

The Jewish Revolutionary Spirit

and Its Impact on World History

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1648 Annus Mirabilis

According to the Zohar, the year 1648 was to be the mystical year of resurrection, when the Jews could expect deliverance from their more than millennium long exile. Heinrich Graetz, a German Jew, a devotee of the Enlightenment and author of one of the most frequently cited histories of the Jewish people, calls the Zohar that “lying book” and by extension impugns the entire Kabbalistic tradition. Since the Enlightenment was in many ways a direct result of the disappointment which followed from the failure of the Messianic expectations which reached their fever pitch and denouement in the second half of the 17th century, his skepticism is understandable, as is his scorn for the Kaballah, the mish-mash what he considered Gnostic and Talmudic mumbo-jumbo that had led to the rise and fall of Messianic hope in the first place. Graetz espoused a worldview which was the complete antithesis of the Messianic fever of the mid-17th century. He was so convinced in his opposition to the Kaballah because he had the benefit of historical hindsight and could see where its vaporous illusions were leading the Jewish people. Expectation of redemption fostered by widespread dissemination of Kabbalistic doctrine made the Jews, in Graetz’s words, “more reckless and careless than was their custom at other times.”

Just what Graetz meant by reckless can be derived from his analysis of Polish Jewry, which had become by the time of the period in question a hotbed of Kabbalistic thought. Beginning with the Statute of Kalisz in 1251, the Jews of Poland were granted rights like nowhere else in Europe. They were even granted their own autonomous legal system, known as the kahal, which allowed them to adjudicate intra-Jewish disputes without recourse to the Polish

Christian legal system. This autonomy, in turn, necessitated the intensive study of the Talmud, which, according Graetz, led to the peculiar corruption of Polish Jews. The reliance on the Talmud as the basis of Jewish legal autonomy created a culture of “hair-splitting judgment” among the rabbis, according Graetz, as well as “a love of twisting, distorting, ingenious quibbling, and a foregone antipathy to what did not lie within their field of vision,” which in turn trickled down to find expression in the behavior of vulgar, who “found pleasure and a sort of triumphant delight in deception and cheating.” Since by the end of the 18th century, the overwhelming majority of Jews lived in Poland, Jews in general earned, as a result, the reputation of being “a nation of deceivers,” to give Immanuel Kant’s formulation. “It does indeed seem strange,” Kant, the quintessential Enlightenment philosopher, continued, “to conceive of a nation of deceivers, but it is also very strange to conceive of a nation of merchants, the majority of whom, bound by an ancient superstition accepted by the state they live in, do not seek any civil dignity, but prefer to make good this disadvantage with the benefits of trickery at the expense of the people who shelter them and at the expense of each other. In a nation of merchants, unproductive members of society... it cannot be otherwise” (Kant, Werke Bd. vii, p. 205-6). From his vantage point in Königsberg, the capital of what was then East Prussia, a country which the Teutonic Knights wrested by force from the Slavic natives, all Jews were Polish Jews.

Graetz, the Enlightenment Jew and apostle of German culture and Jewish assimilation to it, echoes Kant but confines his censure to the Jews of Poland, who, according to his judgment, “acquired the quibbling method of the schools and employed it to outwit the less cunning.” Piety and knowledge of the hair-splitting distinctions of the Talmud became one and the same thing for the Polish Jew, a combination which, when added to the dogmatism of the rabbis,

“undermined their moral sense” and made them prone to “sophistry and boastfulness.”

Largely as a result of the concessions of the Polish crown which began with the Statute of Kalisz, Poland became known throughout Europe as the “paradisus Judeorum,” the paradise of the Jews. When persecutions would flare up in the traditionally Jewish sections of Europe, in the German principalities, particularly in the urban centers of the Rhein valley, as they frequently did throughout the middle ages, the Jews who wished to escape persecution inevitably headed east toward Poland, taking their language, “juedische Deutsch,” or Yiddish with them. When Isaac Bashevis Singer won the Nobel Prize toward the end of the 20th century, he was designated a Pole by the selection committee, and yet in spite of that fact had to admit in a moment of candor that he understood Polish only with difficulty, even though he lived his entire youth in Poland. Jews did not assimilate in Poland; most of them did not learn the language of the Christian Poles, because, other than rudimentary commerce and illicit sexual activity, the Jews had virtually no contact with the Poles even though they had lived in their country for centuries. The Jews established their own state within a state there; they established their own legal system and courts there as well, and, if demographic evidence is conclusive in matters like this, the Polish paradise was the most successful *modus vivendi* Jews ever found in the West.

Jewish Demographics

A short summary of Jewish demographics gives some indication of how successful the Jews were in living under Polish rule. Between 1340 and 1772, when Poland was partitioned for the first time, the Jewish population of Poland increased 75-fold while, during the

same period of time the Christian population only quintupled. The disparity in population increase is explainable in simple terms.

Persecution in the west, largely during the period from the 11th to the 16th century, caused massive immigration. Jews moved to Polish territory during that period of time in unprecedented numbers. By the time Poland was partitioned for the third and final time in 1795, 80 percent of the world's Jews lived there.

This phenomenal expansion of the Jewish population in Poland was matched by a correspondingly rapid increase in wealth, and that, in turn, corresponded to a dramatic expansion of the territorial limits of Poland. The Golden Age of Polish Jews, according to Pogonowski, lasted from 1500 to 1648. By 1634, which is to say toward the closing years of this age, Poland had become the largest country in Europe. Its territory extended from the Baltic almost to the Black Sea and from Silesia in the west to what is now the heart of the Ukraine, two hundred kilometers east of the Dnieper River. As a result, by the middle of the 17th century, as much as 60 percent of Poland's population was not ethnically Polish, a situation which was bound to cause friction sooner or later, depending on how wisely the Polish rulers treated their alloethnic subjects.

Instead of wisdom, what followed was a classical case of cultural drift in which imperial expansion covered over internal decay until finally the contradictions and injustices which had become an integral part of the system became so insupportable that the bubble burst, and an orgy of violence followed, eventually dragging the Polish state into extinction. The story of Poland was in many ways the story of Imperial Rome writ small. Imperial expansion to the east into what is now the Ukraine, the Crimea and Belorus resulted in the creation of huge estates, some the size of western European countries like Holland and Switzerland. The estates were called

Latifundia, an ironic comment on the blindness of the Polish nobility, who failed to see the mischief which the Latifundia system had wrought in ancient Rome. The Polish Noble's republic was a classic oligarchy, as Plato defined the term in his Republic. As in ancient Greece, so in Poland; wealth concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, led to rebellion among the lower classes. As in ancient Rome, wealth concentrated in fewer and fewer hands fueled a system of imperialism in which the chief losers were the overwhelming majority of the Polish people, in particular, as in Rome, the citizen soldiers, who were driven to the wall by the monopoly conditions the Latifundia fostered. When the rebellion finally came, all Poles would be held responsible for the excesses of the magnates who created the system which had dispossessed the average Polish citizen in the first place.

As in ancient Rome, the citizen soldiers who had been the backbone of the republic's legions became the disenfranchised rural proletariat once wealth became concentrated in the hands of the magnates. "The citizen-soldiers who owned small and medium estates," according to Pogonowski, "suffered numerous bankruptcies and were becoming landless while still retaining their full civil rights and privileges." As a result, "many of them had to seek employment in the huge estates called latifundia." This, of course, meant that more political power migrated to the land magnates, who were now the employers of the enfranchised. As a result, "the political machines of the owners of the latifundia enabled them to attain an oligarchic control of the politics of Poland. Their control of the national parliament was based on their grip on the provincial legislatures."

In 1633, the Sejm passed a law forbidding Poland's nobility from selling liquor or engaging in commercial activities. The Polish noble

citizensâ€”both the wealthy and the impoverishedâ€”, in other words, retained political control of the country, but lost economic control because they were forbidden to engage in commercial activity. Because the Polish magnates owned the land but were unable to engage in commerce, they were forced to hand over the job of income extraction to the nationâ€™s Jews, who would pay a set fee for a lease to raise the money the nobles needed. The system of pre-paid, short-term leases was known in Poland as “arenda.” The connection between the arenda system of tax-farming and the Jews was so intimate that it eventually found expression in the Polish language. In legal contracts in the 17th and 18th century, the Polish word “arendarz” or tax-farmer and “Jew” are synonymous. According to Pogonowski, “15 percent of urban and 80 percent of rural Jewish heads of households were occupied within the arenda system.”

The Jewish legal system, or kahal, brokered these licenses to well-to-do Jews, who in turn often subleased them to less well-to-do relatives. In Polish private law, arenda was defined as “the leasing of immovable property or rights. The subject of the lease might be a whole territory, held either in ownership or in pledge [or] the subject might be a tavern, mill or the right to collect various payments such as a bridge toll or a payment connected with a jurisdiction.” A Jew, for example, might take out a short-term lease on a church, in defiance of church law. This meant that he was in sole possession of the key to the church door, which could only be opened for the performance of weddings or baptisms after payment of a fee, a practice which naturally led to resentment among Christians. Since the lease was of necessity a short-term lease, it was in the Jewâ€™s interest to charge as much money as he could to make back his investment and some profit, since the lease might not be renewed. Or, if it were, someone else might outbid him for it. There was, in other words, no financial incentive to create good will among the

local population from which the arendator earned his living. The Jewish tax-farmers had the support of the state“Pogonowski estimates that 20 to 70 percent of the income of the large estates was generated by tax-farming leases held by Jews“but lacked the good will of the community which was the source of that livelihood. Since the Jew was not a part of that community, and in fact had developed, as Graetz indicates, a whole culture of treating the goyim with contempt, he could exploit the situation well beyond what would have been considered tolerable had Catholic Poles been running the system:

Arenda-type short -term leases resulted in intensive exploitation of the leased estates, as the lessees tended to overwork the land, peasants and equipment without worrying about long-term effects. The peasants experienced additional hardships when Jewish arrendators obtained the right to collect and even impose taxes and fees for church services. The peasants and Cossacks in Kresy [the newly colonized lands of the east] bitterly resented having to pay Jews for the use of Eastern Orthodox and Greek-catholic churches for funerals, baptism, weddings and other similar occasions (Iwo Cyprian Pogonowski, [*Jews in Poland: A Documentary History The Rise of Jews as a Nation from Congressus Judaicus in Poland to the Kneset in Israel*](#) [New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc.1993], p. 68).

Because of the arenda system and the prohibition against distilling spirits which became legally binding in 1633, the Jews assumed total control of the liquor business, which meant that, on the one hand, they could manipulate the price of grain by diverting it to more profitable use as distilled spirits and that, on the other hand, it was in their interest to engage in the intense promotion of alcohol consumption, to maximize profits during the short-term of the lease. This led to chronic drunkenness, decreased productivity, and, of

course, increased resentment against Jews, as a group which was perceived as constantly seeking to exploit the weaknesses of the majority population as a way of enhancing their own wealth and power.

Graetz talks about the Jew experienced in financial matters as a salutary counterbalance to the impetuous, headstrong, and ultimately child-like Polish nobleman:

“The high nobility continued to be dependent on Jews, who in a measure counterbalanced the national defects. Polish flightiness, levity, unsteadiness, extravagance and recklessness were compensated for by Jewish prudence, sagacity, economy and cautiousness. The Jew was more than a financier to the Polish nobleman; he was his help in embarrassment, his prudent adviser, his all in all.”

There are other ways of viewing the “unique utilitarian alliance [that] was formed between the huge landowners and the Jewish financial elite.” Looked at one way, Jewish migration to Poland brought with it Jewish capital, and Jewish capital was soon put at the disposal of the Polish crown and the large landowning magnates, whose estates expanded dramatically in size. The Polish magnates proceeded to use both the Jews and their money to expand the Polish empire into the fertile steppes of the Ukraine, Belorus and the northern shore of the Black Sea. Looked at in another way, this alliance concentrated the wealth into fewer and fewer hands, especially during the period of intense Jewish colonization in the Ukraine during the 80 year period between 1569 and 1648. Since the leases involved monopoly rights, the Jewish tax-farmers could increase the political power of their wealthy patrons, and their own wealth and influence as well, by driving the smaller independent landowners to the wall. Increasing

their power in the short term, however, only increased the magnitude and violence of the reaction when it eventually came. It was during this Drang nach Osten, this expansion to the East, that troubles began to appear in the Jewish paradise. The success of the new system contained within in it the seeds of its own destruction.

Radical Disjunction

The radical disjunction between political and economic power in Poland meant that the enfranchised noble citizens gradually lost control of their culture. The easy-going Polish oligarchs, wedded to an economic system that seemed so eminently successful in bringing new lands under the Polish crown, failed to understand that the control over those territories was being undermined from within by the very people they relied on for its administration. This happened gradually, of course, and it began to manifest itself first in the area of religion. Flush with the short-term wealth which the *arenda* system created and the territorial expansion which it enabled, the Polish kings ignored the biggest cultural crisis of their day, the Protestant revolt against Catholic hegemony over Europe. There was no Inquisition in Poland. As a result, what might have happened in Spain did happen there. Poland became a model for tolerance, but in doing so paved the way for its own extinction at the end of the 18th century.

At a time when the Duke of Alba was battling Calvinists and Jews in the Netherlands and in effect setting up a barrier beyond which the Reformation would not pass, saving all of southern Europe beginning at Antwerp from the rebellion which had devastated England and the North, Sigismund August II, ruler of both Poland and Lithuania, surrounded himself with Jews and the Protestant revolutionaries the Poles called *Demi-Jews*. The “Reformers” in Poland were largely

Unitarian and Socinian followers of Michael Servetus, who, in Graetz's words, "undermined the foundations of Christianity," by "rejecting the veneration of Jesus as a divine person."

Flush with the money they provided, King Sigismund indulged his disordered passions and handed the country over to his Jewish and Demi-Jewish administrators for them to rule as they wished. As a result peasants everywhere groaned under the predations of the Jewish tax-farmers, who in turn lent money to the king at usurious rates of interest, thereby keeping him under their power as well. Rabbi Mendel Frank of Brest, according to Walsh, "was so influential that he was called the King's Officer." As in England at the same time, the Polish nobles were torn between religious principle and economic interest. As in England, economic considerations won out and "the nobility in most cases held its protecting hand over the Jews to whom it was tied by the community of economic interests." In other words, the Polish oligarchs "were either in debt to the Jews, or employed them to squeeze taxes from them out of the peasants, naturally at a good profit for the tax-farmers, who took their toll from dairies, mills, distilleries, farms." The Jews "were indispensable to the easy-going magnate, who was wont to let his estates take care of themselves and while away his time at the capital, at the court, in merry amusements, or at the tumultuous sessions of the national and provincial assemblies, where politics was looked upon as a form of entertainment rather than as a serious pursuit. This Polish aristocracy put a check on the anti-Semitic endeavors of the clergy." The Jesuits warred with the Jews over the mind of the Polish oligarchs, but there was no Inquisition in Poland, and no Counter-Reformation. Calvinism was spreading among these nobles virtually unchecked by any official Catholic resistance. As a result, Poland became, in Graetz's words, "a second Babylon for the Jews."

By the death of Sigismund II in 1572, the Jews had attained enough power to name his successor in collaboration with the Porte in Constantinople, the Huguenots in France, and the English Protestants. The man who brokered the deal was Solomon ben Nathan Ashkenazi, adviser to Grand Visier Mohammed Sokoli. Solomon Ashkenazi was a German Jew by birth who had migrated, as so many of his race had, to the paradise of the Jews, where he eventually became chief physician to King Sigismund. He then migrated by way of Venice to Constantinople, where he served the sultan as faithfully as he had served the Polish king. Solomon Ashkenazi had succeeded Joseph Nasi, also an adviser to the sultan, as “a sort of unofficial leader of world Jewry.” Like Nasi, Ashkenazi orchestrated events following the death of Sigismund from behind the scenes. “Christian cabinets,” Graetz informs us, “did not suspect that the course of events which compelled them to side with one party or the other was set in motion by a Jewish hand. This was especially so in the case of the election of the Polish king.”

Locked into such a profitable alliance with the Jews, the Polish magnates saw little reason to change a system from which they profited so effortlessly and enormously. As a result the exactions of the Jewish tax-farmers became onerous to the point of intolerable among the peasantry in general, but especially among the newly colonized Cossacks, who never felt themselves a part of the Polish nation or, as Orthodox, part of the Catholic culture of the west. The political crisis, which had been growing during the last 80 years of Polish imperial expansion, corresponded as well to the worst excesses of the *arenda* system. Reform of the system was urgently necessary; and a bill of reform eventually made its way to the Sejm.

In 1647, as one of the preconditions that prepared the way for a Polish crusade against the Ottoman empire, the Cossacks were

promised full civil rights and enfranchisement over a period of time as Polish citizens. That meant that “the harsh exploitation by Jewish holders of short time leases was to be lessened by banning the collection of such payments as church fees for funerals, weddings, baptisms, etc.” It also meant that disobedience to the tax-farmers was no longer to be considered a capital crime. It also meant that the Jesuits would no longer be assigned to Cossack territory in the Southern Ukraine, and that as a result they would no longer pressure Orthodox to submit to Rome’s authority. Finally, it meant that the Jews were to be evicted from the southern Ukraine along with the Jesuits.

When the bill came to a vote in 1648, the Sejm, dominated by the alliance of huge landowners and their Jewish administrators, defeated the measure, providing a classic instance of how the concentration of wealth and power into a few hands can enable that group to pursue its own interests, with total disregard of the common good, over the brink of that self-interest into national disaster.

The situation in Poland during the first half of the 17th century was roughly analogous to the situation in Spain a century and a half earlier. Spain was the only other country in Europe with an equally influential Jewish population. As in Poland, many Sephardic Jews engaged in behavior that caused resentment among the lower classes. During the famine in Cuenca in 1326 Jewish usurers charged farmers 40 percent interest on the money they needed to borrow to buy grain for sowing. Blasphemy had become a Jewish custom in Spain. Moses, according to Walsh, “had condemned blasphemers to death. Yet it was a custom of many Jews to blaspheme the Prophet for whom Moses had warned them to prepare.” The Jews, as a result, “were disliked not for practicing the things that Moses taught, but for doing the things he had forbidden.

They had profited hugely on the sale of fellow-beings as slaves, and practiced usury as a matter of course, and flagrantly." Blasphemy went hand in hand with Jewish proselytizing, which often took place by compulsion. Jews would force Christian servants to get circumcised as a condition of employment. They would encourage people to whom they had lent money to abjure Christ.

The Jews who defined themselves as the antithesis of Christianity had developed the habit of conspiring with Christendom's enemies. Although they flourished under Visigothic rule in Spain, they were not long thereafter found conspiring with the Arabs in Africa to overthrow the Visigothic monarchy. At the beginning of the 8th century they used their contacts with African Jews to prepare the invasion of the Mohammedan Berbers across the straits of Gibraltar. Once the Mohammedans conquered Spain, the Jews flourished under their rule, achieving as a result one of the most sophisticated cultures in Europe at the time. The Jews excelled in medicine and brought Aristotle to Europe. However, the flower of Sephardic culture drew its economic substance from unsavory roots. The Sephardic Jews grew rich on slaves and usury.

When the Spaniards began their reconquista, the Jews were not persecuted. According to Walsh,

"Saint Fernando, on taking Cordoba from the Saracens, turned over four mosques to the large Jewish population, to convert into synagogues, and gave them one of the most delightful parts of the city for their homes, on two conditions: that they refrain from reviling the Christian religion, and from proselytizing among Christians. The Jews made both promises, and kept neither."

Resentment against usury combined with the suspicion that the

Jews were using their influence to thwart the reconquista, or take control themselves of the already reconquered regions with the secret help of the Moors led to the riots of the late 14th century. If the monarchs did nothing to curb Jewish influence, the outraged citizens simply took the law into their own hands and widespread bloodshed was the result. Leniency only created more violence, as in the case of Pedro the Cruel, who was perceived as giving “his Jewish friends complete control of his government; a circumstance that led his enemies to call him a Jewish changeling, and contributed to his denunciation by a Pope as “a facilitator of Jews and Moors, a propagator of infidelity, and a slayer of Christians.” By the end of the 14th century, Spain’s Christian population, convinced that the Jews were “planning to rule Spain, enslave the Christians, and establish a New Jerusalem in the West” began acting on their suspicions by taking the law into their own hands. Widespread bloodshed was one result. Widespread conversion, both sincere and forced, was another.

Rabbi Solomon Converts

The similarities with Poland are obvious. The Sephardic Jews were, if anything, more a part of Spanish culture than the Ashkenazim were part of Polish culture. The differences, however, are even more striking than the similarities. Unlike the situation in Poland, many Spanish Jews became sincere converts to Christianity. Resentment against the Jews had led to widespread rioting in 1391, and that in turn riveted the attention of the church on the Jews. St. Vincent Ferrer, as a consequence, led crusades for the conversion of the Jews. In 1391 he achieved his most spectacular success when Rabbi Solomon ha-Levi converted to the Catholic faith and became Paul of Burgos or Paul de Santa Maria (1351-1435). Levi was thoroughly conversant with Talmudic literature and was acquainted

with the leading Jewish scholars of his day as well. He embraced Christianity as a result of the efforts of St. Vincent Ferrer and reading the works of St. Thomas Aquinas. His conversion, however, only increased the general animus against the Jews by revealing the evidence of anti-Christian conspiracy from the inside, so to speak. There was evidence enough. The man formerly known as Rabbi Solomon ha-Levi was, after all, a Jewish insider if there ever was one, and he followed up on his conversion by implicating the Jews in a conspiracy to overthrow the Christian monarchs of the Iberian peninsula. After his conversion, Levi published “two dialogues in which he categorically declared that the Jews were bent upon ruling Spain.”

Similarly, another Jewish convert Fray Alonso de Espina eventually became confessor to Henry IV and Rector of the University of Salamanca. In 1459 Espina wrote *Fortalitium Fidei* , one of the most bitterly anti-Jewish documents in history. In his diatribe against the Conversos, Espina “suggested that if an Inquisition were established in Castile, large numbers of them would be found to be only pretending Christians, engaged in judaizing and in undermining the Faith they professed.”

Not all of the conversions following the turmoil of 1391, as numerous Jewish converts themselves indicated, were sincere. The fear which the reprisals created led to an equally unfortunate spate of forced conversions, which only compounded the problem of subversion, which had led to the riots and forced conversions in the first place. Forced conversion is antithetical to the Christian faith. “The unwilling,” Pope Gregory the Great wrote at the beginning of a tradition that would remain unchanged throughout the papacy, “are not to be compelled.” Gregory is also responsible for the creation of the formula which would guide later popes in their dealings with the

Jews, “Sicut Judaeis non, ” a formula which, according to Synan, was “destined to recur endlessly in papal documents concerning Jewish rights and disabilities throughout the Middle Ages”:

“Just as license out not to be presumed for the Jews to do anything in their synagogues beyond what is permitted by law, so in those points conceded to them, they ought to suffer nothing prejudicial” (Edward A. Synan, [*The Popes and the Jews in the Middle Ages*](#) [New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965], p. 46.

Popes throughout the period in question walked a fine line between two extremes, symbolized in our account by Poland, which erred by allowing Jews to usurp Christian privilege and Spain, which erred by excessive rigor, especially by promoting the abuse of forced conversion. Popes protested both abuses, but, in the case of Spain, unscrupulous politicians, seeking in forced conversion a quick fix to a difficult problem, ignored the warnings and created a deeper more intractable problem instead of solving the original problem. Many Jews accepted baptism as a way of retaining possession of their goods and their lives. “Given the forced nature of the mass conversions of 1391,” Kamen writes, “it was obvious that many could not have been genuine Christians.” The king of Aragon repudiated the concept of forced conversion and made it clear to the Jews there that they could return to their ancestral religion, but that was not the case in Barcelona, which, as a result, became a hotbed of subversive activity all the way up to the time of the Spanish Civil War.

Collaboration

The rabbis collaborated with the unscrupulous Spanish politicians by allowing for conversion under duress. The early Church was split

over whether Christians who renounced the faith during the Roman persecutions should be readmitted to the Church. The less rigoristic debated which penances should be applied, but the Church never condoned renunciation of the faith, even if death were the consequence. Talmudic Judaism, however, came up with an accommodation of the practice of lying about conversion based on a distinction which would have consequences which were every bit as serious as those which followed from the forced conversions in the first place. In the fifteen century, the Rabbis in North Africa distinguished between anusim or unwilling converts and meshumadim, those who converted voluntarily. As a result, the only sort of Jew who was ostracized by the synagogue was the sincere convert. The fact that the liar and dissembler was tacitly tolerated, in clear violation of the scriptural principle articulated in the Book of Maccabees was to have far-reaching consequences. One of the most obvious is that the rabbis and the unscrupulous anti-Semitic Christian politicians collaborated in creating an atmosphere where subversion flourished. Jews who had prospered by converting and thereby ignoring the tenets of their own religion could continue to prosper as Christians while retaining the same opportunistic attitude toward Christianity. The Christians who were moved to violence against Jews now harbored the same animus, clouded by religious ambiguity, against the conversos, whom they now called Marranos, a derogatory term of dubious origin which means swine. Forced conversion, in other words, only strengthened the very suspicions it was supposed to allay. And the rabbis were instrumental in strengthening them. As a result, Jews were regarded as a fifth column within the state, and conversos were regarded, because of the very conversion that was forced on them, as an even more dangerous fifth column within the Church. Some conversos were precisely that. Fray Vicente de Rocamora, the confessor of Empress Maria, sister of Philip II, "threw off the mask of Catholicism and

joined the Hebrew community at Amsterdam as Isaac of Rocamoro.” The Jewish community at Amsterdam in the 17th century was made up almost exclusively of conversos who had thrown off the Catholic faith shortly after escaping from Spain and Portugal and arriving there. It was made up, in other words, of apostate Catholics who had lied about their faith.

The system of forced conversion was exploited by the cynical Jews who converted insincerely as a way of retaining power and wealth, and it punished those Jews whose conversions were sincere because they continued to suffer the rigors of anti-Semitism. Later Jewish apologists seem unaware of the complexity of the situation and the implications which flow from it. Describing the aftermath of the forced conversions, Cecil Roth writes that

“within a generation or two, the Marranos became assimilated enough. Their worldly success was phenomenal. They almost controlled the economic life of the country. They made fabulous fortunes as bankers and merchants. They thronged the liberal professions... . Many of them attained high rank even in the Church. But with all their eminence, the vast majority (and those who had entered Holy Orders were no exception) remained faithful at heart to the religion of their fathers, which they handed on, despite unbelievable difficulties from generation to generation. Their Christianity was merely a mask.... They were Christians in nothing, and Jews in everything but name.”

Roth’s justification of false conversion lends credence to the claims of the anti-Semites in two ways. First of all, it ignores the fact that many conversions were sincere. Both Roth and the Spanish anti-Semites dismiss this possibility out of hand. Secondly, Roth’s justification of duplicity condones subversion and in many

ways makes it a Jewish characteristic. In this Roth is simply following the example of the rabbis of the time, who in contrast to the scriptural example of the Maccabees, accepted the idea of outward conversion as long as it was coupled with an inward denial of what was professed outwardly. This rabbinic acceptance of duplicity would have far-reaching consequences for European Jewry. In the short term, it set the stage for the conversion of Sabbetai Zevi, the Jewish Messiah, to Islam in 1666. Because of the tradition established by the Sephardic rabbis, Zevi, the false Messiah, could claim, with some plausibility, that his conversion to Islam was only for show. He could claim that it was really an attempt to subvert the Turkish empire from within. Of course, he could also make similar claims to the sultan of Constantinople, claiming that his preaching in the synagogues of the Levant was really an attempt to convert Jews to Islam.

By condoning false conversion under duress, the rabbis created a nation of subversives. The net result was chaos and confusion so total, so demoralizing and so debilitating that medieval Judaism did not survive the crisis. Medieval Judaism, like medieval Islam, was ultimately incapable of negotiating a *modus vivendi* which accommodated both faith and reason. Medieval Judaism broke apart on the rock of false conversion, as manifested in the case of Sabbetai Zevi. European Jewry, which was virtually unanimous in accepting Zevi as the Messiah, attempted to repress any indication that Zevi had existed after his conversion to Islam, but the evidence of his existence was like the rock just beneath the surface which determines traffic on the river. The messianic fever which infected Europe beginning in 1648 reached its peak and denouement when Zevi converted to Islam in 1666, another *Annus Mirabilis*. Thereafter, the ship of medieval Judaism foundered and eventually broke into two parts, corresponding to faith and reason respectively, since their

union could find in Judaism no unifying force any more. On the one hand, reason found itself represented by Spinoza's rationalism, which led to the German Enlightenment Jew epitomized by Moses Mendelssohn, the man whom Lessing immortalized in German literature as Nathan der Weise. On the other hand, faith divorced from reason led to the Jewish form of quietism known as Hassidism, which continued to thrive in the shtetls of Poland and the Pale of the Settlement all the way up to the Nazi genocide.

As anyone with a rudimentary sense of the relationship between Christianity and culture could have anticipated, the regimen of false conversions in Spain did nothing but make a bad situation worse. The cynical Jewish converts continued to exploit the situation to their advantage under the protection of the Church, while at the same time the sincere Jewish converts were forced to live under constant and intolerable suspicion.

Spain's response to this intolerable situation was the Inquisition. By the 1470s, it was becoming increasingly clear that forced conversions had not solved Spain's Jewish problem. They had in fact made it worse by making it more inaccessible. The longer the government did nothing, the more mob violence increased. Queen Isabella's predecessor is now known to history under the unfortunate name of Enrique el Impotente precisely because he was perceived as handing over to the unscrupulous insincere conversos the administration of both Church and state and doing nothing to curb the rioting and pillaging of the Jews and their possessions which followed in the wake of his inaction. When the civil disorder against the Jews became a serious threat to Spain's military campaign against the Moors, the Spanish crown, united now under Ferdinand and Isabella, imported the Inquisition, created by St. Dominic as a way of ridding Southern France of the Albigensian

heretics, in order to bring legal order to resentments which were leading to the mob violence which threatened to engulf Spain. On September 27, 1480 a papal bull commissioned the Dominicans Juan de San Martin and Miguel de Morillo to begin inquiries into reports of subversion of the faith. The Spanish Inquisition had come into existence. Twelve years later, Ferdinand and Isabella, after expelling the Moors from Spain, expelled the Jews as well. In doing so, they saved Spain from the fate of Poland by exporting a problem they could not solve. Over the course of the 16th century, northern Europe inherited the problem which Spain could not solve and cities like Antwerp became, as a result, a hotbed of revolutionary activity.

Cultural Matrix

The combination of the expulsion of the Jews and rabbinical justification for false conversion effectively established the cultural matrix from which the revolutionary Jew would emerge. If a Jew according to Talmudic teaching could profess what he claimed was an idolatrous false religion in public and still remain a Jew in good standing, then he simply could not be trusted, and the anti-Semites were right in viewing him as a fifth-column who threatened the existence of both Church and state. Forced conversion was wrong, but the acceptance of it on the part of the Jews was just as wrong as the imposition of it on them. Worse still, acceptance of insincere conversion enshrined the principle of deception and subversion as an acceptable part of Jewish life. The Jew, according to the principles established in the Old Testament from the time of Moses to the resistance which the Maccabees provided against the Hellenizers under King Antiochus, had a duty to resist what he perceived as idolatry and incorporation into idolatrous religions, and he was duty-bound to resist that incorporation to the point of death. The fact that Talmudic teaching condoned false conversion indicated

a radical break in continuity between what they taught and what Moses taught. The Marranos, if by that term we mean insincere Jewish converts to Christianity, made subversion and deceit a way of life.

In this their behavior and world view was similar to other disaffected Catholics from other parts of Europe. The German monks who violated their vows of celibacy with impunity led double lives as well. And living a lie helped create animosity toward the institution to whom they had made vows they would not fulfill. In this regard, the first Lutherans and the first Calvinists were virtually indistinguishable from each other and from the conversos, both in theology and practice. Both movements drew their leadership from the sexually corrupt lower Catholic clergy. Calvin's lieutenant, the erstwhile Catholic, Theodore Beza was, according to Walsh,

"a glaring example of the too-common corruption. Though not even a priest, he enjoys the incomes of two benefices, through political influence, lavishes the Church's money on his concubine, and generally leads a vicious and dissolute life. When the Church is under attack, he hastens to join the enemy. As Calvin's lieutenant, this righteous man thunders against the [corruption of the] Old Church, of which he was partly the cause."

Beza's example was not uncommon. The monasteries of Europe were full of monks leading double lives:

"There is no doubt about the laxity of the monasteries of Sevilla and Valladolid, whose members embraced Protestantism; nor of the degeneracy of the Augustinians in Saxony, who broke away from the Church almost en masse in 1521. In England it was the reformed Observatine Franciscans who withstood Henry VIII even to death,

while the relaxed Conventuals and other badly disciplined monks and priests formed the nucleus of the Church of England. The first Protestants, as a rule, were bad Catholics” (Walsh, [*Philip II*](#), p. 252).

Once the Jews who were expelled from Spain began to regroup in the newly-Protestant regions of the North, their settlements began to draw Marranos like a magnet, and the disaffected Catholics who had once been living double lives as clerics with concubines in places like Saxony and Thuringia now began to make common cause with the Jews who had led double lives as well by converting to Catholicism simply to preserve their wealth. Revolution, which is to say, a pan-ethnic coordinated attack on the cultural hegemony of the Catholic Church over Europe, emerged as a force in world history when these two groups merged in places like Antwerp in the middle of the 16th century. Revolution was, in other words, a Protestant-Jewish alliance from its inception. The Jews, as Newman shows so well, promoted every “reform” movement in Europe, from the Hussites to the Anabaptists, as a way of weakening the hegemony of the Catholic Church, reasoning—falsely in the case of Luther—that the enemy of their enemy was their friend. In places like Antwerp and Amsterdam, the Jews put their wealth as well as their considerable expertise in finance and publishing at the disposal of the libidinous German monks and their princely protectors as their way of waging cultural warfare against the Catholic Church and Spain, its defender. When Johan Bokelzoon established his sexual liberationist communist dictatorship in Muenster in 1533, the native population was quickly overrun by libidinous nuns recently “liberated” from their convents by the Lutherans. (Martin Luther, in fact, got his wife, Catherine von Bora, from a Lutheran raid which liberated a convent in Saxony. He offered the youngest and prettiest of the ex-nuns to the Bishop of Mainz if that worthy agreed to convert to the Lutheran party.) The nuns under Bokelzoon’s tutelage quickly

adopted his sexual liberationist practices and began having visions of the coming of the new Jerusalem which caused them to practice glossolalia while rolling naked on the ground, frothing at the mouth. Liberation from the stress of living a double life as a faux Catholic was intoxicating, and the intensity of the intoxication was some indication of the stress that caused it.

The revolutionary link between Jews and Reformers was theoretical as well as practical. The “Reformers” for their part could justify their criminal behavior only by cloaking it in the imagery of the Old Testament. Regicide was the most heinous of crimes and viewed with revulsion by all of Christian Europe, and yet Cromwell justified his role in the murder of Charles I by appealing to the story of Phineas. “Be not offended at the manner,” Cromwell wrote to Lord Wharton in January 1650,

“perhaps no other way was left. What if God accepted the zeal, as He did that of Phineas, whose reason might have called for a jury? What if the Lord have witnessed this approbation and acceptance to this also, not only by signal outward acts, but to the heart also? What if I fear my friend should withdraw his shoulder from the Lord’s work ... through scandals, though false, mistaken reasonings.”

The subjunctive mood of Cromwell’s self-justification gives some indication that not even the models he dragooned from the Old Testament could erase the guilt of regicide from his conscience, but even if they could not absolve him of his sin, they certainly acted as a palliative. Cromwell, according to one commentator,

“was making a startling reference to the biblical story of Phineas, who thrust a javelin through a sinfully copulating couple, thus saving the people of Israel from the wrath of God. In the end, only brutal

summary justice against the King had served to complete God's work to save the nation from His wrath and to secure his continuing love."

By 1649, when Charles I went on trial, the tradition of Judaizing which had been extirpated from Spain had struck deep roots in England. The English judaizers were known as Puritans, and Cromwell as their leader was as versed in using Biblical figures as a rationalization for his crimes as he was in using Jewish spies from Spain and Portugal as agents in his ongoing war with the Catholic powers of Europe. The Puritans in England could implement the idea of revolution so readily precisely because they were Judaizers, and that is so because revolution was at its root a Jewish idea. Based on Moses' deliverance of Israel as described in the book of Exodus, the revolutionary saw a small group of chosen "saints" leading a fallen world to liberation from political oppression. Revolution was nothing if not a secularization of ideas taken from the Bible, and as history progressed the secularization of the concept would progress as well. But the total secularization of the idea in the 17th century would have made the idea totally useless to the Puritan revolutionaries. Secularization in the 17th century was synonymous with Judaizing. It meant substituting the Old Testament for the New. The concept of revolution gained legitimacy in the eyes of the Puritans precisely because of its Jewish roots. Graetz sees the attraction which Jewish ideas held for English Puritans quite clearly. The Roundheads were not inspired by the example of the suffering Christ, nor were they inspired by the medieval saints who imitated him. They needed the example of the warriors of Israel to inspire them in their equally bellicose campaigns against the Irish and the Scotch, who became liable to extermination because the Puritans saw them as Canaanites. Similarly, the King, who was an unworthy leader, like Phineas, deserved to die at the hands of the righteous,

who now acted without any external authority, but, as the Jews had, on direct orders from God. "The Christian Bible," Graetz tells us,

"with its monkish figures, its exorcists, its praying brethren, and pietistic saints, supplied no models for warriors contending with a faithless king, a false aristocracy and unholy priests. Only the great heroes of the Old Testament, with fear of God in their hearts and the sword in their hands, at once religious and national champions, could serve as models for the Puritans: the Judges, freeing the oppressed people from the yoke of foreign domination; Saul, David, and Joab routing the foes of their country; and Jehu, making an end of an idolatrous and blasphemous house"these were favorite characters with Puritan warriors. In every verse of the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, they saw their own condition reflected; every psalm seemed composed for them, to teach them that, though surrounded on every side by ungodly foes, they need not fear while they trusted in God. Oliver Cromwell compared himself to the judge Gideon, who first obeyed the voice of God hesitatingly, but afterwards courageously scattered the attacking heathens; or to Judas Maccabaeus, who out of a handful of martyrs formed a host of victorious warriors."

Graetz puts his finger on the heart of the issue when he identifies Puritan role models as "at once religious and national champions." Revolution as practiced by the Puritan Judaizers of England was a reversion to a more primitive, pre-Christian model. There was no separation the two swords of pope and emperor here"or, to use the terms of a later more secular era, no separation of church and stateinstead, both pope and emperor were fused into one charismatic revenant of King David. Israel had become ethnic once again, except that now the real Jews were Englishmen, the visible elect on earth, and England (or New England) was the New

Jerusalem.

When the Puritan poet and propagandist John Milton wanted, as a result of personal circumstances, to have the Puritan solons in Parliament legalize divorce in 1642, he attempted to help the divines overlook the inconvenient fact that Jesus Christ condemned the practice explicitly by appealing in general to Old Testament models and to Moses, “an author great beyond any exception,” in particular. Milton then quickly gets to the Messianic politics that lies at the heart of Puritan-Jewish revolutionary thought. England’s legalization of divorce will provide the world with a “magnanimous example” which “will easily spread far beyond the banks of Tweed and the Norman isles.” England as the new Israel has a mission to save the world, a mission which was later adopted by equally messianic descendants of Jews and Puritans in America. “It would not be the first or second time,” the author of [*Paradise Lost*](#) continues,

“since our ancient druids, by whom this island was the cathedral of philosophy to France, left off their pagan rites, that England hath had this honor vouchsafed from heaven, to give out reformation to the world. Who was it but our English Constantine that baptized the Roman Empire? Who but the Northumbrian Willibrorde and Winifride of Devon, with their followers were the first apostles of Germany? Who but Alcuin and Wycliffe our countrymen, opened the eyes of Europe, the one in arts, the other in religion? Let not England forget her precedence of teaching nations how to live.”

One can almost hear in Milton’s tendentious pleading for the legalization of divorce, the devotees of Planned Parenthood arguing that the logical sequel to America’s conquest of Afghanistan or Iraq should be contraception and abortion. Messianic politics and sexual liberation have gone hand in hand from the beginning, and

they still do, now that America is the uncontested new Israel. Messianic politics cannot function without Old Testament models, as Milton's appeal to Moses on the issue of divorce makes clear.

Messianic politics lies at the heart of what the Jewish and Puritan revolutionaries of the 16th century had in common, which is to say, both the Puritan and the Jew shared a desire to attain the spiritual goods promised in the Bible by secular means. Messianic politics was a form of magic, since the attainment of wealth and power by spiritual means had always been the goal of Simon Magus and his followers, and as such it had a powerful appeal to a group of people who were just discovering the natural sciences at the same time that they were full of revulsion at the cross of Christ and the ideal of suffering which it embodied. "It is better," St. Augustine wrote, summarizing the Catholic alternative to Simon Magus, "to love God and make use of money, than to love money and make use of God." The Puritan rejection of the medieval worldview of the Catholic Church (and its Anglican surrogates) was ultimately traceable to the Jewish rejection of the suffering Christ as an unworthy Messiah. "The chief priests," St. Matthew tells us, "with the scribes and elders mocked him in the same way. 'He saved others,' they said, 'he cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him.'"

The Jewish/Puritan Alliance

The Jewish/Puritan alliance was born in a mutual rejection of the cross and all it stood for, and the substitution of King David or Simon bar Kokhba or Sabbetai Sevi or Oliver Cromwell or Napoleon Bonaparte as an alternative to the suffering Christ. The Jews were so enamored of Cromwell as a potential Messiah that they sent a delegation to examine his baptismal records in Huntington, to see if

he were descended from the lineage of King David. Cromwell, as Graetz points out, was driven to consummate this revolutionary alliance between Jews and Puritans on both the theoretical and the practical level:

“To bury oneself in the history, prophecy, and poetry of the Old Testament, to revere them as divine inspiration, to live in them with every emotion, yet not to consider the people who had originated all this glory and greatness as preferred and chosen was impossible. Among the Puritans, therefore, were many earnest admirers of “God’s people” and Cromwell was one of them... .”

The consummation of this revolutionary alliance against the Catholic Church and Catholic countries like Spain involved, in other words, not only rummaging through the Bible for images that would justify regicide, it also entailed bringing Jews, so recently expelled from the Iberian peninsula, out of their temporary home in the low countries into the land now governed by the Puritan saints. According to Graetz:

“A desire was excited in the hearts of the Puritans to see this living wonder, the Jewish people, with their own eyes, to bring Jews to England, and, by making them part of the theocratic community about to be established, stamp it with the seal of completion. The sentiments of the Puritans towards the Jews were expressed in Oliver Cromwell’s observation, “Great is my sympathy with this poor people, whom God chose and to whom He gave His law; it rejects Jesus because it does not recognize him as the Messiah.” Cromwell dreamt of a reconciliation of the Old and New Testament, of an intimate connection between the Jewish people of God and the English Puritan theocracy. But other Puritans were so absorbed in the Old Testament, that the New Testament was of no importance.

Especially the visionaries in Cromwell's army and among the members of Parliament, who were hoping for the Fifth Monarchy, or the reign of the saints, assigned to the Jewish people a glorious position in the expected millennium. A Puritan preacher, Nathaniel Holmes... wished . . . to become the servant of Israel and serve him on bended knees. The more the tension in Israel increased ... the more public life and religious thought assumed Jewish coloring. The only thing wanting to make one thing [was the return of the Jews]."

Cromwell's followers felt that by readmitting the Jews to England they could bring about the second coming of Christ, the millennium, and the fifth monarchy mentioned in the book of Daniel. In short, the middle of the 17th century was suffused with an apocalyptic vision of Christ's kingdom being actually established in the here and now. Jewish refugees from Spain and English Ranters and Fifth Monarchy men were of one mind on this issue. The Kingdom of God was at hand. Something like this had been held by Christians for over a millennium and a half, probably because its advent had been pronounced by Christ himself. What had changed, though, was the kind of kingdom Christ's followers were supposed to expect.

St. Augustine gave the definitive Catholic explication of The Book of Revelation in the City of God, where he explained that the millennium was supposed to be understood as a spiritual allegory concerning an essentially spiritual reality. The Millennium had begun with the death of Christ on the Cross, and the New Jerusalem was fully realized in the Catholic Church. Augustine's explanation became Church doctrine when it was adopted as the definitive explanation of the millennium by the Council of Ephesus in 431. From that time on, belief in the millennium as a worldly kingdom was dismissed generally as a superstitious aberration and particularly as "the error of the Jews."

As Archbishop Laud made clear in a sermon in 1621, it was precisely this “error of the Jews” that the Puritans were bent on resurrecting. The Puritans, according to Laud, “Enclyne to Judaisme as the newe sect of the Thraskites and other opinionists concerninge the terrene Kingdome of the Jewes.” Taking the Jews who had rejected Christ on the cross as their model, their Puritan revolutionary co-belligerents now announced the advent of the Kingdom of God on earth, or in Laud’s terms, “the terrene Kingdome of the Jewes” in England. Heaven on earth was to be instituted by a government of English saints at some point in the decade following 1650. Since one of the inaugural events in the coming of this new kingdom was the murder of the English king, it promised to be a bloody kingdom for those with the eyes capable of seeing its true lineaments. But a kingdom nonetheless, and a worldly kingdom as well, in which sainthood was the first job requirement of every politician.

Since there had been no Jews in England since their expulsion in 1290, at least not officially, English philo-Semitism had a distinctly utopian cast to it. The English Judaizers tended to idealize Jews according to their own idiosyncratic reading of the Old Testament. They did not, as one has come to expect of the English, evaluate them according to empirical observation, at least not at the dawn of the Messianic era in 1648. If they had been less preoccupied with their own revolution at home, the English could have learned something about Christian-Jewish relations by observing the apocalypse that was brewing in Poland at the very moment the English were debating the fate of their king. An objective study of what had happened in Spain might have been helpful as well, but an objective English study of anything Spanish is the historical equivalent of an oxymoron.

By 1540 the Converso issue was over in Spain. Figures from the tribunal of Toledo in the years from 1531 to 1560 suggest that only three percent of the cases which came before the Inquisition there dealt with Judaizers. Spain had saved itself from the fate of Poland first by importing the Inquisition from southern France, and then by exporting its problem to the north of Europe. For some indication of what might have happened in Spain if the situation created by the Jews there had gone unchecked, we need only look at the situation in Poland. Jewish influence over Polish political life not only continued in the century after it had abated in Spain; it increased in intensity as well, fueling Polish imperialism in the East. The same violence that appeared periodically in Spain beginning in the late 14th century was repressed in Poland where laws in effect codified Jewish hegemony over large areas of Polish cultural life. Since disobedience to the predations of the Jewish tax-farmers was a capital crime, there is some indication that 1) animosity against the Jews was widespread and 2) that it was severely repressed. The combination of those two factors made an explosion of violence all but certain, and the explosion came when the Sejm, dominated by the Polish magnates and their Jewish administrators, rebuffed Cossack aspirations for political reform. Cultural drift in Poland under the self-serving hand of the oligarchs had led to an explosion of the sort that the Inquisition had prevented in Spain, and as a result of that explosion, the Polish nobles republic went into a state of terminal decline, only to expire altogether 147 years later.

The defeat of their cause in the Sejm turned the hopeful expectation of the Cossacks into equally vehement outrage. That outrage was mobilized by a Cossack leader by the name of Bogdan Chmielnicki. Chmielnicki, who was 53 years old when the Sejm voted against enfranchising the Cossacks, had a personal stake in the matter as

well. A Jew by the name of Zachariah Sabilenki, according to Graetz,

“had played him a trick, by which he was robbed of his wife and property. Another had betrayed him when he had come to an understanding with the Tartars. Besides injuries which his race had sustained from Jewish tax farmers in the Ukraine, he, therefore, had personal wrongs to avenge.”

Chmielnicki’s claim that “The Poles have delivered us as slaves to the cursed breed of Jews” resonated among the Cossacks enough to bring them into open revolt. When Chmielnicki and his Cossack and Tartar hordes defeated the Polish army on May 16, 1648, the way was open to widespread looting, pillaging and murder. It is estimated that 100,000 Jews perished in the ensuing mayhem. Some pretended to be Christians to escape the wrath of the Cossacks. Some, as in Spain a century and a half before, accepted baptism as the price of saving their lives. Chmielnicki’s pogroms became what the riots in Spain would have become without the benefit of the Inquisition. Resentment had built up for too long for this blaze to burn itself out quickly.

As Chmielnicki’s comment to the Cossacks indicated, the Poles were held responsible for the behavior of the Jews, even if they suffered from the same system of financial exploitation that had enraged the Cossacks. Prince Vishnioviecki, the man Graetz calls, “the only heroic figure amongst the Poles at that time,” did what he could to protect the Jews who came under his power, but that wasn’t much given the magnitude of the forces which opposed him. In many towns, the Jews put aside their separatist instincts and allied themselves with the local Catholics in a pact of mutual defense against the bloodthirsty Cossacks. Sometimes that pact succeeded; sometimes it didn’t. When Chmielnicki’s Cossack hordes

arrived at the gates of Lwow, he demanded that all the Jews within the city's walls be handed over to him as a condition of lifting the siege. The Poles refused, and many Jewish lives were saved as a result. According to the Jewish historian Henryk Grynberg: "the Polish armies, who were at war with [the Cossacks] were the sole defenders of the Jews." Chmielnicki's animus was directed equally against the Catholic Church and the Jews. When he was sober enough to dictate the conditions of peace after an attack, those conditions invariably demanded the expulsion of both the Catholic Church and the Jews from the provinces controlled by the Cossacks.

Poland's neighbors exploited the situation to their own advantage, setting in motion a chain of events which would eventually lead to the partition of Poland at the end of the 18th century. Muscovy, Prussia, Sweden, Brandenburg and the Ottoman empire all began nibbling away at pieces of territory which Poland was now too weak to defend. In addition to losing territory, Poland lost 200,000 inhabitants, half of whom were Jews. The Uniates of the Ukraine were forcibly converted to Orthodoxy, diminishing the Catholic and Polish influence on the southern flank of Lithuania, which had converted to Catholicism largely as a result of Polish influence.

As some indication of the hold which the Kaballah exercised over the mind of Polish Jews, the Chmielnicki pogroms, occurring in what was supposed to be the Messianic year of redemption, only strengthened the faith of those Jews who felt that messianic deliverance, ushered in perhaps by catastrophe, was closer than ever. The idea that the Messiah would hear and answer the prayers of his people in time of need became transmuted into a belief that dire need was a sign that the Messiah's arrival was imminent. The alembic which enabled

this religious alchemy was Kabbalah, the very thing which had instilled the messianic expectation in the first place.

Scholem disagrees with those who see the Chmielnicki uprisings as the cause of the Messianic fever which swept European Jewry during the middle of the 17th century. "If the massacres of 1648 were in any sense its principal cause," Scholem argues, "why did the messiah not arise within Polish Jewry?" The source of messianic fervor, according to Scholem, was "none other than Lurianic kabbalism, that is that form of Kabbalah which had developed at Safed, in Galilee, during the sixteenth century and which dominated Jewish religiosity in the seventeenth century." According to the Kaballah, catastrophe and utopianism go hand in hand. The presence of a catastrophe like the Chmielnicki massacres and the ensuing predations of the Swedish army meant, therefore, that redemption was at hand.

Lurianism and Revolution

Lurianic Kaballah not only prepared the way for the Chmielnicki catastrophe, it was also the result of the other great catastrophe of Jewish life at the time, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Isaac Luria Ashkenazi was born in 1534. By the time of his death in Safed in Palestine in 1572, he had gathered around him a group of disciples who were bent on spreading his explanation of Jewish exile, of recent catastrophes like the expulsion from Spain and how these events fit into the plan of divine redemption. In order to do this Luria had recourse to the Gnostic mythology which had been circulating in the Mediterranean world since the time of the first heresies of the Christian era. God or En-Sof had created bowls to contain the light of his understanding. The bowls, however, proved incapable of containing that light and broke scattering the light

throughout creation where it remained imprisoned in matter. The purpose of man's existence on earth became, as a result, *tiqqun* or healing, or restoring the lights to their original place in the universe before the breaking of the vessels had released the forces of sin and evil into the world. After the fall of Adam and Eve, each Jew had as his purpose in life the great process of re-integrating the sparks into their original place in the universe. The Diaspora of the Jews was now readily explainable. They had been dispersed over the face of the earth so as to be better able to discover the holy sparks, extract them from the matter they had become enmired in, and then return them to their rightful place in the universe. When this was accomplished, the Messiah could come, and redemption would be complete. Redemption, according to the Lurianic doctrine, was equally bound up with man's efforts and the process of history, a combination which was incorporated, via Hegel, into Karl Marx's revolutionary theory three hundred years later. The realm of *gelippah*, where the sparks are held in bondage, is a distinctly political realm, which is "represented on the terrestrial and historical plane by tyranny and oppression." The role of the Jew is to bring about redemption, which is not something that descends suddenly, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" from on high but rather appears as the logical and necessary fruition of Jewish history. Israel's labors of *tiqqun* are, by definition, of a messianic character. Final redemption is therefore no longer dissociated from the historical process that preceded it: "The redemption of Israel takes place by degrees, one purifying after another, one refining after another." The messianic king, far from bringing about the *tiqqun*, is himself brought about by it: he appears after the *tiqqun* has been achieved. The cosmic redemption of the raising of the sparks merges with the national redemption of Israel, and the symbol of the "ingathering of the exiles" comprises both.

The political implications of the Lurianic Kaballah seem clear enough. The Messiah must now wait upon man's efforts. He can only come once the process of *tiqqun* or purification and healing has been accomplished by man, i.e., by the Jews here on earth, who act as the vanguard of redemption much as the communist party at a later date would function as the vanguard of the proletariat. Without *tiqqun*, "it is impossible that the messianic king come." From here it is but a short leap of thought to the conclusion that Israel had become its own Messiah, or as Scholem says, "By transferring to Israel, the historical nation, much of the redemptive task formerly considered as the messiah's, many of his distinctive personal traits, as drawn in apocalyptic literature, were now obliterated."

Horowitz sees much the same political meaning emanating from the Lurianic revision of the meaning of exile. Once the meaning of exile had been transformed by its incorporation into the Gnostic creed of Luria's Kaballah, "redemption is no longer a divine release from the punishment of exile, but a humanly inspired transformation of creation itself." What is true of Israel's exile is a fortiori true of mankind's exile in the *qelippoth* or husks of matter. Luria's essentially Gnostic thought projects evil away from the heart of man into structures outside of himself, which is to say, political structures, which can be changed by human effort. Now instead of evil emanating from the heart, evil emanates from evil things in an evil universe, which is begging to be changed by those who know its secrets, i.e., the kabbalists. "Practical" Kaballah, according to Scholem, "is synonymous with magic." Some of Luria's followers felt that they could "force the end" by an act of "practical Kabbalah," which is to say by invoking holy names and Kabbalistic formulae." Since the sparks have been "tricked" into being enmired in matter, it might even be able to trick them out again by the use of what Hyim Vital termed "holy fraud." Like the concept of insincere conversion,

the concept of “holy fraud” would find its most immediate embodiment in the apostate Messiah Sabbetai Zevi, but it would perdure long after Seviâ€™s demise in a tendency toward subversion which would find expression in Jewish revolutionary activity in the Pale of the Settlement in Russia in the 19th century and elsewhere. The kabbalists will lead the world to redemption through magic (or applied science and technology) and trickery but not by leading good lives while waiting patiently for the redeemer to come, because “in the Gnostic view, the evil that men do emanates not from their own flawed natures, but is the result of a flaw in the cosmos they inhabit, which they can repair.” As a result of the Gnostic transformation of Jewish thought that Luria accomplished, “Man” becomes “his own redeemer” (Horowitz, p. 131). Exile of the sort suffered by Jews for over a millennium and most recently in exile from Spain is, according to Luria,

“no longer a punishment, but a mission; no longer a reflection of who we are, but a mark of our destiny to become agents of salvation. In this Gnostic vision, Israel is dispersed among the nations in order that the light of the whole world may be liberated. In the words of the Kabbalist Hayim Vital: “This is the secret why Israel is fated to be enslaved by all the Gentiles of the world: In order that it may uplift those sparks of the Divine Light which have also fallen among them... . And therefore it was necessary that Israel should be scattered to the four winds in order to lift everything up.” The Israelites are the first revolutionary internationalists.”

The Lurianic Kaballah was a reaction to the Inquisition. By the time of the Chmielnicki massacres, the other great catastrophe for Jews at the dawn of the modern era, it had spread to all parts of the Diaspora. “Wherever Lurianism came,” Scholem writes, “it produced messianic tension.” It produced expectation of redemption. But now,

as Scholem points out, “redemption meant a revolution in history.” Since Lurianism created the Messianic fervor of the mid-16th century, it is not an exaggeration to say that it created the revolutionary mindset which characterized the modern world as well. The modern world emerged when medieval Judaism, having fostered northern Europe’s rebellion against Rome, cracked open and fell apart itself when Lurianism found its fulfillment in Sabbetai Zevi, the false Messiah. Jewish Gnostic messianism, with the help of English puritan revolutionaries, was released from the ghetto into the nascent modern world, the world which succeeded the medieval world and was its antithesis. The Messianic age of the mid-17th century “was an age characterized by rebellion against the Catholic Church and the order which the Church had imposed on Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire. A millenium of Catholic culture was threatened by the resurgence of an old idea.”

The old idea was the notion that the millennium meant the restoration of the “terrene Kingdome of the Jewes,” the idea which had been condemned, but not destroyed, by the Council of Ephesus in 431. The new name for that old idea was revolution. When the ghetto was cracked open, but not destroyed, by the subsequent blows inflicted on it “by the Inquisition, the Chmielnicki pogroms, and, most devastating of all, the disillusionment which followed on the heels of the False Messiah’s conversion to Islam” the concept of revolution escaped through those cracks in the ghetto walls into European culture at large, where it was implemented at first by Judiaizers like the English Puritans and finally by the revolutionary Jew in propria persona, at the helm of his own political movement to produce via socialism, Marxism, Zionism, sexual liberation, or neoconservatism “the terrene Kingdome of the Jewes” or heaven on earth.

The most immediate consequence of the Chmielnicki uprising was a massive exodus from the Jewish paradise in the east. Penniless Jewish refugees began streaming west. It was at this moment that the legend of the wandering Jew was born. A race whose scriptures begins with a description of paradise and whose formative moment was escape from bondage in Egypt could not get the idea of escape into another paradise out of its head, and so having heard stories of how the displaced Sephardim were now prospering, their impoverished Ashkenazic cousins began streaming toward places like Hamburg, but more importantly, toward Amsterdam, which by the mid-17th century had achieved the reputation of being the Dutch Jerusalem. Amsterdam, as a result, became a crucial staging area for the ongoing experimentation in revolution which was the modern world. With the two main branches of Judaism converging there in a land recently ripped by force from the Spanish empire by the Demi-Jews known as Dutch Calvinists and their English fellow travelers, the Pilgrims and the Traskites, a new *modus vivendi* was inevitable. It was the revolutionary idea, promoted by Jews (most of whom were baptized Catholics) full of outrage at the Inquisition and by German-speaking Catholics full of revulsion at the order which the Church had imposed on European culture.

On January 30, 1649, eight months after Bogdan Chmielnicki had defeated the Polish army, while the slaughter of Jews was in full swing, the Puritan Demi-Jews presided over the execution of the English king. His death warrant was signed by 59 “saints”; Cromwell’s name was third on the list. One commentator claimed that the execution of the king was “an earth-shattering event.” He would have done better to call the regicide world-shattering instead, because it shattered a number of worlds, all of them medieval. Both the Jew and the Demi-Jew presided at the birth of a new age, an age seen by Jews and Demi-Jews alike, as the

dawn of redemption. That new age and the Jewish/Puritan alliance at its heart is with us still, driving American foreign policy, to give a recent example of its activity, into a war with Iraq. Like all of the wars it spawned, that new age would turn out to be every bit as bloody as the events which inaugurated it.

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