemporary Jewish life. The crown of Torah was carried from Moses via the prophets to the rabbis; the crown of

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<sup>309</sup> Introduction *Yosippon*; cf. Hartog Beem, ‘Yiddish in Holland: linguistic and socio-linguistic notes’ in: Uriel Weinreich ed., *The field of Yiddish: studies in language, folklore, and literature* (New York 1954) 122-133, there 125-126; Shlomo Berger, ‘Yiddish book production in Amsterdam between 1650-1800: local and international aspects’ in: Kaplan, *Dutch intersection*, 203-212, there 208-209.

<sup>310</sup> In 1771 *Yosippon* and *Sheyris Yisroel* were republished by the same printing firm, now headed only by Kosman ben Joseph Baruch. In the introduction to this 1771 *Yosippon* edition the printer looked back on the 1743 editions and stated that the two books were soon out of print. He did not write a word about a possible *Tam ve-Yashar* edition. *Sefer Yosippon* (Amsterdam 1771) introduction.

<sup>311</sup> At the time of the publishing of the 1743 *Yosippon* and *Sheyris Yisroel*, *Tam ve-Yashar* was already available in Yiddish; Chava Turniansky, ‘The first translations of Sefer Ha-Yashar in Yiddish’ [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 54 (1985) 567-620.

<sup>312</sup> Introduction *Yosippon*, v.

priesthood went via Aharon to the kohanim, the priests. Finally, the crown of kingdom was realized in the figure of David and continued by the kings who succeeded him.<sup>313</sup>

It was crucial to all three *ketarim* that they be regarded as mediating institutions between God and the people of Israel, which provides each *keter* its own realm yet at the same time interweaves it with the other *ketarim*. As Stuart Cohen has shown, the tannaim and amoraim interpreted the *ketarim* as a tripartite system, with ‘normative autonomy’ of each *keter*. There needed to be a balance of power between the three realms of authority, although it could shift in the course of history. As a reaction to the *hurban ha-bayit* in 70 CE, which significantly affected the domain of the *keter kehunah*, the tannaim and amoraim re-interpreted the model in such a way that from then on the *keter Torah*, which the rabbis themselves represented, would be the apex of a triangle which provided the base for the entirety of Jewish life.<sup>314</sup>

In analogy to these three crowns the three books were given an extra heading, which was published at the top of the title page, before the actual title was given. *Tam ve-Yashar* was designed to be titled *Keter Torah*, because therein the narrative of Torah is retold and explained. *Sefer Yosippon* appeared under the heading of *Keter Kehuna*, since its assumed author, Joseph ben Gorion, was a *kohen* and because the priestly family of the Maccabees figure prominently in the book.<sup>315</sup> Finally, *Sheyris Yisroel* was given the *Keter Malkhut*. This name needed further explanation, as the concept of the *keter malkhut* was, after the disappearance of the Davidic dynasty, less easily distinguishable.

Whereas the crowns of Torah and priesthood represented the religious authorities, the crown of kingdom symbolized the Jewish civil authorities. The *hurban ha-bayit* was interpreted as the end of a tradition of Jewish political autonomy, either within an independent state or as part of a larger empire. From then on, Jews were first and foremost political subjects, and lacked political structures comparable to those of nations with some degree autonomy in a fixed territory. This meant that the concept of the *keter malkhut* needed reinterpretation if someone wished to stand by the tripartite system. In due course, at least three different positions became apparent.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Daniel Judah Elazar, Stuart Cohen, *The Jewish polity. Jewish political organization from biblical times to the present* (Bloomington IN 1985) 16-17.

<sup>314</sup> Stuart A. Cohen, *The three crowns. Structures of communal politics in early rabbinic Jewry* (Cambridge 2007) 14-23.

<sup>315</sup> Introduction Yosippon, v.

<sup>316</sup> Cf. Bart Wallet, ‘Politics and Jewish communities: the centralization of Western European Jewry’ *Pe’rusb* 1 (2009) 1, see: <http://perush.cjs.ucla.edu/2009/05/05/wallet-bart-politics-and-jewish-communities-the-centralization-of-western-european-jewry/> (Consulted 12 September 2009).

The first strategy was to accept that there was no longer an earthly *malkhut* for the Jews. The *keter malkhut* now came to refer to the ultimate kingdom of God, ruler of the world, including all earthly kings to whom the Jews were now subjected. In this way, the *keter malkhut* remained in place and was even more powerful than the political structures of all other nations. This interpretation lies behind Shlomo ibn Gabirol's famous liturgical poem *Keter Malkhut*, which became part of the penitential prayers at Yom Kippur in the Sephardic rite. Ibn Gabirol depicts God as the creator of all, sovereign and in control of past, present and future.<sup>317</sup>

Another strategy was to connect the *keter malkhut* to the lay leadership of Jewish communities. Already in the rabbinic age, the patriarchs in Palestine and the exilarchs in Babylon presented themselves as the bearers of the *keter malkhut* and sought to substantiate their claims of Davidic lineage. In situations with less communal autonomy, such as in the rabbinic age, lay leaders – such as *parnassim* and *shtadlanim* – substantiated their authority by referring to the *keter malkhut*.<sup>318</sup> In the 1743 edition of *Yosippon* this line of argument is used in explaining the heading of *Keter malkhut* for *Sheyris Yisrael*. Namely, this continuation of *Yosippon* presented the history of '*malkhut beit Yehuda*', the kingship of Judah, which was in different forms still intact within Jewish communities. According to the publishers a form of *keter malkhut* remained necessary, because Genesis 49, 10 stated: *לא יסור שבט מיהודה*, 'The scepter shall not depart from Judah'.<sup>319</sup>

A third variant of this interpretation is used in *Sheyris Yisrael*. Kings may be seemingly absent from post-Biblical Jewish history, but what about the Ten Lost Tribes? Their fate plays an important role in Amelander's philosophy of history, as will be demonstrated. The first chapter of Amelander's work can be read as a lengthy effort to convince readers that the Ten Lost Tribes were still extant and that they had their own kings. Amelander introduces this section, which he based on Farissol's *Orbot olam*, by stating that he sought to console the remnant of Israel that God had not completely abandoned his people. Non-Jews might state that they have kings and we not, he explains, but that claim is not entirely true, for there are

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<sup>317</sup> Adena Tanenbaum, 'God, man, and the universe: Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Keter Malkhut*' in: idem, *Hebrew poetry and philosophical theory in medieval Spain* (Leiden etc. 2002) 57-83. Surprisingly, Tanenbaum does not explain the title nor relates it to the theory of the *shloshe ketarim*.

<sup>318</sup> Daniel Judah Elazar, *Kinship and consent. The Jewish political tradition and its contemporary uses* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition; Edison NJ 1997) 66-67.

<sup>319</sup> Introduction *Yosippon*, v; exemplary for Amelander's use of this line of argument is his inclusion of the legend of Busthenai in the version of *Orbot olam*, SY ed 1943, 26r-29v. In the *Tsene u-Rene* on Genesis 49, 10 also the continuation of the kingdom of Judah after the fall of the Temple is stressed, e.g. in the *rashei ha-galut*, rabbis and decedents of the tribe of Judah.

Jewish kings, albeit far away and behind the magical river Sambatyon.<sup>320</sup> This interpretation of *keter malkhut* coincides with the explanation of the title *Sheyris Yisroel*, as explained in the next paragraph.

The same introduction offers another, quite innovative interpretation of the *keter malkhut*: although *malkhut* no longer refers to Jewish forms of political administration or the kingdom of the God of Israel, it is reinterpreted in exactly the opposite way. Amelander's book was titled *Keter malkhut* not only because it recounts internal Jewish political representation, but also because it presents the history of the Jewish people in גלות עול מלכות, in exile under the yoke of kingdom.<sup>321</sup> The last two words are from Pirkei Avot 3,6, where Rabbi Nechunya ben Hakkaneh is quoted as saying: 'Whoever accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah study, the yoke of government [עול malkhut] and the yoke of livelihood will be removed from him. Whoever casts off from himself the yoke of Torah study, the yokes of government and livelihood will be placed upon him.' In referring to this mishnaic saying the editors communicate two messages. First, there is a qualification of the experience of exile. Because the people of Israel did not opt for the yoke of Torah study, they had to go into exile. Second, *malkhut* is connected to the experience of exile and thus to the kingdoms of the nations under whose yokes the Jews suffer. From this perspective *Sheyris Yisroel* is rightly called *Keter malkhut*, because it recounts the history of the Jewish people in exile, after the *hurban bayit sheni*, during which the Jews were subject to non-Jewish political systems.<sup>322</sup>

Addressing their motivation for the historical project the three brothers returned once again to the Pirkei Avot. A fourth crown is mentioned there, one which has no religio-political nature and therefore has no place in narratives about power constructions in Jewish history. This fourth crown is the *keter shem tov*, the crown of a good name, and the publishers expressed their hope to achieve this crown as a reward for all their efforts and expenses in furthering the publishing project. The brothers stressed that everything they had done was intended to please God.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> SY ed. 1743, 2r-4v; the same attention for possible Jewish kings in the chapters 29 and 35.

<sup>321</sup> Introduction Yosippon, v.

<sup>322</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, neither in the prefaces nor elsewhere in *Sheyris Yisroel* is reference made to the 'four empires'-theory based on the book of Daniel (in Hebrew *malkhut* is used for empire). In many medieval and early modern Jewish history books (like Christian ones) the theory was applied, as in David Gans' *Zemah David* – who was assured that he lived in the fourth empire, while the next stage, the messianic era, was about to begin. 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, there 179-180, 196-199.

<sup>323</sup> Introduction Yosippon, v; SY final page.

### 5.2.3 *The Remnant of Israel*

The title page of *Sheyris Yisrael* is difficult to misinterpret. The page opens with the text: כתר מלכות והוא חלק שני מספר יוסיפון בלשון אשכנז. The words מספר יוסיפון are written in the largest type, showing the importance of the bestseller *Yosippon* for the so-called second part. The publishers clearly wanted to use the popularity of *Yosippon* for the marketing of *Sheyris Yisrael*. In a font slightly less large כתר מלכות is announced, stressing the connection with the (supposed) other two volumes in the printing project. In much smaller type the proper name of the book is finally given, שארית ישראל, Remnant of Israel. From a marketing perspective the publishers must have considered this name less attractive, as it did not yet resonate in the memory of the intended readership. All three titles, however, had in common that they were framing the readers' perceptions of the book itself. In early modern times, titles functioned first as a commercial tool for publishers, but in the eighteenth century authors had obtained significant say in the titling, which they used to introduce, offer commentary on or summarize the text's subject. Through the title an author sought to instruct the readership in how his text should be read or interpreted.<sup>324</sup> Although the concept of the 'three crowns' was introduced and explained by the three fraternal publishers, and although the work's second title (presenting it as volume two of *Sefer Yosippon*) also had evident commercial origins, the third title, *Sheyris Yisrael*, was explained by the author in his preface and could therefore be read as an expression of authorial assertion.

The name *Sheyris Yisrael* revealed no less about the book and its ideology than did the heading *Keter malkhut*. The term would have been familiar to Amelander's intended readership, as it is part of the *siddur* and is cited in *tabanun*, the second part of the prayers of supplication. In the first part of *tabanun* the congregation humbles itself before God, confessing its sins. The second part, in which the worshippers express their hopes for forgiveness, opens with the prayer: 'Guardian of Israel (*shomer yisrael*), protect the remnant of Israel (*sheerith yisrael*); Do not let Israel be destroyed; Those who say "Shema Yisrael"'. This liturgical poem, *peyyut*, was, in the Middle Ages, said during the week before Rosh Hashanah, but it gradually became part of the daily *tabanun* prayers, which were ultimately formalized in nineteenth-century *siddurim*.<sup>325</sup> It can

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<sup>324</sup> Eleanor F. Shevlin, "To reconcile *Book* and *Title*, and make 'em kin to one another': the evolution of the title's contractual functions", *Book History* 2 (1999) 42-77.

<sup>325</sup> Lawrence A. Hoffman, *My people's prayerbook. Tachanun and concluding prayers* [My people's prayerbook 6] (Woodstock, VT 1997) 87-93.

be assumed that in eighteenth-century Amsterdam the prayer was already widely known, including outside the immediate context of the liturgy for the month of *Ellul* in preparation for Rosh Hashanah.

Given the specific nature of liturgical practices, which by their daily or at least regular repetition become easily familiar to the confessants, we can assume that the title *Sheyris Yisrael* would have evoked the said prayer.<sup>326</sup> As such the title must have referred primarily to a context of penitence, awareness of Israel's sins and dependence upon God's mercy.

Yet this was not the only or even the main connotation Amelander aimed at in choosing the title. The term *sheerith yisrael* in the prayer is a quotation from the Bible. This exact wording is used three times: in Jeremiah 31:7, Micah 2:12 and Zephaniah 3:13. The concept of 'the remnant of Israel' is frequently invoked in exilic and post-exilic Biblical writings. In the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah it is one of the central ideological concepts, and the terminology is also used in Ezekiel, Amos, Micah and Zephaniah. The 'remnant of Israel' is re-interpreted each time in different contexts: from Judah as the rest of the united Israel of the twelve tribes (2 Kings 17:18), to the remaining inhabitants in Eretz Israel during the Babylonian Exile (Isaiah) or – exactly the opposite – the exiles in Babylonia (Jeremiah). The use of the term is meant to give the remnant legitimacy as the only and true continuation of the whole of Israel, adhering to God and to the Torah. In the Biblical writings it is not so much politics or territory that define this continuity, but instead almost entirely religious convictions and practices.<sup>327</sup>

Many scholars qualify the 'remnant of Israel' phrase as the solution for the prophetic tension between two not easily combinable messages. On the one hand the prophets have a message of judgment over Israel's sins, yet they also promise a peaceful future and a reconciliation between God and Israel. In order to maintain both messages, all of Israel will suffer God's judgment; however, through judgment God will elect a remnant to be the bearer of his promises.<sup>328</sup>

There are two layers of usage in the terminology 'remnant of Israel'. The first relates to historical reality, that is, the fact that after warfare and exile only one part of Israel remained. The second layer seemed to have been lost. This context stresses the responsibility of the remnant to preserve the covenant which had been forged between God and all of Israel. The

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<sup>326</sup> Jeremy Schonfield, *Undercurrents of Jewish prayer* (London/Portland, Oregon 2006) 62f.

<sup>327</sup> R.E. Clements, 'Šā'ar' in: G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, Heinz-Josef Fabry eds., *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament* 14 (Grand Rapids 2004) 272-286; more detailed: Gerhard F. Hasel, *The remnant. The history and theology of the remnant idea from Genesis to Isaiah*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Berrien Springs, MI 1980).

<sup>328</sup> Hasel, *The remnant* 202-203.

second layer has an explicit eschatological connotation. The ‘remnant of Israel’ is not only the result of destruction, but is also connected to promises of redemption and restoration. It involves a return from exile, a rebuilding of Jerusalem and of the Temple and a peaceful coexistence between Israel and the nations.

The eschatological interpretation of the ‘remnant of Israel’ is particularly strong in the book of the prophet Zephaniah. It is to this book that Amelander refers when he explains the nature of his title. In Zephaniah the eschatological ‘Great day of the Lord’ is described, a time when judgment is dispensed over Israel and the nations. In the end it appears that there will remain an ‘afflicted and poor people’ which shall find refuge in the name of the Lord. They are the *sheerith yisrael*, which will do no injustice anymore, refrain from lying and experience peace and quietness.<sup>329</sup>

The ‘remnant of Israel’ presupposes that there is another part of Israel. In the Biblical writings this part nearly disappears. But in rabbinic tradition this segment of Israel again claimed its position; next to the remnant the ‘Ten Lost Tribes’ returned. In continuation with the ‘remnant of Israel’ discourse, the ‘Ten Lost Tribes’ are also interwoven into an eschatological vision. In the Talmud and elsewhere, they are supposed to live beyond the river Sambation, which during weekdays is so turbulent as to be uncrossable. Only on Shabbat is the river in complete silence, but neither the ten nor the two tribes will cross it, so as to not to violate the Shabbat commandments. In the messianic age, however, the messiah will be able to cross the river and unite the whole of Israel and will then bring them to Eretz Israel.<sup>330</sup>

As will be shown elsewhere in this thesis, Amelander was highly conscious of the eschatological connotation of the title *Sheyris Yisroel*. In the introduction to his book, he refers explicitly to Zephaniah 3, 13: “The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.” (OJPS) The three explanations for the title he offers are closely

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<sup>329</sup> Ehud Ben Zvi, *A historical-critical study of the book of Zephaniah* [Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 198] (Berlin 1991) 234-238.

<sup>330</sup> See e.g. Genesis Rabbah 73, 6; Flavius Josephus, *The great Roman-Jewish war*, ed. D.S. Margoliouth (Mineola, NY 2004) 388-393; there is extensive literature on this subject, I here only refer to: Shalva Weil, ‘Beyond the Sambatyon: the myth of the ten lost tribes’ *Ariel* 85-86 (1991) 25-31; Andrew Colin Gow, *The red Jews. Antisemitism in an apocalyptic age, 1200-1600* [Studies in medieval and Reformation thought 55] (Leiden etc. 1995) 23-30. Parallel to rabbinic literature, the phrase ‘remnant of Israel’ is also used in early Christian writings, starting with Paul’s letter to the Romans 9:27. See e.g. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the letters of Paul* (New Haven/London 1989) 68-73; V. Hertrich and G. Schrenk, ‘Remnant’ in: Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich eds., *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*; abridged in one volume by Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids 1985) 523-526.

related to this *pasuk* and employed the rabbinic method of Bible commentary, which Amelander was familiar with from his education and previous book projects.

The first explanation concentrates on the words *sheerith yisrael*. In the book the history of the remnant of Israel after the loss of the ten tribes will be told. *Sheyris Yisrael* comprises the history of the two remaining tribes, Judah and Benjamin, and a part of Levi, from whom the author was a descendant. This explanation shows that Amelander connected his book closely to the discourse about the Ten Lost Tribes, about whom no history was to be related (as they are absent) but who are already represented in the title.<sup>331</sup>

The second and third explanations concentrate on the connection between the ‘remnant of Israel’ and the phrase about not speaking lies. Amelander presented himself as one of the remnant of Israel who, according to the prophecy, did not speak lies. Accordingly, everything he had written in his book had been researched thoroughly, and anything he had held doubts about had not been included. Amelander thus used the phrase to defend his credibility and to stress the accuracy of his history book.<sup>332</sup>

The third explanation applies the phrase ‘nor speak lies’ to those Jews who refused to speak lies (and thereby become unfaithful to Judaism) and who therefore preferred to die for the *Kiddush ha shem* (sanctification of the Name) rather than to live with lies. Amelander connected the continuation of the *pasuk* to these faithful Jews, who would receive their reward in the eschatological future. They would be raised from the dead and would ‘feed and lie down’ in Eretz Israel and no one would make them afraid anymore. Amelander connected part of his historical narrative, namely the deaths (mainly during the Crusades) of Jews who had chosen to die rather than to convert to Christianity or Islam, with the prophecy of Zephaniah.<sup>333</sup> In doing so, he explicated his eschatological historical philosophy in which history and historical events became connected to eschatological promises and thus achieved a sense and relevance which transcended historical reality.

Amelander clearly chose for his book a title which expressed at least part of his conception of history. For him it is clear that contemporary Jewry is a remnant of a larger Israel, and that for this remnant several promises are given in the Bible which relate to an eschatological future. As an encapsulation of his historical narrative Amelander spans his

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<sup>331</sup> SY ed. 1743, v, Yiddish introduction.

<sup>332</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>333</sup> Ibidem.



eschatological ideology, thus connecting his present readership with the past and with the future of a (re-)united, complete Israel.

#### 5.2.4 Paratextual poetry

After the three titles the language on the title page of *Sheyris Yisrael* changes from Hebrew to Yiddish. The mixing of both languages was quite common on title pages of contemporary Yiddish books, and each language had its own function therein. Hebrew served to stress the serious religious character of a book, whereas Yiddish was used to attract as large a readership as possible.<sup>334</sup> Here, a so-called Yiddish ‘title page poem’ follows, which was another way to present the text of the book to potential readers in a most favourable way. The poem reads:

איר ליבה לייט טוט גשווינד לויפן  
אונ' טוט אייך באלד אזו איין מעכטיג (ספר) קויפין  
דען דא אין ווערט דר צילט אלי דיא וואונדר גשיכטן  
דיא גאט האט אן אונש יהודים טאן ריכטן  
פון דיא צייט דש יוסיפון האט אויף גהערט צו שרייבן  
אונ' וואז מיר יהודים אין גלות האבן טון בלייבן  
דען מיר יהודים זיין פר שפרייט גווארן  
אין אלי עקין פון דר וועלט  
(מזרח מערב צפון דרום) וויא זיא ווערן גמעלט  
(הש"י) זאל ווייטר היטן דיא איבר בלייבונג פון ישראל  
אונ' זאל אונז שיקן אונזר רעכטר (גואל)  
דז זאל גשעהן אין קארצי טאגין  
דרויף וועלן מיר אמן זאגין<sup>335</sup>

The poem addresses potential readers directly and describes the main contents of the book, in an effort to persuade them to buy it. In the poem two of the titles are connected to the contents: as the second part of *Yosippon*, the book continues its story, documenting the history of the remnant of Israel. It ends with a blessing for the people of Israel and with the

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<sup>334</sup> Berger, ‘Invitation’, 37.

<sup>335</sup> *SY* ed. 1743, title page. Translation: ‘Dear people walk speedily/ and buy yourself soon such a mighty book/ because therein all miraculous histories are narrated/ that God let happen to us/ from the period that *Yosippon* had stopped writing/ and what held us Jews in diaspora/ because we Jews are spread/ in all corners of the world/ east, west, north, south, as they are called/ let God further protect the remnant of Israel/ and send us our true saviour/ which will happen soon/ to that we will say amen.’

wish that God would soon send the Messiah. Such an ending was topical in Yiddish ‘title page poems’; likewise, many such poems presented a short description of the book’s contents. In the early modern age, Yiddish books, unlike Hebrew ones, almost always had a title page – and sometimes also prefaces – written partly or entirely in verse.<sup>336</sup>

The introduction of poems onto the title page should be understood as part of the development of the title page as such since the beginning of the print revolution. Some sixty years after the first printed books, title pages had become common and helped standardize the book as a physical object. The title page served a predominantly commercial role: it needed to draw attention to the book, present a short summary of the contents and stress the book’s availability. As concerns the function of ‘title page poems’ it is important to note that from the late sixteenth until well into the eighteenth century title pages also functioned as advertising for forthcoming or already published works. Publishers printed many more title pages, often before the book itself was printed, and spread these throughout their distribution networks and had them displayed at print and book shops.<sup>337</sup>

In *Sheyris Yisroel* more poems are included. After the title page follows the chief rabbi’s Hebrew approbation, and thereafter a Hebrew preface by the publishers Naphtali Herz and his son-in-law Kosman. Naphtali Herz and Kosman stress their efforts in the printing of the two books, which were directed at all Jews, young and old, and were of the best possible quality. Their preface concludes with a Hebrew poem, of which the first letters form their names and in which the two books are connected to preceding biblical history. Two more prefaces follow, both by Amelander, the first in Hebrew and the second in Yiddish, and both conclude with a poem. The first poem, an acrostic of Menahem ben Shlomo ha-Levi, has each line ending with the word Israel and praises God’s protection and providence for the remnant of Israel. The Yiddish poem, also an acrostic but this time of Menahem Man ben Shlomo ha-Levi, is, like the one on the title page, directly addressed to the readers. Amelander assures them that he had worked hard on the book and that he had examined many sources but included only material that would be acceptable to reasonable readers. Furthermore, Amelander again offers a summary of the book’s contents, noting that it contains the stories of the rabbis and sages, of persecutions and of how kings had treated Jews throughout history. Finally, he asks his readers for a favourable verdict on his work.

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<sup>336</sup> Berger ‘Invitation’, 37-39.

<sup>337</sup> Shevlin, ‘Book and Title’, 46-49.

Poetry in the paratext of books had become fairly common in the early modern age. In learned books friends or colleagues of the author would praise a work and its author as being most important. Some even employed Latin, in an obvious display of their knowledge. In books aimed at the larger market poems were directed at readers, in order to persuade them to buy and enjoy the book. It seems that in *Sheyris Yisroel* both types of poetry were included: Hebrew poems, showing the serious character of the book and the team that had worked on it; and Yiddish poems, presenting the book in direct relation to the intended readership.

The mixture of seriousness and commercial interests also merged in the paratextual features at the end of the book. Included there, next to the colophon and a concluding apology from the publishers for any mistakes, is a table of contents. The chapters do not have titles, but each chapter is preceded in the running text by a short description of its contents. In the table of contents the same strategy is used: someone searching for particular historical information could easily find the relevant chapter. Including such a table of contents would have made the book more user-friendly and thus commercially more attractive. At the same time an inclusion of a table of contents also gave the book a more serious appearance.

#### 5.2.5 The 'visualization' of Jewish history

The Amsterdam 1743 editions of *Yosippson* and *Sheyris Yisroel* not only present Jewish history in a contemporary Yiddish, thereby bringing the work to the vast majority of the Ashkenazi communities, but also include images. In their introduction to both books, the publishers – the three previously mentioned brothers – inform the readers that they had taken great efforts in having made such 'elegant illustrations'.<sup>338</sup> There was, nevertheless, a great difference between the first and second book: *Yosippson* includes no less than 59 illustrations; *Sheyris Yisroel* only three.

The decision to include images in both books was significant. It was part of a major trend in early modern Jewish printing, a trend that reached its high point in the first half of the eighteenth century. The first illustrations in printed Jewish books were in the first Yiddish edition of *Yosippson* (1546), and in a few sixteenth-century Yiddish books printed in Italy, including a book of fables and a haggadah. Inclusion of images was in many ways a significant

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<sup>338</sup> Introduction by the publishers to: *Sefer Yosippson bilshon Ashkenaz* (Amsterdam 1743), v. In the 1771 Amsterdam edition Kosman ben Joseph Baruch confirms that the brothers had bought the illustrations and brought to the printing firm of his father-in-law and himself; *Sefer Yosippson* (Amsterdam 1771) introduction.

development, especially as it evidenced the ‘expansion of the visual’, in that no longer was it only images of the elite that were portrayed, but also the daily life of ordinary Jews.<sup>339</sup> When Hebrew and Yiddish printing moved towards new printing centers north of the Alps, such as in Basle, Sulzbach, Fürth, Frankfurt am Main and Amsterdam, the practice of including illustrations expanded rapidly but remained restricted to only a few genres. Falk Wiesemann distinguishes seven of these genres: books of fables, zodiac motifs in *lukhot* and *mahzorim*, *minhagim* books, editions of *Yosippon*, editions of the Yiddish Bible paraphrase *Tsene-Rene*, *haggadot*, and the *Megillat Ester*.<sup>340</sup>

There are two remarks to be made about this list of genres. First, all the genres that used illustrations were directed at a broader public rather than at the rabbinic intelligentsia alone. Genres typical for the religious elite, such as *halakhah*, Bible commentaries and even *musar* literature, were not illustrated – the only visual element allowed was the title page and decorative elements at the end of a chapter or the book as a whole. Full-scale illustrations only appear in books that were intended for a broad public; such illustrations offered extra help in interpreting the text and made the book more appealing for purchase. Second, a significant number of the books with illustrations are written in Yiddish. Especially Yiddish books, a fairly new and growing market, were considered suitable for having this innovation included, precisely because their language was directed at all Yiddish-reading Jews. Yiddish literature had not yet been canonized in the same way as had the Hebrew one, and this allowed authors and publishers to experiment with new trends in the printing industry. of which the inclusion of illustrations was a major one.<sup>341</sup>

In the first half of the eighteenth century illustrations had become an integral part of editions of *minhagim* books, *haggadot*, the *Tsene-Rene* and *Yosippon*. A clear assortment of images used for these (mostly) Yiddish books is discernible. The images were primarily connected to one genre, but in more than one case illustrations crossed genre boundaries and were re-used in a new context. This often meant that such an illustration was connected to

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<sup>339</sup> Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, ‘The expansion of the visual: reflections on sixteenth century illuminated Yiddish books’ *Jewish History* 20 (2006) 231-241.

<sup>340</sup> Falk Wiesemann, ‘Das ‘Volk des Buches’ und die Bilder zur Bibel vom 16. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert’ in: idem, *‘Kommt heraus und schaut’: Jüdische und christliche Illustrationen zur Bibel in alter Zeit* (Essen 2002) 9-34, there 12-23.

<sup>341</sup> Wiesemann’s claim that it was almost exclusively Yiddish books does not hold, as shown by Diane Wolfthal. Likewise, Shmeruk’s thesis that illustrated Yiddish books did not pave the way for illustrated Hebrew editions of these books is falsified by Wolfthal with regard to books of customs. Wiesemann, ‘Volk des Buches’ 23; Chone Shmeruk, *The illustrations in Yiddish books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The texts, the pictures and their audience* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem 1986) vii, 39; Diane Wolfthal, *Picturing Yiddish. Gender, identity, and memory in the illustrated Yiddish books of Renaissance Italy* (Leiden, Boston 2004) 202-203.

another story than the one for which it had been created. In the beginning of the eighteenth century most illustrations were modeled on earlier ones, and publishers seldom instructed an artist to make a new series of illustrations.<sup>342</sup>

When the publishers of our edition of *Yosippov* claim that they had ordered ‘such elegant illustrations’, they did not mean that their edition featured new illustrations. Rather, their statement means that they had had an Amsterdam artist rework the existing catalogue of *Yosippov* images. Comparison with earlier editions - the first Yiddish edition, of Zürich 1546 (the first illustrated Yiddish printed book ever), the Amsterdam edition of 1661 and the 1709 Frankfurt edition - presents a clear picture of how the visualization of early Jewish history developed.<sup>343</sup> First, there is obvious continuation from the 1546 to the 1743 editions with regards to many illustrations. In each new edition such an illustration is used again, often with little difference, save enough to reveal the hand of an often unknown artist who had reworked it. Second, the topics of the illustrations remained the same, even if a different illustration as in the *editio princeps* had been used. Apparently, illustrations deemed too difficult for the artist to reproduce, or in which the topic was presented in a manner not suitable for the intended public, were replaced with others.

A closer examination of the 1743 Amsterdam edition alongside the preceding 1661 Amsterdam and 1709 Frankfurt am Main editions helps illustrate this process and sheds some light on the Amsterdam publishers’ claim about their ‘elegant illustrations’. The Frankfurt edition has more illustrations than the Amsterdam one, 71 in total – 73, if two decorations at the end of the book are included. That was an unprecedented number of illustrations, and the publisher Zelikman Reis proudly announces on the title page that his edition has copper engravings of images that were not found in the earlier editions of *Yosippov*.<sup>344</sup> The illustrations are actually woodcut, but Reis was not the only person, or even the first, to confuse woodcuts and copper engravings; the publisher of the 1692 Sulzbach *Tsene-Rene* had done the same.<sup>345</sup> The first edition, of 1546, and the 1661 Amsterdam edition each have 66 images, all of which are the same. In the 1661 edition some illustrations are simplified, but the artist remained very close to the original illustrations.

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<sup>342</sup> Shmeruk, *Illustrations in Yiddish books*, 14, 17.

<sup>343</sup> For a detailed analysis see the first appendix.

<sup>344</sup> *Sefer Yosippov* (Frankfurt am Main 1709) title page; in the introductions, both the Hebrew and the Yiddish one, no information is given about the illustrations.

<sup>345</sup> Milly Heyd, ‘Illustrations in early editions of the *Tsene-U’Rene*: Jewish adaptations of Christian sources’ *Journal of Jewish Art* 10 (1984) 64-86, there 65.

The expansion of the traditional catalogue of *Yosippon* images in the 1709 Frankfurt edition resulted in a much greater variety of styles than in the first two editions. Besides the rectangular illustrations that were part of the 1546 edition, new ones were also included. These are oval illustrations, surrounded by decorative elements in the popular style of ‘Strapwork’.<sup>346</sup> This style was made famous by the Swiss Protestant illustrator Jost Amman in his Bible illustrations, which were also used in the 1704 Frankfurt edition of the *Tsene-Rene*. This likely influenced Reis in his *Yosippon* edition. He was fortunate that there existed an edition of Flavius Josephus illustrated by Amman, which he could use for his own Yiddish edition.<sup>347</sup> Heyd describes the characteristics of Amman’s style as follows: ‘[t]he ends curl or bend outwards and are occasionally shaded towards the edges of the cartouches to give an illusion of plastic relief.’<sup>348</sup> A third category in the Frankfurt edition consists of portraits of kings and emperors, portrayed as medieval German knights.

The publishers of the 1743 Amsterdam edition selected a smaller but significant number of illustrations and opted for stylistic uniformity. In contrast to the Frankfurt edition, no ‘Strapwork’ illustrations are included, but only rectangular woodcuts and a series of portraits. Whereas the portraits in the Frankfurt edition are clearly of different origins - some are small woodcuts surrounded by bold lines, others show large figures without any frame separating them from the text - the Amsterdam edition has only portraits in a frame with bold lines. The portraits are generally smaller than the illustrations of historical scenes, but since they are all situated within the same type of frame the book’s illustrations show stylistic uniformity. The same can be said about the quality of the illustrations; each is clear and concentrates on the central theme, whereas in the Frankfurt edition some illustrations are dark and too complex for a rather small illustration.

It is beyond doubt that the publishers of the 1743 edition used not the immediately preceding Frankfurt edition as their *Vorlage* but rather the 1661 Amsterdam edition, thus at the same time remaining closer to the first edition of 1546. In most cases the 1743 edition copied the illustrations from the 1661 edition, sometimes very neatly, other times more freely. Details within an illustration are changed rather frequently, e.g. in the illustration of Queen Tomyris with the head of King Cyrus (copied from Holbein in the *editio princeps*), one of the women

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<sup>346</sup> Gordon Campbell, *The Grove encyclopedia of decorative arts* 2 (Oxford 2006) s.v. ‘Strapwork’.

<sup>347</sup> 1569.

<sup>348</sup> Heyd, ‘Illustrations’ 70.

portrayed was changed to a man for the 1743 edition.<sup>349</sup> Two illustrations from the 1661 edition are merged into a new illustration (illustration 4a and 5a). Several illustrations were not copied; other changed by duplicating another and re-using it within a new narrative framework. The result is that 1743 edition presents 59 illustrations, 7 fewer than in the *Vorlage* from 1661.

The illustrations in early modern Jewish printed books almost always derive from Christian originals. Those used in the 1743 edition have a clear Christian *Vorlage*, often the Bible illustrations of Hans Holbein the Younger in his *Historiam Veteris Testamenti icones ad vivum expressae*.<sup>350</sup> Holbein's illustrations were used in the first 1546 edition and later copied. Holbein was popular among illustrators, along with Mattheus Merian the Older, Virgilius Solis and Amman. Their illustrations were used as models in both Christian and Jewish publications. Often an illustration is used for a different topic, as seen in the first illustration in the Amsterdam *Yosippou*. As Wiesemann has shown, here we see someone with the head of King Belsazar, a figure which originates in Holbein's picture of King Saul decapitated by the Philistines.<sup>351</sup>

*Yosippou* was not unique in joining the tradition of Holbein iconography. The artist and his successors Merian and the Dutch Pieter Hendriksz. Schut were highly successful not only in the German lands but also in the Dutch Republic.<sup>352</sup> One example is the famous 1695 Amsterdam Haggadah, which does not continue the existing tradition of Haggadah pictures – established in the early Italian editions – but instead reworks a series of illustrations by Merian. The emphasis on the ritual and liturgical aspects is replaced by a purely Biblical, visual narrative, modeled after Merian's Bible illustrations that are themselves adaptations of Holbein's images. Likewise, some of Merian's illustrations of classical Roman history are taken up and re-used in the context of the Haggadah narrative.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> See the appendix under illustration 8a.

<sup>350</sup> Hans Holbein der Jüngere, *Bilder zum alten Testament. Historiam Veteris Testamenti icones ad vivum expressae* (München 1884).

<sup>351</sup> Wiesemann, 'Volk des Buches' 12-13. The appendix reveals many more cases.

<sup>352</sup> Mattheus Merian, *Die Bilder zur Bibel. Mit Texten aus dem Alten und Neuen Testament*, ed. Peter Meinhold (Hamburg 1965); Wilco C. Poortman, *Bijbel en Prent. Deel IIa Boekzaal van de Nederlandse Prentbijbels. Deel IIb Boekzaal van de werken van Flavius Josephus in de Nederlandse taal* ('s-Gravenhage 1986) 56-92.

<sup>353</sup> A later edition, the 1712 Amsterdam one, expanded the Merian illustrations with more traditional ones inspired by the 1629 Venice Haggadah. Rahel Wischnitzer-Bernstein, 'Von der Holbeinbibel zur Amsterdamer Haggadah' *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 75 (1931) 4, 269-286; idem, 'Zur Amsterdamer Haggadah' *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 76 (1932) 3, 239-241; Kurt Schubert, 'Die Weisen von Bne Braq in der Haggadaillustration des 18. Jahrhunderts' *Artibus et Historiae* 9 (1988) 17, 71-81; B. Narkiss, faksimile uitgave Jerusalem 1972; Shalom Sabar, 'From Amsterdam to Bombay, Baghdad, and Casablanca: the influence of the Amsterdam Haggadah illustration among the Jews in India and the lands of Islam' in: Kaplan, *Dutch intersection*, 279-299.

In the beginning of Hebrew and Yiddish printing the publishers were Christians, as Jews were often not allowed to own printing presses. In most cases Christians and Jews collaborated in preparing Hebrew and Yiddish books, and Christian publishers offered illustrations from Christian Bible editions and history books for inclusion in Jewish publications. The first illustrated printed Yiddish book, the *Yosippson* edition of 1546, was printed by the Christian publisher Christoffel Froschauer.<sup>354</sup> A year before the *Yosippson* edition, he had printed a Christian Bible with no less than 322 illustrations, and in 1547 and 1548 the monumental Swiss chronicle of the Reformed pastor Johann Stumpf was published (*Gemeiner Loblicher Eydgnoschafft Stetten, Landen und Völckeren Chronik wirdiger thaaten beschreibung*). Stumpf's chronicle numbered a stunning 4000 illustrations, including maps. When the Yiddish *Yosippson* was in preparation, the publishing firm had a wealth of illustrations from both the illustrated Bible and the forthcoming chronicle. The printer decided to use these illustrations as well for *Yosippson*, and thus laid the foundation for the Yiddish catalogue of illustrations that was still in use in 1743.<sup>355</sup>

Research has shown that well into the first half of the eighteenth century only slight changes were made to accommodate the illustrations to the new Jewish public. Illustrations of God were modified, as were misspellings in Hebrew words and visualizations of Christological interpretations of biblical stories. Only in the second half of the eighteenth century was there growing awareness of the Christian character of the images, leading Jewish publishers to strengthen the Jewish elements.<sup>356</sup>

Jewish readers of the 1743 Amsterdam *Yosippson* were confronted with depictions of classical Jewish stories, such as Queen Ester before Ahashverosh (ill. 9a), Judah the Maccabee (ill. 26a) and the pious Hannah and her seven sons (ill. 25). However, these depictions were in clearly European Christian contexts. The Jewish heroes in these stories were not depicted as Jews but as Christians, dressed in fashionable clothing and armored as late medieval, early modern knights. This surely could have evoked a sense of estrangement within Jewish readers, such that they regarded this Jewish history as foreign. Obviously, alienation from one's own history was not the work's intention – indeed, it was contrary to the vision of the authors and

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<sup>354</sup> The first Hebrew printed book that was illustrated, was a book of fables, Isaac ibn Sahula's *Meshal ha-kadmoni* (Brescia 1491), with over eighty woodcuts. It was a mere continuation of the manuscript tradition of books of fables, which were always illustrated; Diane Wolfthal, *Picturing Yiddish. Gender, identity, and memory in the illustrated Yiddish books of Renaissance Italy* (Leiden/Boston 2004) 89.

<sup>355</sup> Shmeruk, *Illustrations in Yiddish books*, 18-33. On Stumpf: Hans Müller, *Die Geschichtschreiber Johann Stumpf. Eine Untersuchung über sein Weltbild* (Zürich-Selnau 1945).

<sup>356</sup> Heyd, 'Illustrations' 69, 79; Wiesemann, 'Volk des Buches' 23-30.



printers – but such separation could result from employing the same pictorial language as was used by contemporary Christians to express their beliefs. Another interpretation is possible. The illustrations show Jews in another era of history, during which they had been not mere subjects of politics, but rather agents. In that period Jews had been present at courts as kings and queens and fought on the battlefields, just as had the other nations of the world. According to this line of argument, the illustrations could have spurred feelings of pride among the Jewish public and strengthened their self-image vis à vis the surrounding dominant culture.

A number of the 59 illustrations in *Sefer Yosippon* was used more than once. The same portrait is used for both King Darius (ill. 2a) and King Philip (ill. 12c); the illustration of the Jews leaving Babylon in the time of King Cyrus (ill. 6) is also used for the return of the Jews under King Talmi (ill. 21b); and the depiction of the battle of Vespasianus (ill. 60a) is re-used to depict Titus before Jerusalem (ill. 70a). In this way there are five such pairs, and one illustration (a scene of a city siege) is used three times. It is first used for Herod's siege of Jerusalem (ill. 43a), thereafter for the sieges of the cities of Yodfat and Seleucia (ill. 63a and 65a). From a rather small catalogue of images the printers made their choices to illustrate the text, including re-using the same images in the same book for different causes. Because the books were sold in (often weekly) issues, a few pages per issue, most buyers would not have recognized such repetitions. Only in the end, when they brought the bundle of papers to a book binder, would they have realized what had happened with the illustrations. Of course, there remains the question if this would have bothered most readers. Illustrations made the reading experience much more pleasant; moreover, many of the illustrations might have already been known from earlier editions or from other printed books. Shmeruk even suggests that the repeated use of illustrations was a parallel to the Jewish textual tradition of using traditional comparisons, idioms and metaphors in different contexts in new texts.<sup>357</sup>

*Sheyris Yisroel* received only three illustrations: one dedicated to the Roman siege of the city of Beitar; a second one depicting the Persian king while an old Jewish sage explains to him his dream; and the third one showing a war against the Jews in Ashkenaz. Each of these images had been used before in the *Yosippon* edition and originated from the Zürich edition. The first is the same siege illustration that had been used three times in *Yosippon* (ill. 43a, 63a, 65a). The second illustration had been used to illustrate Herod with his advisors (ill. 44a), and the third one had earlier illustrated a battle between the Romans and the Jews (ill. 73a). This

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<sup>357</sup> Chone Shmeruk, 'The itinerary of an illustration since 1593' *Journal of Jewish art* 8 (1981) 3, 54-59, there 59.

last illustration goes back to a larger scene in Stumpf's chronicle, where it was used to depict the battle of Julius Cesar in the Cimbrian war and the battle between the Turks and the crusaders at Dorylaeum (1147). The illustration was cut into two pieces, and both were used for *Yosippon* (the other half was used two times, ill. 60a and 70a). For *Sheyris Yisroel* the left half was re-used for yet another history.<sup>358</sup>

The most likely reason for the limited number of illustrations in *Sheyris Yisroel* is that the publishers could not use an existing catalogue of images, as this was the first time the book had been published. Furthermore, it was probably too costly to have an artist design new illustrations. The only option was to re-use a limited number of woodcuts from *Yosippon* that fit stories of *Sheyris Yisroel*.

Two of these illustrations have military themes, which for early modern Jews was a practice connected to the non-Jewish, dominant society. Jews lacked their own political territorial entity to defend, and, with few exceptions, they did not opt for employment into European armies.<sup>359</sup> Early modern Jews were pacifistic by practice, not persuasion. In her study of sixteenth-century images in Italian Yiddish books, Diane Wolfthal labels the Jewish depiction of military-related imagery as a crossing of the borders of traditional Jewish life. Although lacking military power, Jews had a complex relationship with it, and could have used such images as a vehicle for expressing Jewish pride or anger against Christian military dominance. The Jewish visualization of military themes was one element demonstrating the innovative nature of Jewish Renaissance images. As the pictorial history of the *Yosippon* editions and *Sheyris Yisroel* demonstrates, this feature continued well into the eighteenth century.<sup>360</sup>

The third illustration shows a king sitting on his throne, holding a scepter in his left hand and receiving a visitor, who kneels before him. This scene is situated in the left section of the illustration; the other half is used to show what is happening in the background. We see people outside the palace, apparently awaiting the results of what is transpiring inside. This illustration is modeled after Holbein's picture of King David receiving the woman of Tekoah (from 2 Samuel 14).<sup>361</sup> The *Yosippon* and *Sheyris Yisroel* artist used the same composition, with

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<sup>358</sup> Shmeruk, *Illustrations in Yiddish books*, 26-28; <http://franktigue.com/Bijbel%20Bladen/1547%20STUMPF%20leaf%20Fine%20wc%20TURKS%20defeat%20CRUSADERS/index.html> (consulted 4 January 2010).

<sup>359</sup> Wolfthal mentions some cases of Jewish involvement with war and weapons, but they are still so few that they do not alter the predominant view; Wolfthal, *Picturing Yiddish*, 151-152.

<sup>360</sup> Wolfthal, *Picturing Yiddish*, 132-133, 151-154.

<sup>361</sup> Holbein, *Icons*, II. Sam. XIV.

the narrative placed on the left, and King David on his throne and the woman kneeling before him. In contrast to the adaptation, the background in the original is filled in rather soberly. The eighteenth-century artist's strategy of adopting the central scheme of an illustration but changing various elements within the picture was common in the early modern era. Within the framework of more or less canonized pictorial structures an artists could adopt illustrations to his own taste and talent and to the new reading public.<sup>362</sup>

The illustrations of *Sefer Yosippon* and *Sheyris Yisroel* exemplify how Jewish cultural expressions, such as copper engravings and woodcuts, are tightly bound with contemporary Christian culture. Although the textual and narrative traditions differed, Jewish and Christian Bible editions that were directed at lay people, and history books as well, often presented their readers with the same images. These images, originating from Christian sources, were slightly adapted to a Jewish reading public, thus leaving the task of accommodating picture and text to the captions. The result was surely that the books became more attractive for purchase and that the combination of narrative and visual elements succeeded in eliciting imagination of the past. Heyd concludes that the use of pictures in books is both 'definitely indicative of growing Christian influences' at large in early modern Jewish society and at the same time a 'desire to "modernize" the Jewish book' in order to attract 'the less orthodox and more assimilated type of Jew, thus preserving him from complete alienation from the traditional sources.'<sup>363</sup> Indeed, both conclusions apply to the two Amsterdam history books discussed here.

### 5.3 *Amelander's idea of history*

#### 5.3.1 *Sheyris Yisroel as Jewish historiography*

The study of *Sheyris Yisroel's* paratext has revealed the outlines of Amelander's philosophy of history. The book's three titles together present different yet complementary introductions to the contents. *Keter malkhut* is an approach to political history and the role of Jews in it. *Heleq sheni mi-sefer Yosippon* positions *Sheyris Yisroel* in the vast body of Jewish historiography. *Sheyris Yisroel* presents an eschatological interpretation of Jewish history. The other paratextual features, such as the Hebrew and Yiddish prefaces, poetry and a table of contents, evidence the author and publishers' intention to stress both the seriousness of the book and their wish for

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<sup>362</sup> Cf. Wischnitzer, 'Holbeinbibel' 274.

<sup>363</sup> Heyd, 'Illustrations', 86.

broad readership. The inclusion of illustrations even strengthened the character of *Sheyris Yisroel* as a book for young and old readers.

In this section we will map Amelander's philosophy of history by examining his defense of history writing, his approach to temporal and spatial connections within Jewish history and two central themes in *Sheyris Yisroel*: the Ten Lost Tribes and the diaspora experience.

### 5.3.2 Benefits of history

Writing history in an early modern Jewish community such as Amsterdam was not an activity free of contentions. As the history of Jewish historiography presented in Chapter 2 demonstrates, there was considerable hesitation and even opposition to history writing. Maimonides spoke for many when he concluded that such writing 'is a sheer waste of time'.<sup>364</sup> After the de' Rossi affair, which showed the critical potential of historical research, history writing became even more disputed than it had been in medieval times.<sup>365</sup>

A Jewish author commencing to write history thus had to defend himself and to convince his readers of the legitimacy and usefulness of history writing. It is not coincidental that nearly all early modern Jewish history books open with a section in the introduction listing the benefits of history.<sup>366</sup> Jewish historians were not unique in this respect, as their Christian counterparts also developed comparable categories of uses of history. The importance of these sections, in both Jewish and Christian historiography (and no less in later Enlightenment historiography), was not solely or even primarily rooted in the necessity of defending history writing.<sup>367</sup>

First and foremost benefits of history were expressions of a metahistory, namely the firm belief that history was meaningful and that via knowledge of the past people could acquire deeper insight into the process of history and the development of a redemptive future. History was, in the end, sacred history: a series of actions by God, leading to the end of the world.

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<sup>364</sup> Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishnah* (Tel Aviv 1948) 131, introduction to Sanhedrin XI. For a detailed discussion of this quote and Maimonides' perception of history and history writing in general, see the classical article by Salo W. Baron, 'Maimonides' historical outlook', *Proceedings of the American academy for Jewish research* 6 (1934-1935) 5-113. There is, however, discussion if Maimonides only meant Arabic historiography or sacred i.e. Jewish historiography as well; see: Bonfil, 'Jewish attitudes', 13-14.

<sup>365</sup> Weinberg, 'Translator's introduction', xx-xxi, xlii-xliv.

<sup>366</sup> Feiner, *Haskalah and history*, 14.

<sup>367</sup> A useful survey of early modern historiography is provided by: Anthony Grafton, *What was history? The art of history in early modern Europe* (Cambridge 2007).

Contemporary readers could grasp their own position in history by connecting to the past and the future. This religious philosophy of history, expressed in two different but related variants in Christianity and Judaism, served as one of the main legitimations of history writing. In the early modern period many historians and theologians searched for new ways to write history, which sometimes resulted in situating ‘sacred history’ at a distance from political history. Nonetheless, fundamental deviations from the overall concept of ‘sacred history’ were seldom.<sup>368</sup>

The other line of argument, no less religious yet more focused on daily life, regarded history to be a textbook for morality. Cicero, for example, developed this idea of history as ‘magistra vitae’.<sup>369</sup> Proper history writing should show how good actions eventually result in peace and prosperity or at least in God’s eternal blessing, whereas bad and immoral conduct leads to severe consequences for the individual or collective involved. Historical examples of punishment and reward were supposed to strengthen moral norms among readers and spur them to live in a God-fearing and proper way. To achieve this goal history writing provided models of exemplary lives, including, in both Catholic and Protestant historiography, church fathers, martyrs and good rulers, and, in Jewish history writing, rabbis and Jewish martyrs. In the early modern period interpretation of this exceptional benefit of history became, especially via the influence of classical authors, less focused on one’s leading a sanctified life and more on one’s public life. This contributed to the success of history writing in a period when the concept of ‘sacred history’ was much debated and applied less overtly.<sup>370</sup>

Amelander was thus not doing anything particularly remarkable in continuing the tradition and he utilized the myriad benefits that any student of history could acquire. He was in good company by opening his work’s section on the benefits of history by citing Deuteronomy 32:7 (OJPS): ‘Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations; ask thy father, and he will declare unto thee, thine elders, and they will tell thee.’ Amelander explains this passage with a short commentary in which he argues that the past

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<sup>368</sup> Irena Backus, *Historical method and confessional identity in the era of the Reformation (1378-1615)* [Studies in medieval and Reformation thought 94] (Leiden 2003) 329, 339-341; Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: ancient, medieval & modern* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Chicago 2007) 88, 166-167, 199; John Tosh and Seán Lang, *The pursuit of history. Aims, methods, and new directions in the study of modern history* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; Harlow 2006), 29-31; an influential Christian expression of this line of thought, contemporary to Amelander, is to be found in: Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edward’s philosophy of history. The reenchantment of the world in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton NJ 2003); for the development of this argument within Jewish thought: Jacob Neusner, ‘The religious uses of history: first-century Palestine and third-century Babylonia’ in: idem, *Talmudic Judaism in Sasanian Babylon: essays and studies* 1 (Leiden 1976) 25-45, there esp. 33, 45.

<sup>369</sup> ‘Historia vero testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis, qua voce alia nisi oratoris immortalita commendatur?’; Cicero, *De oratore* 2, 36.

<sup>370</sup> Breisach, *Historiography*, 38, 56, 160, 189; Backus, *Historical method*, 251, 339-340.

shows us the works of God, which are sincere. A Jew must therefore consider the days of the world and understand the years of all generations, and ask the fathers and the elders, who are understood to be the most learned, to tell about the past.<sup>371</sup>

Having legitimized his project by referencing this biblical text, Amelander then enlists no less than five benefits of history. First, he stresses the great value of studying the past. To engage oneself with history would teach the student *יראה*, fear, and *אהבה*, love, both of which appear to be two sides of the same coin. History shows how God helped the faithful and that they were able to do great miracles. This teaches man to love God and to fear Him. Only in such a status would God guide and assist the Jewish people today. History, the other side, shows that God punishes the evil ones, as had happened at the Tower of Babel, the generation of the flood and Sodom and Amora. In this respect history would teach man to fear doing evil.<sup>372</sup> In his narrative Amelander occasionally refers explicitly to this benefit of history, such as in the account of the false messiah Shabtai Zvi. The lesson of this story, according to Amelander, is that in the end the bad people were revealed and suffer greatly, whereas God would bless the righteous ones: *זוא זאל פר לארן אלי דיא (שונאים) פון גאט. אונ' דיא (צדיקים) זאלן זיך זטארקן. גלייך דיא זון זיך זטארקט אין זיין אויש גין אמן.*<sup>373</sup>

In enlisting fear and love as an ethical benefit of history, Amelander implicitly refers to one of the books he had edited previously, namely De Vidas' *Reshit Hokhma*. This work was divided into five 'gates' of wisdom, the first two being 'Fear' and 'Love'. De Vidas' application of the kabbalistic notion of two kinds of fear - the fear for God and the fear of sin - can be recognized in Amelander's description.<sup>374</sup> History, as Amelander implies through his use of the two categories, was one of the instruments to teach men to stay on the correct, moral path, to love and to fear God and to refrain from sin.

The second benefit is the practical use of history, its showing how someone should live his life. Interestingly, the non-Jewish context is prominent in this part of Amelander's argument. He states that knowledge of the past teaches *דרך ארץ*, the ways of behaviour in general society. The past presents examples of how other Jews lived in a majority culture, thereby offering lessons to contemporary Jews.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> SY ed. 1743, iii.

<sup>372</sup> SY ed. 1743, iii-iv.

<sup>373</sup> 'In this way all the haters of God will perish. And the righteous will strengthen. Like the sun rises in the morning. Amen.' SY ed. 1743, 109r.

<sup>374</sup> Cf. Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish theology* (New York 1973) 177-178; Fine, *Safed spirituality*, 85-89. As biblical base for connecting fear and love commonly Deuteronomy 10, 12 is invoked.

<sup>375</sup> SY ed. 1743, iv.

Third, in early modern society wisdom was connected to a person's age: the older the person, the wiser he was. The Jewish ideal of life was precisely to acquire the status of a wise man. Amelander argues that the study of history could help in this process. He even quotes 'a sage' who stated that knowledge makes a man old without years - that is, that one's degree of wisdom, not his age, is the decisive factor: 'Because someone who is young but has read and learned much, knows much more than an old person who has learned nothing.' To further strengthen his thesis, Amelander quotes R. Jose ha-Galili's saying: אין זקן אלא מי שקנה חכמה - אפילו יניק וחכים and yet wise.<sup>376</sup>

For his fourth benefit of history, Amelander turns to Torah. He argues that all of Bereshit and Shemot until the twelfth chapter is narrative, without halakhic material. This surely has a special meaning, because otherwise Torah would have been written differently. For explanation Amelander turns to Rashi, who noted that the histories of the past were good to know because they could 'teach you good ways and good manners'. This was demonstrated for all of Torah by the Ralbag, Gersonides, who, according to Amelander, had shown the use of the many stories (mayses) in Torah. Gersonides' commentaries are indeed known for beginning with the literal meaning, the *peshat*, of the biblical text, and thereafter revealing the philosophical and ethical meanings hidden in the narrative. Via this method Gersonides illustrated the practical use of each biblical story as a pedagogical completion of the more general halakhic portions.<sup>377</sup> Amelander even refers his readers to the Yiddish translation of Gersonides' תועליות הרלב"ג. Amelander contended that, just as biblical stories had practical use, the post-biblical narratives were likewise replete with meaning and potential benefits for the reader.<sup>378</sup>

The fifth benefit of history, closely connected to the eschatological interpretation of history already demonstrated in his title, Amelander presents not in his introduction but throughout the history book. Several times he connects the historical narrative to biblical prophecies, thereby showing the prophecies' realizations in history. Studying history not only presents the Bible's adequacy but also the position of contemporary readers in the metahistorical framework in which Amelander's work was embedded. Just as these prophecies

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<sup>376</sup> ב"ר, Kidushin 1, 32b; SY ed. 1743, iv.

<sup>377</sup> Robert Eisen, *Gersonides on providence, covenant, and the chosen people. A study in medieval Jewish philosophy and Biblical commentary* (Albany 1995) 91-92.

<sup>378</sup> SY ed. 1743, iv.

were fulfilled, so too would the ultimate ones – the coming of the Messiah, re-unification with the lost tribes, the return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple – become reality.<sup>379</sup>

Comparing Amelander's list of the benefits of history with the catalogues of his predecessors leads to the conclusion that although Amelander was original in his expressions, he remained firmly rooted in the traditional strategies of legitimizing and defending the writing and reading of history. The first, third, fourth and fifth benefits all fit into a traditional theological defense of history, in which trust in God's providence and belief in principles (such as reward and punishment and hope of redemption) are strengthened.<sup>380</sup> Capsali, for example, in the introduction to his *Seder Eliyahu zuta*, stresses God's providence and his just rule; he also presents history as being a source of wisdom (next to two kabbalistic inspired principles, דעת ובינה, knowledge and understanding), and invokes, as does Amelander, Gersonides' interpretation of biblical narratives. Amelander, however, was unfamiliar with Capsali's chronicle, which was then only extant in manuscripts.<sup>381</sup>

The second pragmatic benefit, as Shmuel Feiner has demonstrated, is more interesting, innovative and even contested. That history could have considerations beyond religion was not an argument without dispute. Certain prominent rabbis, including Gersonides and Obadiah Sforno, supported the use of biblical history as a source for models for life. Many argued, as had De' Rossi, that Torah was a sufficient source for such examples and that post-biblical history therefore needed different legitimization. Amelander, however, adopted in this respect a position comparable to that of Capsali, who had written very clearly that history could teach a person to 'become more precise, hone his intelligence, and learn the affairs of the world, be they its [commercial] negotiations and its guiles and manipulations, the conduct of wars and the necessary stratagems, or how to speak to people in a fitting manner'.<sup>382</sup> Capsali and Amelander consciously chose to apply Gersonides and Sforno's opinions about the biblical to the post-biblical domain. In doing so, they chose a position closer to contemporary European historiography than did many of their Jewish fellow historians. However, for both of

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<sup>379</sup> In connecting history with eschatology Amelander was not alone, already Rashi in his commentary to Deuteronomy 32:7 – following the midrash Sifre - is doing the same. Commemoration of the past should lead to attention for the future and convince people that it is in God's power to bring the 'days of the Mashiah and the days of the world to come'.

<sup>380</sup> Feiner, *Haskalah and history*, 13-17; Jacobs, 'Joseph ha-Kohen', 69, 75.

<sup>381</sup> Eliyahu ben Elqana Capsali, *Seder Eliyahu zuta I*; ed. Aryeh Shmuelevitz and Meir Benayahu (Jerusalem 1975) 10.

<sup>382</sup> Bonfil explains Capsali's exemplary use of history as an application of ideas of humanist Renaissance writers in Jewish historiography; Bonfil, 'Attitudes', 18.



them the pragmatic benefit remained merely one in addition to, if not in the shadow of, the other theologically grounded benefits.<sup>383</sup>

In this respect, it is striking that Amelander did not follow the strategy of De' Rossi and David Gans, who had declared the domain of history writing to be halakhically neutral, and thus a domain in its own right. Gans states in his introduction: 'Since from this work of mine neither impurity nor purity, neither prohibition nor permission emerge, my heart empowered me to put my mind to the task of writing this book.' De' Rossi, who inspired Gans to write this passage, used the concept of neutralism to defend the application of critical methods to post-biblical history.<sup>384</sup> Gans, in turn, regarded the merit of historiography to be that it, among other things, provided Jews material for intelligent conversation with Christians such that they could thus find 'grace and respect' in their eyes.<sup>385</sup> Amelander apparently did not feel the need to define his historical work as a separate, neutral domain alongside other more concretely legitimized genres. For him the traditional, theological benefits of history were sufficient enough, besides the more pragmatic use of history.

For Amelander the benefits of history were much more than simply the traditionally required arguments for engaging oneself with history. They show how, for Amelander, history was interwoven with his theological opinions, as the stage through which and on which God showed how to live and what to live for. Yet, on the other hand, history was not detached from everyday life; it was in fact a source of instructions for how to live a decent and pious Jewish life in a non-Jewish society.

### 5.3.3 Temporal and spatial connections

Amelander's *Sheyris Yisrael* is a so-called universal or world history book.<sup>386</sup> It encompasses Jewish history over a lengthy period, from 70 CE until his own time, and concerns Jews throughout the world, from China to the Americas, from Africa to Russia. The pressing question for any historian is how to organize his materials in both temporal and spatial terms in a practical and meaningful way. Amelander also had to find a way to combine the histories

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<sup>383</sup> Feiner, *Haskalah and history*, 13-16; Capsali, *Eliyahu zuta* I, 10 (translation by Feiner); cf. Bonfil, 'Attitudes', 16-21, 30-31.

<sup>384</sup> Feiner, *Haskalah and history*, 15-17; David Gans, *Zemah David. A chronicle of Jewish and world history (Prague, 1592)* [Hebrew]; ed. Mordechai Breuer (Jerusalem 1983) 7 (translation of Feiner).

<sup>385</sup> Breuer, 'Modernism and traditionalism', 70-71.

<sup>386</sup> R. de Schryver, *Historiografie. Vijftienvintig eeuwen geschiedschrijving van West-Europa* (Leuven, Assen/Maastricht 1990) 129-131.

of Jews living in temporally, geographically and culturally very different contexts into a single narrative. As there were no previously written Jewish history books that could serve as a model for a Jewish universal history, he had to draw inspiration for structuring his narrative from other sources.<sup>387</sup> The following chapter will demonstrate how the Dutch version of *Histoire des Juifs de Jésus-Christ jusqu'à notre temps*, a sizable history book written by the French-Dutch Huguenot pastor Jacques Beauval de Basnage, served as Amelander's primary model. Here we will offer an initial analysis based on the final version of how Amelander ordered and structured his material.

Amelander divided his narrative into 35 chapters, which recount Jewish history chronologically from the *burban bayit sheni* until the eighteenth century, yet also meander between different geographical entities. The chapters are untitled, but each is preceded by a short summary of its contents. These summaries usually present both the periodization and geographical topic of the chapter. Most of the chapters appear to begin rather randomly at a certain year and to finish abruptly (e.g. Chapter 9 covers the period 612-740; Chapter 12 concerns 935-1040 and Chapter 24 recounts 1222-1380). Nowhere in the book is this chosen periodization explained.

An historian's periodization is not just drawing a line through time; it also reveals which conceptual categories the author used to designate a period.<sup>388</sup> Although most of Amelander's periodization appears to have been dictated first of all by the materials he had found (which had left him with large temporal gaps), his arrangement of this material reveals certain caesuras that he saw in history, in particular the fall of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Both Chapters 4 and 6 take this singular event as their starting points for narrating respectively the histories of Jews in Palestine and in Babylonia. The ascension to the throne of Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor of the Roman Empire, is the *terminus ante quem* for the Chapter 7, whereas Chapter 11 uses the rise of Charlemagne as a line of demarcation. In the history of Middle Eastern Jewry the appearance of Mohammed is presented in Chapter 8 as the opening of a new period. These three caesuras were politically inspired, but other ones were determined by what Steinschneider has labeled the Jewish *Leidensgeschichte*: the first Crusade (1096) and its horrific consequences for Ashkenazi Jews (Chapter 14), the respective medieval

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<sup>387</sup> Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish history*, 1-42.

<sup>388</sup> On the politics of periodization in European historiography: Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and sovereignty. How ideas of feudalism and secularization govern the politics of time* (Philadelphia 2008).

expulsions from France, England and the Iberian peninsula (Chapters 22, 23, 25) and finally the *gezeirot tach ve-tat* in 1648 in Eastern Europe (Chapter 32).

The periodization used in *Sheyris Yisroel* is a mixture of political history and the history of Jewish suffering. Whereas the first group of events was, in contemporary general histories, considered of the utmost importance, the latter – although deeply connected to contemporary political developments – was specific to periodizing Jewish history. Both aspects reveal basic ideas behind *Sheyris Yisroel*. Throughout the book political history serves as a framework in which Jewish history is positioned. Although Amelander had no intention of writing a history of Roman emperors, Arabic khaliefs, French kings or Roman popes, he used their sequencings as a categorizing principle. Each personage was described and evaluated only from the perspective of Jewish history, or, more precisely, whether they had acted in a positive or negative way towards their Jewish subjects. Interestingly, as seen in Chapter 2, David Gans, in his *Zemah David*, still separated Jewish and political history into separate sections, whereas Amelander, in *Sheyris Yisroel*, integrated the two into one grand narrative. Amelander's historical narrative is not a closed intra-Jewish story, but instead takes seriously the societal and cultural environments.

The second aspect was no less important. Amelander, like many of his predecessors and successors, interpreted Jewish history in diaspora basically as one of suffering. Although he also directed much attention to periods when Jews had fared better, within the diasporic experience the well-known persecutions, expulsions and pogroms served as demarcations, thereby resulting in a grand narrative of Jewish history that is characterized by these events. This aspect of *Leidensgeschichte* described the relations between Jews and non-Jews, influencing the course of Jewish history in dramatic ways, even resulting in new diasporas. Jews in this way were predominantly presented in a passive role, as victims. This was, however, supplemented by a description of the internal dynamics of Jewish communities. This description focused on the great rabbis, scholars and leaders and their major works and achievements. This *Geistesgeschichte* in its turn afforded Jews a more active and positive role.<sup>389</sup> Amelander focused a number of chapters primarily or completely on rabbinic sages, including Chapters 5 and 6, on rabbinic cultures in Palestine and Babylonia and Chapter 16, on medieval Jewish intellectuals like Maimonides and Rashi.

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<sup>389</sup> On the combination of *Leidensgeschichte* and *Geistesgeschichte* in later nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* historiography: Andreas Gotzmann, *Eigenheit und Einbeit. Modernisierungsdiskurse des deutschen Judentums der Emanzipationszeit* (Leiden etc. 2002) 141-143, 160, 279-280.

Next to periodization, cultural geography has an important function in how a universal history book such as *Sheyris Yisroel* is structured. The material is arranged in a chronological way but is also grouped in geographic entities. As Moshe Rosman has recently stressed, the spatial dimension of an historian's work is no less important than the periodization used.<sup>390</sup> Amelander, in the introductory lines before each chapter, offers a precise geographic description, varying from Rome in Chapter 2, to Germany, France, England, Bohemia and Hungary in Chapter 14 and Constantinople, Greece and the Ottoman Empire in Chapter 27. There are chapters in which a number of neighbouring countries are taken together. Other chapters follow contemporary political geography and concern only one country. Behind Amelander's geographic structuring Amelander, however, there is a metastructure: all of his material is divided over two transnational geographic entities - the East and the West - roughly following the lines between first the Eastern and Western Roman Empire and consequently between the political entities of Islam and Christendom.

Amelander explicitly introduces the division between the Jews of the East and the West in his second chapter:

איך וויל ערשטליך נאך ריכט געבין דש אלי דיא יהודים דיא פֿר טריבן זיין נאך חלה אונ' חבור אונ' אין מצרים אונ' אין דש לאנד יהודה. אין גריקן לאנד אונ' אין דש גאנצי אוישטרשטי רייך. דיא היישן מיר. דיא אויף (מזרח) זייט וואונין. אונ' אלי די יהודים דיא פֿר טריבן זיין גווארין אין אטליא. שפאניא. טייטש לאנד. ענגלאנד. אונ' פֿראנקרייך. דיא היישן מיר אויף דיא (מערב) זייט:<sup>391</sup>

In this passage Amelander lists several countries in the East and the West. For some he uses the Hebrew name, like *Mizrayim* for Egypt and *Yebudah* for Palestine, but for others, especially countries in the West, he restricts himself to Germanic alternatives. In this book Amelander often randomly uses Hebrew and Germanic synonyms within Yiddish, but here there may be more conscious use of the later alternatives. Instead of *Spania* he could have used *Sepharad*, and instead of *Taytsland*, *Ashkenaz*. These names, however, had in Amelander's period developed

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<sup>390</sup> Moshe Rosman, 'Jewish history across borders' in: Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman eds., *Rethinking European Jewish history* (Oxford/Portland, Oregon 2009) 15-29.

<sup>391</sup> 'I will first pay attention to all the Jews they were expelled to Halah and Habur and Egypt and in the land of Judah. In Greece, and in the whole Eastern Empire. Those we will call the ones who live on the Eastern side. And all the Jews that were expelled to Italy, Spain, Germany, England, and France, those we will call the ones who live on the Western side.' Amelander, *SY*, 8r.

from mere synonyms for Spain and Germany into two categories of world Jewry, and thus represented a slightly different way of structuring Jewish history than Amelander did.<sup>392</sup>

The crucial difference between both concepts is where to locate Spain: in the East or the West? From a Christian perspective Spain belonged to Christian Europe, even if in medieval times it had generally been in Islamic hands. Jews, like Muslims, used to stress the connections between the Iberian Peninsula and the Middle East, as did Abraham ibn Da'ud in his *Sefer Ha-Qabbalah*, wherein he constructed a continuous line between the Babylonian geonim and the rabbis in Spain. After the 1492 *gerush Sefarad* the several diasporas of Sephardic Jewry spread the concept of Sepharad to large parts of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world. In contrast, the spread of Jews from medieval Germany to the rest of Europe resulted in a comparable growth of the concept of Ashkenaz.<sup>393</sup>

Amelander did not divide his chronicle into the internal Jewish categories Sepharad and Ashkenaz; instead he used the general European concept of political geography. This was not entirely unique in Jewish historiography. One of Amelander's predecessors, Joseph ha-Kohen, used in his chronicle *Divrei ha-yamim le-malkhe Tsarfat u-malkhe Otoman ha-Togar* (1554) exactly the same division between Christian and Islamic empires, as represented by France and the Ottoman Empire.

In the arrangement of the chapters the two lines of East and West in *Sheyris Yisroel* become clear. First, there is the history of the Jews in the East, told largely as a continuing story in the Chapters 4-8, 12, 15, 19 and Chapter 26, on the impact of Shabtai Zvi. Thereafter the story of these particular Jews divides into three geographically ordered chapters: Chapter 27, on the Ottoman Empire; Chapter 28, on Eretz Yisrael; and Chapter 29, on Africa. The history of the Jews in the West is narrated in a comparable series of chapters: Chapters 2, 3, 9, 11-15<sup>394</sup> and Chapter 18, which ends in the year 1200. Here again the story divides into five geographical areas, three of which Amelander concluded before his own time, partly due to the effect of expulsions: Chapter 21, on Italy (describing Jewish history until 1394); Chapter 22, on France (1300-1670); and Chapter 23, on England (1210-1649). In the two other areas the concepts Sepharad and Ashkenaz appear as geographic, ethnic and cultural concepts, both

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<sup>392</sup> On the formation of a transnational Ashkenazi identity, partly in response to a similar Sephardic identity: Joseph Davis, 'The reception of the *Shulhan 'Arukh* and the formation of Ashkenazic Jewish identity', *AJS Review* 26 (2002) 2, 251-276.

<sup>393</sup> Davis, 'Reception *Shulhan 'Arukh*', 275-276. On the role of Yiddish in this process: Berger, 'A diasporic third space', *passim*.

<sup>394</sup> Chapter 15 is part of both lines, since it narrates the position of Jews in the East and West according to Benjamin of Tudela's *Masa'ot Binyamin*.

originating in the original motherland and thereafter following the diaspora's new areas. The history of Sephardic Jewry is covered in Chapters 20, 25 and 33, and Ashkenazi Jewry in Chapters 24, 30-32 and 34.<sup>395</sup>

It is more than a coincidence that in Amelander's structure the two lines of Western Jewish history - the Sephardic and Ashkenazi - both end in Amsterdam. Amelander, for his narrative, let the Sephardic and the Ashkenazi diasporas meet in Amsterdam. He thus expressed an opinion that what had happened in Amsterdam – namely, two main streams in Judaism coming into contact again and mutually influencing their beliefs and cultures - was of historical importance. Amelander was well aware of this process, as he was an agent in bringing Sephardic heritage within the reach of Ashkenazim – as shown in chapter 4 on his earlier publications. *Sheyris Yisroel* itself was an expression of the encounter between Sephardic and Ashkenazi cultures.

Thus, although in *Sheyris Yisroel* the overarching geographical division - that between the Christian West and the Islamic East - is generally a political one, within this structuring Sepharad and Ashkenaz are not overlooked. They are presented as parallel lines within the West, thereby evidencing that Amelander was well aware of the comparable nature of these two diasporic transnational communities. Furthermore, that both lines end in Amsterdam reflects the reality of the interaction between Sephardim and Ashkenazim in the city, of which *Sheyris Yisroel* can be regarded a product.

Periodization and cultural geography are together the backbone for the structure of *Sheyris Yisroel*. The book develops chronologically, by presenting two fundamentally parallel lines, sometimes further subdivided into smaller geographic unities. Amelander organized his material in such a way that a larger grand narrative of Jewish history appears. There is, however, a further aspect in his structure that deserves separate attention, as it reveals yet another aspect of Amelander's philosophy of history.

#### 5.3.4 *The utopic Ten Tribes*

Around the two lines of Jewish history - the Eastern and the Western - Amelander construed a circular structure whose main theme was the Ten Lost Tribes. The first chapter addresses the

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<sup>395</sup> A few chapters do not fit entirely into the geographical framework and are more thematic in nature: Chapter 10 narrates the specific case of the Khazar conversion to Judaism; Chapter 16 deals with both Eastern and Western sages from 1099-1190, and Chapter 17 offers the reverse picture of false Messiahs on both sides.

question of where the Ten Tribes could be located after the expulsion from Eretz Yisrael. Amelander closes the circle by concluding his book with a chapter on the Jews in India and China. Here he informs his readers about two other exotic Jewish communities, which could well be descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes, as he concludes.

The question of the whereabouts of the Ten Lost Tribes became in early modernity deeply connected to the discovery of new parts of the world and the spread of colonialism. Jews had always believed the Ten Lost Tribes to still exist somewhere, behind the magical Sambatyon river. Only in messianic times would the two remaining tribes and the ten lost ones be united. Geographical discoveries aroused new expectations among Jews that the Ten Lost Tribes were about to be found, a discovery which would signal the start of the messianic age. From the sixteenth century onwards there was huge interest among Jews in theorizing about the Ten Lost Tribes and for reports from exotic countries that potentially indicated discovery of the lost Jews.<sup>396</sup>

The quest to find the Ten Lost Tribes in newly discovered areas had resulted not only from traditional religious beliefs. It was also greatly influenced by the broader European discourse on the exotic Americas and Indies. As Michel de Certeau has demonstrated, early modern European interest in the new territories first of all reflected the longings and expectations of Europeans. The inhabitants of the East and West Indies and the Americas were used to mirror European dreams for utopias. The vast material written about these inhabitants subjected them, stressed their alterity and at the same time attached new meanings to them.<sup>397</sup> In the Jewish case, Indians came to reflect Jewish utopian longings for the messianic era. From the sixteenth century onwards, rumours spread that the Indians were actually Jews, descendants of the Ten Tribes. They were thought to be hiding their Jewish identities from the newly arriving Europeans, but to occasionally reveal their knowledge of Hebrew and Judaism in small yet significant details. Whereas Jews were everywhere in the world a minority, the Indians-as-Ten-Tribes were supposed to be strong, independent and ruled by their own kings. Jews tried to supersede their present minority position through this utopian fantasy about the discovery of the Ten Lost Tribes in the new territories.

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<sup>396</sup> See for instance, next to the literature mentioned hereafter: Chone Shmeruk and Israel Bartal, 'Telaot Moshe: the first Yiddish written geography book, and the description of Erez Israel by R. Moshe ben R. Abraham the proselyte' [Hebrew] *Cathedra* 40 (1986) 121-137; Sara Zfatman-Biller, 'A Yiddish epistle from the late sixteenth century concerning the Ten Tribes' [Hebrew] *Kobez al Yad* 10 (1982) 217-252.

<sup>397</sup> Carla Freccero, 'Toward a psychoanalytics of historiography: Michel de Certeau's early modern encounters', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100 (2001) 2, 365-379.

Amelander's emphasis on the Ten Lost Tribes was part of this larger Jewish discourse. He was familiar with most literature on the subject and used it at great length. The fact that he lived in Amsterdam is also significant. The city was one of the main ports in contact with the East and West Indies and the Americas, and along with myriad exotic products there also entered the city a continuous stream of stories and rumours. Many of these were published in pamphlets and leaflets and enjoyed widespread popularity. Amsterdam Jews participated in this enthusiasm, partly from their own experiences. The extraordinary stories were scrutinised for information about exotic Jews. Following the Dutch conquest of Cochin in India in 1663, a rumor spread that the Dutch had encountered Jewish communities, Amsterdam Jews decided to send an expedition to India to verify these stories and to determine the character of the communities. Upon returning, with positive accounts, the expedition's findings were soon published and spread widely among Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews.<sup>398</sup>

In *Sheyris Yisrael* the narrative on the Ten Lost Tribes and their possible descendants is based on these specific Amsterdam sources, as well on two earlier related books: *Iggeret orbot olam* (1525), by the Italian Renaissance Jew Abraham ben Mordechai Farissol; and *Mikveh Yisrael* (1650), by the Amsterdam Sephardic rabbi Menasseh ben Israel. Farissol's work was the first book written by a Jew on the geographic discoveries; it was based on Christian sources, but Farissol evaluated these findings in his own religious tradition. He was convinced that with the location of the Ten Lost Tribes Israel's redemption would be near. Although Farissol was critical and skeptical towards all overly positive accounts (especially the claims of a certain David Reuveni, who had professed to be a messenger from the Ten Lost Tribes), he was convinced of the existence of Jewish communities descending from the Ten Lost Tribes and concluded that there was room for cautious optimism.<sup>399</sup>

Amelander was most directly inspired by Menasseh ben Israel, whose messianism drove him to investigate the Ten Lost Tribes. In his book *Mikveh Yisrael* Menasseh ben Israel describes the discovery, in South America, of some of the lost tribes as one of the signals for the coming of the Messiah. Likewise, the intensification of Jewish suffering after 1492, and on the other hand the prominence of Jews in countries such as the Dutch Republic, resulted in

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<sup>398</sup> Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and blacks in the early modern world* (Cambridge 2004) 206-213.

<sup>399</sup> David B. Ruderman, 'A Jewish view of the new geographical discoveries' in: idem, *The world of a Renaissance Jew. The life and thought of Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol* (Cincinnati 1981) 131-143.



Menasseh's optimistic view that redemption was forthcoming.<sup>400</sup> Amelander followed Farissol and Menasseh and wove this eschatological vision into the structure of his book.

As a summary Amelander concludes the first chapter by presenting an exegesis of Isaiah 49:8-9: "Thus saith the Lord: in an acceptable time I will answer thee (...) Saying to the prisoners: 'Go forth' – alluding to the tribes that are trapped beyond the river Sambatyon and unable to cross until messianic times - 'to them that are in darkness: 'Show yourselves' – a reference to tribes hidden behind the dark mountains - 'they shall feed in the ways' – the tribes expelled to the creek Gozen and the city Madi. Amelander perceived the topic of the Ten Lost Tribes through biblical prophecies such as Isaiah 49 that placed the reunification of the ten tribes with the two remaining ones in the messianic era. Amelander thus ended his exegesis with the traditional formula: 'It will be the will of the Holy One, blessed be He, that we will experience this soon in our days, Amen'.<sup>401</sup>

In the last chapter Amelander relies heavily on Menasseh ben Israel's material on the tribes in *Mikveh Yisrael*. He evokes the story Menasseh had heard from a certain Aaron Levi Montezinos, who claimed to have found in the West Indies a secret Jewish tribe living among the Indians, saying the *Shema* and speaking Hebrew. According to Amelander this story was surely reliable because Menasseh had heard it himself from Montezinos and had qualified him as a faithful witness.

This story and others, told by both Jews and non-Jews, brought Amelander to the conviction that the prophecy in Deuteronomy 28:64 had been fulfilled: 'And the Lord shall scatter thee among all peoples, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers, even wood and stone.' Yet the fulfillment of this negative prophecy – that Jews would be scattered across the world - was for Amelander a positive sign. With reference to R. Akiva in Makkot 24b he states that the fulfillment of negative prophecies offers reassurance that God will likewise fulfill the positive prophecies. Here Amelander's choice of title, *Sheyris Yisrael*, the structure of his book and his eschatological reading of Jewish history come together. Isaiah 11:11-12 offers the positive prophecy which had yet to be fulfilled, but which would not last much longer, since the negative prophecies had already been fulfilled: 'And it shall come to

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<sup>400</sup> Richard H. Popkin, 'The rise and fall of the Jewish Indian theory' in: Yosef Kaplan, Henry Méchoulan and Richard Henry Popkin eds., *Menasseh ben Israel and his world* (Leiden etc. 1989) 63-82; Ernestine G.E. van der Wall, 'Petrus Serrarius and Menasseh ben Israel: Christian millenarism and Jewish messianism in seventeenth-century Amsterdam' in: *ibidem*, 164-190, esp. 174; Rivka Schatz, 'Menasseh ben Israel's approach to messianism in the Jewish-Christian context' in: *ibidem*, 244-261, esp. 252-253.

<sup>401</sup> Amelander, *SY*,4v.

pass in that day, that the Lord will set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people [שאר עמיו], that shall remain from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elan, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And He will set up an ensign for the nations, and will assemble the dispersed of Israel, and gather together the scattered of Judah from the four corners of the earth.’ Amelander explains, in short, that the dispersed of Israel - the Ten Lost Tribes, along with the scattered members of Judah, - the two remaining tribes, whose history as the *Sheyris yisrael* Amelander has narrated in his book, will be reunited and return to Eretz Yisrael in due course.

In his interpretation of Isaiah 11 Amelander follows Menasseh closely, as he did in refuting the objection that could be made against this interpretation of these biblical prophecies. Had they not already been fulfilled upon the return from the Babylonian exile? No, Menasseh and Amelander argued, the verse speaks about a ‘second time’, which could not have been the return from the Babylonian exile, as at that time only a small segment of the whole Jewish people had returned to Eretz Yisrael. Also Isaiah 43:5-6; 60:10 and Ezekiel 39:28 clearly included elements that had not been fulfilled during the return from Babylonia, and were therefore applicable only to a future return of both the two and the ten tribes.<sup>402</sup>

Amelander developed a circular structure, opening and ending with the Ten Lost Tribes. The message of this structure is clear: with the discoveries of new parts of the world, the Ten Lost Tribes would also be discovered, thus enabling fulfillment of positive prophecies. The *Sheyris yisrael* would be reunited with the whole of Israel, ‘that it will happen soon in our times, Amen.’<sup>403</sup> Amelander’s circular structure situates the history of Jews in the East and West in an eschatological framework that is both typically early modern and thoroughly theological. Jewish history in diaspora, in Amelander’s interpretation, was clearly an intermezzo between biblical and messianic times.

### 5.3.5 *The concept of galut*

The circular structure of *Sheyris Yisrael* reinforces the interpretation that the book is fundamentally a history of Jewish diaspora experiences. Even though it may be considered an intermezzo, Amelander still deemed it legitimate to be studied and kept for the generations to

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<sup>402</sup> Menasseh ben Israel, *Miqveh Yisrael. Esto es, Esperança de Israel* (Amsterdam 1650) 79-87; the Dutch edition used by Amelander: idem, *De hoop van Israël* (Amsterdam 1666) 79-86. The reference to Isaiah 60, 10 and Ezekiel 39, 28 is not made by Menasseh, but added by Amelander himself to strengthen the interpretation of Menasseh.

<sup>403</sup> Amelander, *SY*, 146r, which are the final words of *Sheyris Yisrael*.

come, not least as studying diaspora history held many benefits for early modern Jews. As noted, for Amelander as for many of his predecessors, diaspora was a period typified by *Leidensgeschichte*, only to be balanced by *Gelehrtengeschichte*.

For Amelander, suffering was at the essence of *galut*. In many chapters he recounts how Jews were mistreated by non-Jews, as well as persecutions and expulsions. Amelander notes different explanations for these discriminatory activities by non-Jews. Blood libel (Chapters 21, 23, 24) and avarice (Chapters 22, 23, 30) are the most commonly mentioned causes of Jewish suffering. Likewise, Amelander attributes motives for anti-Jewish persecutions and expulsions to jealousy (Chapter 22), desire for conversion (Chapter 23), accusation of collaboration with an enemy (Chapter 24), alleged poisoning of wells (Chapter 24), God's providence (Chapter 31) and infertility of a king (Chapter 32). These socio-political motives focus on the alterity of Jews in non-Jewish societies, in that Jews were both a religious and an ethnic minority. They followed different religious practices, which were sometimes considered threatening by the surrounding non-Jewish society. Moreover, they formed a different 'nation' as opposed to the dominant one, and were thus often thought to constitute a potential ally to enemies.

Behind these socio-political motives for persecutions there was a much deeper religious question: why were Jews suffering so much in diaspora? Amelander reflects on this question in Chapter 25, on the *gerush Seфарad*. Although he does not inform his readers, his exposition here is taken largely from ibn Verga's *Shevet Yehuda*, which addresses the issue of *galut*, in the same context of the 1492 events and the start of the Sephardic Diaspora. Amelander, however, modified and omitted parts of ibn Verga's reasoning.

Just like ibn Verga Amelander begins by repeating the traditional rabbinic view that *galut* is fundamentally God's punishment for the sins of the Jewish people. Ibn Verga and Amelander hold that God so severely punished the Jews in *galut* – in fact, more so than he had done previously to any other people, even though other nations had committed much greater sins. The clue to understanding this paradox, as both authors found, is in Amos 3:2: "You alone have I singled out of all the families of the earth — that is why I will call you to account for all your iniquities".<sup>404</sup> Amelander expands ibn Verga's argument for his Yiddish readers, and translates the Hebrew 'singled out' into the Yiddish 'loved', leading to the conclusion that, precisely because he loves Israel, God is punishing them. Amelander explains that God is

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<sup>404</sup> Ibn Verga, *Shevet Yehuda* (ed. Baer), 129.

already doing so in this world and at these times, in order that Israel will arrive purified in the *olam haba*, the world-to-come, whereas the non-Jewish nations – especially those who are committing far worse crimes – will have to suffer in the life hereafter.<sup>405</sup>

This interpretation of Amos 3:2 by ibn Verga and Amelander is presented as the theological fundament explaining the suffering of Jews in *galut*. This introduces the question about what sins of the Jews had caused all these persecutions. Amelander's subsequent list offers no less than five different explanations, which he claims to have found in various sources, without noting that they all stemmed from ibn Verga's *Shevet Yebuda*.

The first explanation is that the Jews were still suffering because of the sins of their ancestors during the exodus from Egypt with the golden calf (Exodus 32 and 34) and their subsequent sins in the Land of Israel. Jeremiah's dictum, 'Our fathers sinned and are no more/ and we must bear their guilt' (Lamentations 5:7), remained true. The collective guilt of Israel caused the Jewish people to go into diaspora. Amelander here followed ibn Verga, whose argument leads back to the Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 54a, which states that the people of Israel would never have been sent into *galut* if they had not sinned with the golden calf.<sup>406</sup>

The second, and midrashic, explanation both authors offer is that when Jews are not firm in their identity, *galut* results in the hostility (*sin'ab*) of the nations. This hatred has as its ultimate focus Torah, given at Mount Sinai (*Sina*), which arouses *sin'ab* from those whom the Jews live among in exile. In particular, the Torah commandment not to eat and drink together with non-Jews – because these daily rites lead to unification – provokes outside anger. This reasoning was a common rabbinic interpretation of *galut*, based on the exegesis of Mount Sinai in the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Shabbat 89a-89b: 'What is Mount Sinai? The mountain that brought enmity (*sin'ab*) upon the nations of the world'. Rashi further developed the idea and made the connection with the rituals of eating and drinking.<sup>407</sup>

Third, Amelander follows ibn Verga in enlisting a set of three motives for why non-Jews were jealous of Jews, resulting in envy and persecutions: faith, women and money. When Jews acted with any of these three motives in a negative manner, they afforded non-Jews reasons to persecute them. If a Jew was not faithful to Torah, and committed *avoda zara*, he was, from a halakhic perspective, guilty and deserved the death penalty. If the penalty was not executed, the Jews' collective position in society was weakened. The jealousy of women was

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<sup>405</sup> *SY* ed. 1743, 99v.

<sup>406</sup> *SY* ed. 1743, 99v; Ibn Verga, *Shevet Yebuda* (ed. Baer), 129.

<sup>407</sup> Rashi, commentary on Exodus, parashat Yitro, passuk 'For you have done it'.

another trap for Jews, in that a Jewish man giving in to a non-Jewish woman could result in accusations against all Jews. Also, when a Jew badly mishandled financial affairs, he made all Jews equally responsible. Jews, therefore, should realize that their behaviour with regards to these three motives could result in *hilul ba-shem*.<sup>408</sup>

Fourth, there were Jews swearing false oaths, despite the fact that these were strictly forbidden by halakha.<sup>409</sup> Amelander employs ibn Verga's reference to Abraham ibn Ezra, who had explained that such an act, in which the name of God is used, in fact holds God in contempt. When absolute truth is connected to lies, one is therefore actually denying God's existence. Thus, for Ibn Ezra, even swearing in vain is reason enough for God to extend *galut* to the Jews.<sup>410</sup>

The final explanation is Jewish arrogance. There were Jewish individuals from the wealthy class who wished to rule over the nations and who were not content with their present positions in society. Moreover, in the year of the *gerush*, Jews began fighting among themselves in synagogue during the Yom Kippur service, even beating each other with the light of the *hekhal* (*ner tamid*). Arrogance, thus, was not only destroying the position of Jews in society but was also weakening internal Jewish relations. Amelander again follows ibn Verga in accusing individuals 'who have sought to dominate the nations'.<sup>411</sup>

Amelander ends his catalogue of explanations for God's punishing of the Jews apodictically with the conclusion: *גאט איז גרעכט. אונ' מיר זייני שולדיג*, 'God is just, and we are guilty'.<sup>412</sup> Although Amelander relied heavily on ibn Verga's catalogue, he omitted one of the reasons ibn Verga offered: namely, the killing of Jesus by the Jews.<sup>413</sup> Whereas ibn Verga - in the immediate aftermath of the *gerush Sefarad* - had taken this Christian argument seriously and included it in his catalogue without further reasoning, Amelander did not include it as he had with ibn Verga's other reasons. Most likely, he rejected the Christian accusation of Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death and thus did not consider it among the Jews' sins that had caused *galut*.

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<sup>408</sup> *SY* ed. 1743, 99v; ibn Verga, *Shevet Yehuda* (ed. Baer), 129.

<sup>409</sup> *EJ* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), s.v. 'oath' [authored by Moshe Greenberg].

<sup>410</sup> Abraham ibn Ezra, commentary on Exodus, passuk 'Lo tisah'; *SY* ed. 1743, 99v; ibn Verga, *Shevet Yehuda* (ed. Baer), 130.

<sup>411</sup> *SY* ed. 1743, 99v; ibn Verga, *Shevet Yehuda* (ed. Baer), 130.

<sup>412</sup> *SY*, ed. 1743, 99v; this is a direct translation from ibn Verga's: 'וצדיק הוא ה' וכאלה רבות עמנו, וצדיק הוא ה', in: *Shevet Yehuda* (ed. Baer), 130.

<sup>413</sup> Ibn Verga, *Shevet Yehuda* (ed. Baer), 129.

Ibn Verga's exposition of the reasons for *galut* has been described as innovative, as he not only reproduced the traditional rabbinic arguments but also added 'purely naturalistic reasons'. Whereas the first two explanations are strictly theological, being partly located in the biblical past and responsible for the pure fact of *galut* itself, the next three explanations all concern Jewish acts within *galut*. These latter acts are thus responsible for the perpetuation of *galut*. Ibn Verga, besides presenting theological explanation, also tried to offer a sociological analysis of Jewish suffering, so as to facilitate understanding of Christian attitudes towards Jews.<sup>414</sup> By reproducing Ibn Verga's arguments, Amelander automatically adopted the same philosophy on the concept of *galut*.

Although the immediate cause for Amelander's exposition was the *gerush Seфарad*, he interpreted this event as but one example of Jewish suffering in diaspora; he also seized the opportunity to explain in more detail the theological framework from which the persecutions should be understood. Moreover, as Jews were still living in *galut*, he did not speak of a distant past but narrated as much about Jews in earlier ages as in present times. Contemporary readers were thus instructed about their own situation.

#### 5.4 Methodology

For Amelander Jewish history was the history of the remnant of Israel since the *burban ha-bayit* until his own time. This history was positioned in an eschatological framework in which the Ten Lost Tribes played a major role, as did the upcoming reunification of Israel with the coming of the Messiah and the rebuilding of the Temple. This eschatological perspective also coloured his historical narrative, in which he looked for signs of the forthcoming redemption. But what can be noted about his methodology – whether applied consciously or unconsciously? Where had he found his sources and how had he selected the appropriate materials?

Thus far, the few historians who have referred to Amelander's history book nearly all emphasize that he mingled history and legends into one narrative, thereby making *Sheyris Yisrael* an unreliable source for proper historiography. The only chapters singled out as trustworthy are those on Dutch Jewish history, as here Amelander was writing about contemporary history

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<sup>414</sup> Shubert Spero, 'The impact of the Spanish expulsion on Jewish historiography' in: idem, *Holocaust and return to Zion: a study in Jewish philosophy of history* (Hoboken NJ, 2000) 163-185, there 166-168. Some even describe *Shevet Yehuda* therefore as 'reminiscent of the intellectual ambience of the early Enlightenment': Eliezer Schweid, *The classic Jewish philosophers: from Saadia through the Renaissance* (Leiden etc. 2008) 450.

which he and other eyewitnesses had experienced and he was not relying on dubious sources. These historians stress that Amelander, in not distinguishing between fact and legend, was a traditional chronicler and not in line with developments in eighteenth-century European historiography.<sup>415</sup> Leo and Rena Fuks, however, in their opinion that *Sheyris Yisroel* should be regarded as an early work of Jewish Enlightenment, attribute a proper critical sense to Amelander. He would have studied his sources thoroughly, distinguishing between trustworthy and unreliable historical accounts, and would have oriented himself on contemporary non-Jewish, critical historiography.<sup>416</sup>

In the next chapter I will examine Amelander's sources and how he used them in composing his own narrative. Here I will concentrate on several issues fundamental to Amelander's methodology: the question of composition, the relation between facts and legends, and his narrative strategies. These interrelated topics will demonstrate how Amelander regarded the position of historian.

As the next chapter will demonstrate, Amelander used an impressive number of sources. From these sources he took fragments, which he translated from Hebrew and Dutch into Yiddish and ordered according to his chronological and geographic framework. Materials from different sources were thus combined, sometimes with reference to the original sources, sometimes not. Amelander presented himself not so much as the author of *Sheyris Yisroel* but as its compiler. He collected sources and presented the materials to his readers.<sup>417</sup> Of course, Amelander developed strategies towards his sources and actively sifted and ordered – and was thus, as the next chapter will explain, far from being a naïve collector of historical sources. His self-image as a compiler, however, is telling. It reveals that he positioned himself within the tradition of medieval Jewish historiography, with its stress on *compilare* (to compile), *colligere* (to collect), and *aggregare* (to assemble), and did not follow antiquarian and philosophical trends in contemporary European historiography that emphasized archival research.<sup>418</sup>

In the Middle Ages collecting was part of a general mentality in both Europe and the Middle East. As a literary method it was so popular among Jews that Marc Bregman has labeled it a 'medieval Jewish passion'.<sup>419</sup> Amelander, in his earlier work, had become familiar with the idea of a compilation, having edited *Midrash Tanbuma*, an outstanding specimen of a

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<sup>415</sup> See the introduction to this thesis.

<sup>416</sup> Fuks and Fuks-Mansfeld, 'Joodse geschiedschrijving'; Fuks-Mansfeld, 'Yiddish historiography'; Fuks-Mansfeld, 'The role of Yiddish'.

<sup>417</sup> *SY* ed. 1743, 99v.

<sup>418</sup> Bonfil, *History and folklore*, 32.

<sup>419</sup> Marc Bregman, 'Midrash Rabbah and the medieval collector mentality', *Prooftexts* 17 (1997) 1, 63-76, there 68.

collection of materials from very different sources being integrated as a new composition.<sup>420</sup> By interpreting the task of the historian mainly as a compiler rather than a researcher, and thereby ‘cloaking his authorial persona within the authoritative works of others’, Amelander stepped into the tradition of medieval historiography. However, this also meant that he risked becoming a ‘slave to his documents, whose errors he piously passed on’.<sup>421</sup>

Amelander’s entering a tradition in which historiography was basically a work of compilation significantly influenced the character of his historical narrative. Through an intensive process of selecting, combining and composing, materials from a wide variety of sources were now presented alongside each other, resulting in a new overall composition. Amelander’s *Sheyris Yisroel* thus shares a number of characteristics with what Eli Yassif has labeled ‘anthological historiography’ (see paragraph 2.5).<sup>422</sup> First, there is a duality between the chronological, and complete as possible, history, and the anthological ordering of texts, which had been collected according to the author’s taste and ideology. Second, the original text’s authority derives not from its historical approach but from the status of the book or the personality. Third, in the end the totality of the work outweighs its parts in importance, in that all selected fragments are assimilated into ‘an encompassing chronological conception’.<sup>423</sup>

Each of these characteristics can also be applied to *Sheyris Yisroel*. Amelander included material from myriad kinds of sources; likewise, he respected the authority of traditional Jewish history books and of narrative materials within the Talmud and other rabbinic writings, and thus included both historical and legendary material in *Sheyris Yisroel*. Myth and history merged organically in a unified narrative.<sup>424</sup> One example of this mingling is the inclusion, in Chapter 8, of the Bustenai legend, which had been constructed to strengthen the legitimacy of the Babylonian exilarch, complete with a miraculous ending.<sup>425</sup> Amelander adopted it into his history of Babylonian Jewry, since its source, Farissol’s *Orbot olam*, was in his opinion trustworthy. He did not question how reliable the story itself was, but instead restricted himself to his opinion on the authority of the original source.

Amelander’s critics are correct in that he included legendary material within his historical narrative. Yet there is more to be noted in this respect. The overall composition, in

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<sup>420</sup> Bregman, ‘Midrash Rabbah’, 64-65.

<sup>421</sup> Gabrielle M. Spiegel, ‘Genealogy, form and function in medieval historiography’ in: idem, *The past as text. The theory and practice of medieval historiography* (Baltimore/London 1997) 99-110.

<sup>422</sup> For a broader overview of the genre of the anthology (of which historiography is only one part), its genesis and development into modern times: David Stern ed., *The anthology in Jewish literature* (Oxford 2004).

<sup>423</sup> Eli Yassif, ‘The Hebrew Narrative Anthology in the Middle Ages’ *Prooftexts* 17 (1997) 153-175, there 157, 160-161.

<sup>424</sup> Bonfil, *History and folklore*, 25-26.

<sup>425</sup> Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew folktale: history, genre, meaning* (Bloomington, Ind. 1999) 317-332.



which all fragments were integrated, is no less important. Amelander's philosophy of history, described previously, served as the main structure for connecting all the material. His eschatological interpretation of Jewish history positioned both the historical and legendary fragments into a new grand narrative, thus adding new interpretations. The value of *Sheyris Yisroel* as a history book is not so much in the historical validity of all of its accounts, but rather in the transfer of historical and pseudo-historical material from other domains into Yiddish and in the philosophy of history behind it.

Consequently the Jewish historiographical traditions that had been developed during the Middle Ages and the sixteenth century, in both the Sephardic and Ashkenazi domains, left their traces on *Sheyris Yisroel*. Via Sephardic historiography 'the chain of tradition' entered the history book, for example in Chapter 6, where the sequence of Babylonian rabbis from Rab to rabbi Jose is given. The Ashkenazi matyriological tradition is also integrated into *Sheyris Yisroel*, notably in Chapter 14, on the Crusades, a chapter which highlights several Jewish 'martyrs' who preferred death over baptism, and in Chapter 18, on twelfth-century European Jewish history. In the chapter that Amelander wrote on the Amsterdam Ashkenazim he applied the *shalshelet ha-qabbala*-tradition to his own community and made the sequence of rabbis the main structure of his narrative, integrating other materials into this structure.

As a result of the different nature of Amelander's sources, the style throughout *Sheyris Yisroel* is highly variable. Many fragments are taken from originally non-Yiddish sources, and so various styles of the original sources remain recognizable in the new context of *Sheyris Yisroel*. Besides a running narrative, in which the author is sometimes present as narrator through the formula 'omar', Amelander also employed narrative strategies of direct speech and of epistles. This resulted in a vivid style, easily readable for the Yiddish audience.

Throughout *Sheyris Yisroel* Amelander is occasionally present in connecting histories to biblical and rabbinic intertext – another characteristic of traditional Jewish historiography.<sup>426</sup> Amelander's use of biblical quotations will be discussed shortly. On the whole, however, the number of cases in which Amelander connects histories to biblical contexts is sparse. Moreover, in most cases these quotations and references are already part of one of the sources Amelander used for his narrative. The result is that most of *Sheyris Yisroel* presents Jewish history in a rather naturalistic fashion, rarely commenting or referring to existing biblical and other modes of interpretation.

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<sup>426</sup> Bonfil, *History and folklore*, 37-40.

A good example of the few cases in which the narrative is significantly coloured by biblical models would be the previously mentioned legend of Bustenai. There existed a wealth of legendary material on Bustenai, the first exilarch under Islamic rule, from which Amelander opted for the account of Farissol. This account integrates elements of the biblical Ester and Daniel narratives in a strengthening and interpreting of the Bustenai legend.<sup>427</sup> As in the book of Daniel, the last Persian king was prevented from murdering the heirs to the Davidic dynasty via a dream, which could only be interpreted by an aged Jew. The young boy Bustenai, the last descent of David, was saved and honoured richly, and, as had Daniel, received an important position in the court. When he finally became exilarch, he was – like Mordechai, as recounted in the Esther scroll - led through the city in the royal carriage, with people exclaiming: ‘Thus does the king to the one he appoints to be exilarch, whom everyone in his empire should honour and respect!’ Applying the biblical models to Bustenai’s history demonstrates that, as concerns Jewish history, God’s protection for the people of Israel had not been restricted to the biblical era but indeed remained in force. Readers of *Sheyris Yisroel* would thus be reassured in their faith, especially via this reinforced connection between Bustenai to Isaiah 37:31: ‘And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward’. For present readers, it is clear that Amelander not only saw in the history of Bustenai a sign of hope, but that in using this specific text – with reference to his own title, in the word *Sheyris* – he also held the same view about contemporary times.

### *5.5 Conclusion: Sheyris Yisroel as a hybrid history book*

*Sheyris Yisroel* can only be understood if it is interpreted as part of a larger historical project. It was envisioned as part two of the popular medieval history book *Sefer Yosippon* and was connected to the rabbinic narration of biblical history *Tam ve-Yashar*. As such, even though Amelander was composing a new book, his first objective was to situate his efforts within existing Jewish historiography, and he held the authority of traditional sources in high esteem. *Yosippon* was not only instrumental as an authoritative predecessor work; it also offered Amelander both a defense of history writing as such and a methodological example. Amelander’s wish to weave *Sheyris Yisroel* into the fabric of existing Jewish historiography is

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<sup>427</sup> More invocations of the book of Daniel in chapter 18, where the three martyred rabbis of Blois are compared to the three friends of Daniel in the oven (for the history of this analogy see: Susan L. Einbinder, *Beautiful death. Jewish poetry and martyrdom in medieval France* (Princeton 2002) 45-69) and in chapter 20, where Don Abraham Benveniste acts as a dream interpreter for king Alphonso XI.

also demonstrated by his largely traditional catalogue of various benefits of history, which stress theological and ethical merits of developing familiarity with the past. Qua methodology Amelander used the same strategy as did *Yosippon* and most other medieval Jewish history texts, as he describes the task of the historian as being first and foremost a compiler as opposed to a researcher. From a great variety of sources, Amelander made selections and composed his own historical narrative, thereby making *Sheyris Yisroel* an early modern example of ‘anthological historiography’.

Amelander’s *magnum opus* thus first of all shared many characteristics with traditional Jewish historiography – and deliberately so. Amelander himself was also very present in the book, composing the narrative and developing a philosophy of history with distinctively contemporary eighteenth-century features. The fact that the book was written in Yiddish instead of Hebrew was quite innovative and part of a transfer of the genre of history writing from the Hebrew to the Yiddish domain. Amelander’s history book could reach a much larger public than had any Jewish history book in Hebrew. The paratextual features of *Sheyris Yisroel* testify to the publishing team’s wish not only to be considered serious but to appeal to a large public. Besides Hebrew titling, prefaces and a *haskama*, Yiddish poetry and several pictures were added. The same mingling of traditional and contemporary is also evident in the inclusion of a pragmatic benefit to the catalogue of benefits of history – continuing an innovation which had entered Jewish historiography in the sixteenth century.

The closest we can get to Amelander’s own ideas of history is through the book’s narrative structure and the exegesis of its title. He agreed with preceding Jewish historiography that Jewish history in Diaspora was characterized by suffering instigated by the outside non-Jewish world, suffering that would in some way be balanced by the internal blossoming of Jewish knowledge. Amelander, however, as an early modern Amsterdam Ashkenazi intellectual was part of two major changes in Jewish society.

First, in Amsterdam Sephardim and Ashkenazim lived alongside each other and, especially in the book industry (where Amelander was active), were collaborating and influencing each other. In *Sheyris Yisroel* both traditions are described on equal footing and even end up together, side by side, in two closing chapters on Amsterdam Jewry. The reconnecting of the two major Jewish traditions in Amsterdam could, in Amelander’s vision, well be interpreted as paving the way towards the ‘end of Jewish history’, the finishing of Diaspora. Second, Amsterdam, being a principal agent in the colonial trade, was at the forefront in the discovery of new territories and new cultures – discoveries which had attracted much attention

from Jews and non-Jews alike. Early modern Ashkenazim hoped to be reconnected not only with Sephardim, but also – as the remnant of Israel – with the Ten Lost Tribes. The latter, it was thought, could very well be found in the newly discovered territories, possibly among the indigenous peoples. Amelander expressed this eschatological vision via a circular structure around *Sheyris Yisroel*, by beginning and ending the work with the quest for the lost tribes and the existence of far-flung, exotic Jewish communities.

Amelander himself can be described as a ‘hybrid intellectual’, in whom traditional and innovative characteristics joined together. Likewise, the only book he authored himself, *Sheyris Yisroel*, is no less a hybrid book and as such is a typical product of eighteenth-century Ashkenazi culture. Amelander connected himself to traditional historiography and its philosophy and methodology, yet he also introduced innovations in language, philosophy and marketing. The generally sober depiction of Diaspora history of previous, traditional Jewish historiography is uplifted by Amelander through an optimistic narrative framework. This framework was inspired by an eschatological vision connected to traditional Jewish knowledge yet deeply coloured by early modern experiences. The context of Amsterdam, with its two sizeable and influential Jewish communities (Sephardic and Ashkenazi, respectively) and the thriving colonial context (which offered, among other things, a continuous exchange of new information) led Amelander to write a Diaspora history within an eschatological frame, in which past and present are uplifted by the promises of a positive future that may well be near.