

English summaries

A Pious Community and Doubt: Qiddush ha-Shem (Martyrdom) in Northern European Jewry (Ashkenaz) and the Story of Rabbi Amnon of Mainz

I. G. MARCUS

The self-image of the Jews of Latin Christendom was of a righteous, God-fearing community. That collective memory derived from ancient Palestinian traditions of the "early pietists" (hasidim rishonim) whose traditions were brought to southern Italy and then to the Rhineland and Champagne. This positive self-image is reflected, among other places, in ancient and early medieval narratives about Jewish martyrs. Until the First Crusade massacres in the Rhineland in 1096, martyr narratives describe great scholars. In 1096, the picture changes to holy communities of the righteous. In none of these narratives is there any hint that Jews are tempted by or attracted to Christianity.

The story of Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, from late twelfth-century Germany, a fictional account, is the first to suggest that some Jews were attracted to Christianity and had doubts about themselves. They remembered that experience and connected it with guilt and divine judgement on the Jewish New Year. Its memory is preserved to this day in connection with the recitation of a liturgical poem and the sanctus (qedushah) on the Jewish New Year and Day of Atonement.

Jews, Script, and Scripture in the Eschatological Thought of Medieval Christendom (France, 1000-1200)

B. M. BEDOS-REZAK

Christian lay elites in Northern France participated progressively in ecclesiastical documentary practices during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This acculturation involved a complex set of ideas according to which gifts of land recorded in writing assured a warrior nobility redemption in the world to come, and writing was seen as the inscription of divine order deriving authority and authenticity from scripture. Monks, particularly Benedictines, were primarily responsible for the spread of such literate modes and their linkage to eschatological visions. Concern for the validity of the written word and for its capacity to signify truth became focal points in monastic thought. By defining God and scripture as the referential matrix of written signs, the monks created a semiotic dilemma in which writing was seen as both absolute and infinite. Seen as absolute, the written text was authoritative but idolatrous. Seen as infinite, the written text required and became subordinate to interpretation, thus loosening its tie to the divine absolute. While engaged in these uneasy reflections on script and scripture, monks encountered another contemporary literate culture in which the association between scribal and scriptural practices was predicated upon the same principle

(divine origin) applied to the same text (the Bible). Monks thus came to consider contemporary Jewish scribal and scriptural modes as challenges to Christian authenticity. Jewish intimacy with script and scripture had to be undermined and invalidated. In a new rhetoric of antisemitism introduced by Benedictine monks, the traditional theme of the Jew relating to scripture carnally and not spiritually was brought to an extreme conclusion. As beings who used flesh for mind, the Jews were dehumanized, considered animals from whose polluting presence the world had to be purged.

The Changing Face of Judaism: On the Jewish Beard and the Construction of its Meanings

E. HOROWITZ

The present paper explores the range of meanings associated with the Jewish beard in Europe, the Mediterranean countries, and the Middle East between the ninth and eighteenth centuries, and the processes through which those meanings were constructed. Although classical Jewish law prohibited shaving with a razor, it did not require that the Jew wears his beard conspicuously long or untrimmed. Where Jews cultivated such an appearance, such as in the Maghreb and the Muslim or Byzantine East, it was due no less to the cultural values of the surrounding environment, in which the beard functioned as a badge of masculine honor, than to the demands of Jewish tradition. In those same areas the kabbalists were able to endow the beard with an additional dimension of mystical meaning, regarding it as a symbol of divine splendor which was not to be tampered with in any way. Not surprisingly, where the beard was most venerated, it was also most subject to violent attack or punitive removal.

In medieval Christian Europe, by contrast, most Jews opted not to grow their beards in a pronounced manner. This did not prevent Christians from making use of the beard as a symbol of the Jew and his otherness. Jews (and Christians) travelling to the East or the Holy Land would sometimes grow their beards there but remove them upon returning to Europe, apparently so as not to be perceived as an alien Other. The meanings of the Jewish beard were never determined by the Jews alone, nor by the cultures in which they lived, but through dynamic interactions on both the social and discursive levels.

Antisemitism or Social Knowledge? On the Genesis of the Modern Ritual Murder Trial

H. J. KIEVAL

This article examines the reappearance of ritual murder trials against Jews in modern Europe (ca. 1882-1914) from the perspectives of two competing interpretations: instrumental rationality and the social production of knowledge. Starting from the juncture of the Tiszaeszlár investigation and the gathering of European "antisemites" in Dresden in 1882, it traces the appropriation of the theme of ritual murder by political movements in Hungary, Austria, and Germany, analyzes the symbolic language that gave coherence to different forms of anti-Jewish mobilization, and considers the role of socially generated knowledge and "myth" generally in modern mass politics. It argues that the ritual murder accusations and trials of the late nineteenth century cannot adequately be explained simply as pretexts for mass political mobilization. On a fundamental level, and particularly at the early stages of the phenomenon, the modern charge of Jewish ritual murder derived from the "social knowledge" of Hungarian, Czech, and German villagers, directed at the mysteries of criminality and social deviance, and constructed at the local level.

The Persian Tales of Menasseh Ben Israel: Polemic, Apologetic, and Dissimulation in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam

B. BRAUDE

This article explores one of the most well-known works of modern Jewish letters, Mikveh Yisrael (The Hope of Israel), to reveal that its author produced not one, but two versions, Esperança de Israel, intended for a Separdi audience, and Spes Israelis, intended for a Gentile audience. The differences between the two demonstrate 1) chronic sensitivity about portraying the Jewish economic role, 2) the subtle vacillation of Marrano discourse between Judaism and Christianity, and 3) the importance of the image of Jewish wealth and power in the lands of Islam in determining the position of Jews in the West. Mikveh Yisrael was a benchmark in the changing attitude of European society toward the Jew during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Liaisons dangereuses : Jewish Marriage and Modernity in XVIIIth century Trieste

L. C. DUBIN

This article considers Jewish emancipation, tradition and modernity through the issue of marriage law and family formation, specifically the effects upon Jews of the modern state's transfer of marriage from religious to civil law. From archival and rabbinic sources, it reconstructs and analyzes the cases of two couples in late 18th-century Trieste whose unusual situations precipitated struggles between the Jewish community and the state over which marriage law — Habsburg or Jewish — would effectively prevail. It explores how individuals' choices were constrained by laws, custom, parental authority, public opinion and social class. It shows that the defense of Jewish marriage law in the face of the enlightened absolutist state also entailed redefinition of tradition and incipient secularization.

Purim and its Relatives in Tripoli: A Comparative Perspective on the Social Uses of Biblical Stories

H. E. GOLDBERG

The story of Purim in the biblical book of Esther, provided a text which animated and was used to interpret Jewish life throughout the ages. Its relevance to Jewish communal life in the Diaspora was poignant because it takes place in a setting where Jews appear as a weak minority. The question of the relation of Jews to non-Jews is salient in the story, and various readings of that theme became relevant in different social and historical settings. This process is explored with reference to the Jewish community of Tripoli, Libya, with examples from the 18th through the mid-20th centuries. That community established two local Purims, celebrating the deliverance of the Jews and the general population of Tripoli on two occasions in the 18th century. In the mid-20th century, the biblical tale of Joseph, which is a prototype of the Esther story, was mobilized in a tense situation prevailing between Jews and Muslims. In all these instances, biblical themes and texts were used to express and guide complex situations in which Jewish life followed distinct trajectories while intertwined with society at large.

The exemplary story in Sefer Ḥasidim

E. YASSIF

Sefer Ḥasidim is one of the most important literary, social and religious documents of mediaeval Jewry. It has been studied from various points of view, including the literary-folkloristic aspect. However, this collection of tales (more than 400 Hebrew stories) has not yet been studied comprehensively. It has not been compared in depth to the vast exemplary literature that flourished in Christian Europe in the same time and place, and no literary analysis has been used in order to understand the complex ideological and social problems reflected in Sefer Ḥasidim.

This study compares the work with the mediaeval exempla in order to point out both the similarity and the uniqueness of the literary phenomenon demonstrated by Sefer Ḥasidim. It is shown that, as in the Christian type, the exemplary stories of Sefer Ḥasidim can be divided into two main categories: the 'literary exemplum' and the 'personal exemplum'. However in a large number of stories (above one hundred) of Sefer Ḥasidim the leading figure is 'the Ḥakham', a fictional-literary figure similar to that of the implied author in modern literature. This is, we suggest, a personification of the author of Sefer Ḥasidim, R. Judah the Pious himself.

Another aspect examined here is that of folk religion. The mediaeval exemplum in Europe played an essential role in disseminating the concepts of Christian folk religion during that period. Sefer Ḥasidim makes extensive use of the literary techniques of the folktale: its forms, structure and themes. However, the exempla brought here are not folktales. Most of them were composed especially for this work, and they were not subsequently recited as folktales. R. Judah the Pious deliberately used the techniques of folk literature as a popular way of influencing the Jewish community to accept his moral and theological ideals.

In addition to reviewing the comparative and functional aspects of the exempla in Sefer Ḥasidim, our study shows how the tales illuminate Jewish life in twelfth-thirteenth-century Germany. Each becomes a miniature depicting an episode of everyday life, and demonstrates the author's teachings. The primary purpose of these stories was undoubtedly moral, and that also is why they are so brief and condensed. However, they reveal an art of realistic narrative that was very uncommon in mediaeval literature and anticipated realistic literature by many years.

Jewish Mysticism and Jewish History

M. IDEL

One of the most decisive moments in the field of Jewish Studies in the twentieth century is the change of attitude toward the nature of mysticism in Jewish history. The modern shift in Jewish history owes a very great debt to the scholarly achievements of Gershom Scholem who established a solid methodology for studying Jewish mysticism and to radiate in some domains of Jewish studies and in the general perception of Judaism by scholars of religion. By resorting to a certain history of Jewish mysticism, Scholem innovated also in the realm of a more historically oriented perception of mysticism. This paper considers that the relation established by Scholem between mysticism and Jewish history is not satisfying. Two phenomena are discussed: the assumption that history impinged on the change in the nature of kabbalah and the claim that the dissemination of kabbalah affected the direction of the change in Jewish history.