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Philosophy & Intellectual History



Between Cross and Crescent: Jewish Civilization from Mohammed to Spinoza

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Part 2

Course Guidebook



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Jewish Civilization from Mohammed to Spinoza
Part II

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Between Cross and Crescent: Jewish Civilization from Mohammed to Spinoza

Scope:

This course presents an overview of Jewish culture and society from its rabbinic foundations in late antiquity until the dawn of modernity in the 18th century. It focuses especially on the creative encounter between a rabbinic civilization shaped centuries earlier in the ancient Near East with the new social, economic, political, and intellectual environments of medieval Islam and Christendom. While casting its primary glance on the evolution of Jewish life over many centuries, it also affords a unique perspective from which to examine the three major Western religions as they interact with each other over time, especially their ability or inability to tolerate and even appreciate the “other”—as viewed from the vantage point of the Jewish minority.

After a brief overview of rabbinic civilization prior to the rise of Islam, the course focuses first on the Jewish community of Baghdad in the 9th and 10th centuries, a period in which a multitude of sources, including a special collection known as the Cairo *genizah*, provides a rich profile of the politics, social, and intellectual life of the Jewish community both within the environs of the city and beyond. The Jewish leadership is introduced, as well as its communal institutions, its forces of dissent, and its ultimate decline. The towering figure of Saadia Gaon of the 10th century is the focus of this intricate social and cultural world. The course moves from Baghdad to Cordova in Spain, examining the political and cultural developments of what some historians have called the “Golden Age” of Spanish Jewry, based on the explosion of new poetic writing in Hebrew as well as philosophical and legal works, especially those of Moses Maimonides and Judah ha-Levi.

From the Muslim orbit, the course then considers the long relations between Judaism and Christianity, from the Christian 1st century until the Middle Ages. After setting out the larger context of Jewish settlement in northern Europe, and the economic and social conditions under which Jews carved out their existence, the rise of Christian hostility is delineated, leading to the Crusades and the new aggressiveness toward Jews and Judaism. A close look at the new Christian offensive against the Jewish (and other minorities) in the 13th century, leading to their decline and eventual expulsion, provides the backdrop to understand the causes of medieval anti-Semitism.

While the course gives due attention to the political, social, and economic forces shaping Jewish culture in this long period, it focuses especially on the intellectual and cultural history of Jews in the Muslim and Christian environments and the modes of cultural interchange between Jews and their host cultures. I am especially interested in the emergence of two, distinct intellectual developments uniquely situated in the medieval world: the rise of medieval Jewish philosophy, on the one hand, and the appearance of Jewish mysticism

and pietism as primary expressions of Jewish religiosity on the other. In incorporating both the history of Jewish thought and spirituality into this survey, I am obliged to be highly selective in the figures and movements I have chosen to highlight. But I do think that these choices convey accurately some of the salient features of Jewish civilization in its reconfiguration during the medieval period. The varieties of intellectual and cultural expression in Muslim and Christian lands, along with the social and political conditions under which Jews lived, allow one to see distinctly both the continuities and discontinuities of Jewish existence across the boundaries of these larger civilizations.

The last part of the course examines the decline of Jewish life in Christian Spain, leading to the expulsion of the entire Jewish population in 1492. It considers the new demographic, social, and cultural changes engendered by the Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation, the printing press, the discovery of the New World, and the changing economic and political context of early modern Europe. It follows the explosion of new mystical and messianic movements in the 16th and 17th centuries, the impact of the Inquisition and the emergence of the new *converso* community based on unique economic, ethnic, and religious affiliations, as well as the remarkable growth and stabilization of new Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. The course closes with the emergence of the unique Jewish community of Amsterdam in the age of Spinoza.

Spanning over 10 centuries, this survey provides a broad introduction to some of the leading Jewish communities, their political and economic structures, their social relations with Jews and non-Jews, and their cultural and intellectual achievements in the pre-modern world. By embedding Jewish history within the larger social and cultural spheres of the Islamic and Christian worlds, the course ultimately raises the perplexing question of whether each of the three religious civilizations can learn to tolerate each other in our own chaotic and dangerous world, allowing each to live creative and dignified lives in the light of the mixed record of their past encounters and interactions.

Lecture Thirteen

Patterns of Jewish Culture—Rabbinic Learning

Scope: The Crusades also provided a major impetus to the consolidation of Jewish culture in northern Europe. With the destruction of the Rhineland centers of rabbinic learning, Talmudic scholarship shifted geographically to northern France. Moreover, in an effort to preserve the rich legacy of Ashkenazic rabbinic culture, oral traditions were soon committed to writing. Rabbi Solomon Ben Isaac of Troyes (1040–1105) undertook the prodigious task of recording these interpretative traditions of northern European Jewry. His accomplishments included the writing of a commentary on the entire Hebrew Bible and a parallel one on almost the entire Babylonian Talmud. Both works were instant successes and became indispensable guides to the study of biblical and rabbinic literature.

Rashi also wrote legal *responsa*, pioneering for northern European Jewry an independent legal tradition which gave ample consideration to local custom. Moreover, he established with his own students an academy of rabbinic learning. Scholars of this school, of whom Rashi's grandson Rabbeinu Tam (ca. 1100–1171) was the most prominent, were called *ba'alei tosafot* (literally “masters of additions,” referring to their comments on the Talmud's text and on Rashi's commentary). By focusing on Rashi's commentary, which they discussed, refined, and even refuted, they introduced into Talmud study higher ranges of understanding and critical insight. Unlike Maimonides and his colleagues, they were less interested in codification of law or in the study of philosophy and the sciences. More like the canon lawyers of northern Europe, they shared a commitment to a scholastic methodology of questions and answers. In their relatively insulated cultural settings, they were stimulated more by their own indigenous traditions and revered texts than by the dynamic cultural universe that surrounded them.

Outline

- I. The Crusade of 1096 precipitated a momentous transformation in Jewish culture.
 - A. The rabbinic academies of Germany were forced to close, and the traditions of rabbinic study were put in jeopardy.
 1. Rabbinic learning thrived especially under Rabeinu Gershom Ben Judah (ca. 960–1028) in Mainz, one of the chief communities decimated in 1096.

2. R. Solomon Ben Isaac (1040–1105), known as Rashi, a student from northern France in Germany survived the catastrophe and vowed to open a rabbinic academy in his home town of Troyes in northern France.
- B.** Rashi's opening of his academy not only relocated Jewish learning but engendered a shift from oral to written transmission.
1. Rashi recorded the oral interpretive traditions of Ashkenazic learning and committed them to writing in the form of commentaries.
 2. He composed a commentary on the entire Hebrew Bible, offering a simple interpretation of his key words and concepts. The commentary, within a relatively short period of time, became the standard pedagogic text for Jewish students studying the Bible.
 3. Rashi's commentary was studied by Jews living within both Christian and Muslim worlds, testifying to the interconnectedness of Jews across diverse cultures. It was also studied assiduously by various Christian scholars in search of the simple meaning of the text.
 4. Rashi also composed a commentary on almost all of the Babylonian Talmud. It too became the standard pedagogic tool for understanding the complex arguments of the rabbis.
- C.** Rashi's school also left a decisive impact on the modes of rabbinic learning.
1. Rashi's students, many from his own family, known as the *ba'alei tosafot*, mastered Rashi's interpretive methods but delved deeply into the Talmudic text to expose more questions and more difficulties.
 2. The result of these students' efforts was an additional layer of commentary known as *tosafot*. These comments usually began by discussing Rashi's commentary, raising additional issues about his conclusions, and asking more profound questions about the arguments discussed.
- D.** Rashi and his followers also wrote rabbinical responsa—responses to legal queries.
1. The school of Rashi emphasized the role of local custom in determining Jewish law.
 2. Rashi's grandson, Rabbeinu Tam (1100–1171) was probably the most important of the *ba'alei tosafot*. His rabbinic expertise was such that his authority began to reach beyond the northern French community and was recognized in Germany as well.
 3. After religious persecution in the French city of Blois in 1171, Rabbeinu Tam was responsible for the wide distribution of a series

of advisory missives that called for the entire Jewish community to organize itself. Eventually, he was able to unify the disparate communities of the Rhine Valley and France into a larger entity called Ashkenazic Jewry.

- II. Rabbinic scholarship in northern Europe left a particular stamp on Jewish culture.
- A. Rashi and his disciples helped shape a cohesive Jewish culture in medieval Europe; its legacy transcended any particular region.
 - B. They wrote commentaries, edited written versions of their oral deliberations, but eschewed the writing of legal digests and codes.
 - C. They had little interest in philosophy and science, in contrast to their counterparts in Spain.
 - D. Although they preoccupied themselves with indigenous rabbinic texts and modes of interpretation, their activity is easily comparable to that of the Christian legal scholars of their day. Whether or not there was actual contact between these two elite groups, the mode of their intellectual activity represents a fascinating parallel development.
 - E. The impact of Rashi's commentaries and the Ashkenazic traditions was especially significant in Poland and Lithuania centuries later.

Essential Reading:

Ivan Marcus, "A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis: The Culture of Early Ashkenaz," in David Biale, ed. *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, pp. 449–516.

S. W. Baron, "Rashi and the Community of Troyes," in S. W. Baron, *Ancient and Medieval Jewish History*, pp. 268–283.

Supplementary Reading:

Kenneth Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe*, especially pp. 135–156.

Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does one explain the remarkable impact that Rashi had on his generation and those to come? How did a rabbi in the small community of Troyes transform the educational methods of Jewish society, rapidly crossing political and cultural borders in an age long before print?
2. Did Rashi and his disciples focus exclusively on rabbinic texts and traditions, as the conventional view would have it, or were they also engaged in a wider dialogue with their Christian neighbors, sometimes in overt and sometimes in disguised ways? What evidence do we have to suggest their openness to, and interactions with, the surrounding culture?

Lecture Fourteen

Patterns of Jewish Culture—Kabbalah

Scope: The kabbalah, the collective traditions of Jewish mystical contemplation of the divine, can be traced to antiquity. In the Islamic world, Jewish descriptions of mystical journeys to the divine realm were often expressed in the form of visions of the celestial chariot (called the merkavah), derived from the biblical book of Ezekiel, with depictions of an ascent through seven heavenly palaces of the divine king (called *hekhalot*). By the 12th century, kabbalistic circles and their writings had emerged in Provence and, by the 13th century, in Gerona in northern Spain, where an influential circle of Jewish scholars, including the celebrated Moses Nahmanides (1194–1270), produced an extensive literature of mystical speculation. The most significant kabbalistic writing, the *Sefer ha-Zohar* (*The Book of Splendor*), a mystical interpretation of the Pentateuch, the Song of Songs, and the book of Ruth, written in Aramaic, appeared in Spain by the end of the century. The *Sefer ha-Zohar* describes a divine realm of aspects of the divine mystery known as *sefirot*, 10 in number, who interact with each other and with the kabbalist whose relationship with them elevates his soul but also affects positively the divine realm and that of the entire cosmos.

The kabbalah's proliferation in the 13th century was, to a great extent, a negative reaction to the influence of rationalism and philosophy on the part of the Jewish community. Most kabbalists in Provence and Spain saw little value in reconciling Jewish and non-Jewish cultures or harmonizing Judaism with reason. Rather, they were intrigued with the most irrational, mysterious, impenetrable aspects of Jewish revelation. They believed that Judaism's esoteric traditions both preceded and were superior to all other human cultures. Judaism's mystery, its irreducibility, defined its unique spiritual vocation among the nations.

Outline

- I. The kabbalah and its enthusiasts assumed a prominent role in Jewish culture in Provence and in Spain by the 13th century.
 - A. This public appearance of kabbalistic activity followed on a long, if less visible, history of mystical speculation and fascination with magic, stemming back to biblical and Hellenistic times.
 1. Kabbalah can be understood as those traditions of Judaism focusing on mystical, esoteric, prophetic, and magical activities. Not every kabbalist was a mystic, if the latter is defined as one

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who achieves a total unity with the Divine, though some kabbalists were indeed mystics.

2. Although biblical prophecy is surely an activity analogous to that of later kabbalists, the history of kabbalah is usually traced from the early rabbinic period in *merkavah*, or throne mysticism, referring to the throne described in the book of Ezekiel, and to the visions of God sitting on it, which the mystic perceived.
3. Other treatises describe the seven heavenly places (the *hekhalot*) that the mystic passes through on his journey to God.
4. In Provence in the mid-12th century, a small group of kabbalists emerged, soon followed by others in Gerona in Spain, who publicly studied ancient mystical texts and created their own.

B. By the 13th century, Spain became the center of kabbalistic activity with the writing of the *Sefer ha-Zohar* in the circle of Moses de Leon (1240–1305), often called theosophical kabbalah, and with the prophetic writings of Abraham Abulafia (1240–after 1291), often called ecstatic kabbalah.

1. The *Sefer ha-Zohar* represents a mystical commentary or homily on the Pentateuch, the Song of Songs, and the Book of Ruth. It portrays metaphorically the divine world in 10 forces called *sefirot*, those aspects of God that human beings can know and with whom they can interact, as opposed to that unknown part of God called the *ein-sof*.
2. By connecting to the sefirotic world of the divine, the kabbalist contemplates the divine mysteries and also energizes the divine world through his fulfillment of the divine commandments.
3. The kabbalah of Abulafia focuses on the mystical contemplation of letters and their configurations, especially on the constituent letters of the divine name.
4. Rather than envisioning divine mysteries, the ecstatic kabbalist directs his energy to his soul, to transforming his state of consciousness in trying to create a unitive experience with God.

II. In recent years, the kabbalah has attracted the interest of many scholars and has had a significant impact on interpreting Jewish thought and spirituality from antiquity until modern times.

- A. Gershom Scholem was the most important scholar of the 20th century to reconstruct the entire history of kabbalah.
1. Scholem identified the manuscripts, principal authors, and ideas of the kabbalah.
 2. He saw kabbalah as a unique phenomenon within the Jewish experience rather than simply a Jewish version of a general history of mysticism.

3. He emphasized the esoteric aspects of Judaism in reaction to early scholars who had downplayed those aspects in favor of a more rationalist image of Judaism.
 4. His focus was an intellectual history of mystical ideas in Judaism, a bookish phenomenon rather than an experiential one.
- B.** In recent years, a younger generation of scholars, such as Moshe Idel, Yehudah Liebes, and Elliot Wolfsohn, have challenged many of Scholem's assumptions.
1. In focusing especially on ecstatic kabbalah, Idel and Wolfsohn have given more weight to the experiential side of kabbalah. They have also been more interested in comparing it with mystical experiences in other religious traditions.
 2. Both Idel and Liebes have challenged the dichotomy of Scholem between a legalistic rabbinic Judaism and a spiritual kabbalah. Both have stressed the mythic, mystical components in rabbinic Judaism from its inception.
 3. Idel has theorized that many of the later themes of medieval kabbalah were already present in oral form in earlier Judaism. Unlike philosophy, when kabbalah became public, it evoked little opposition or acrimony, because, as he argued, it rested on ancient traditions well embedded in normative Judaism.
- C.** Most scholars now agree that the kabbalah became a cultural force in the 13th century as a negative reaction to philosophy.
1. Maimonides's death and the controversy that followed it are relevant in understanding the emergence of these new schools of kabbalah.
 2. The kabbalists challenged the dominance of the rationalist school in Judaism. They claimed their esoteric traditions were the most authentic and would lead the worshipper to the spiritual heights of Judaism.
 3. Some kabbalists underscored the singularity of their vision and its incomparability with other religions and cultures, while resisting any encounter with the latter.
 4. Others were more open to the cultures with whom they interacted. Some were aware of mystical and philosophical currents of their day and were able to appropriate and integrate elements of the latter into their kabbalistic systems.

Essential Reading:

Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, especially pp. 1–39.

Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*.

Supplementary Reading:

Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*.

Yehudah Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How do mystics emerge within most religious traditions, and how did they emerge in Judaism? The rabbis had provided a meaningful structure of worship, study, and ritual action. So what was missing that the mystics provided?
2. How do you explain the debate between Scholem, the master architect of kabbalist scholarship, and his critics? What are the differences in their approaches? Can you speculate how each generation's reconstruction of the kabbalah is also a product of its own intellectual and cultural worlds?

Lecture Fifteen

Patterns of Jewish Culture—German Pietism

Scope: In Germany, roughly between 1150 and 1250, a small community of Jews introduced a unique social philosophy and set of religious practices that came to be known as German pietism (*Hasidut Ashkenaz*). This movement centered around one particular family, known as the Kalonymides, who had migrated from Italy and around one dominating figure called Judah he-Hasid (the pious) (d. 1217). Judah was the primary author of the classic text of this spiritual circle called *Sefer Hasidim* (*The Book of the Pious*). Maintaining no clear doctrinal unity, the pietists preached ascetism and renunciation of the material concerns of this world, striving for complete serenity of mind, humility, restraint, and social equality. They emphasized especially a higher religious demand, a heavenly decree that transcended the conventional demands of Jewish law. They formulated an elaborate system of penitence that they practiced assiduously. They viewed their self-appointed mission of “laying bare the will of God” with a sense of *noblesse oblige* and moral superiority.

It is difficult to establish the specific context of this pietistic awakening. Perhaps it grew out of a spiritualized reaction to the horror of the Crusade atrocities on the part of a community of survivors. Perhaps it was influenced by ascetic and pietistic tendencies within Christian society that were developing particularly among the Franciscans. Perhaps it constituted a negative and alienated response to the French school of *ba'alei ha-tosafot* on the part of a displaced German Jewish aristocracy disdainful of the French intellectual accomplishment and frustrated by their own efforts to regain the center stage of Ashkenazic Jewish culture. Whatever its precise background, German pietism left its imprint on Jewish culture in later ages, particularly in its colorful folklore and in its moral literature.

Outline

- I. A pietistic movement among German Jewish elites arose in the middle of the 12th century called *Hasidut Ashkenaz*.
 - A. The new pietism was the initiative of the Kalonymide family, specifically three leading figures of this family dynasty originating from Italy.
 1. Samuel the Pious, his son Judah, and Eliezer of Worms were the dominating forces behind this revival.

2. Judah played the leading role in harnessing the religious extremism of Samuel and transforming it into a respectable pietism of a more mainstream following.
 3. Judah was also responsible for composing *Sefer Hasidim*, the major tract of the pietists.
- B. Primarily a social philosophy, German pietism lacked a clear doctrinal unity.
1. Its emphasis was on the ascetic renunciation of worldly things, a complete serenity of mind, and the imposition of religious demands on believers that were greater than those of Jewish law itself.
 2. It preached humility, restraint, and self-abnegation, and especially stressed the practice of penitence.
 3. Besides its major text, a rich collection of homilies, stories, and parables of enormous interest to the folklorist and social historian, German pietism produced many other moralistic texts, including penitential guides.

II. Historians have proposed several explanations to account for the emergence of this movement.

- A. Their interpretations range from seeing it primarily as an internal development to considering it a Jewish version of a parallel Christian development.
1. Ivan Marcus traced the development of pietism from a personal philosophy to one appealing to a larger following by Judah's time, without offering a clear explanation of its origin, while Robert Bonfil emphasized its earlier Italian origins.
 2. Haim Soloveitchik saw the movement as a negative reaction to the ascendancy of dialectic among the French *ba'alei tosafot*. The pietists reacted negatively to the reduction of Torah to a purely intellectual experience and emphasized instead the spirituality and morality of Jewish practice.
 3. In Soloveitchik's understanding, the German pietists were a displaced aristocracy who had been overshadowed by the new intellectual elite and were seeking to regain their patrimony over Ashkenazic Jewry.
 4. Yitzhak Baer and, more recently, Talya Fishman have underscored the remarkable parallels between German pietism and Franciscan spirituality: their asceticism, their penitentials, and their identification with the poor.
 5. Baer has also stressed the pietists' negative view of the non-Jew and their connection to the martyrological ideal of *Kiddush ha-*

Shem, thus linking this movement with the values conveyed in the Crusade chronicles.

- B. While pietism was primarily located in Germany, its legacy transcended its local origins.
1. *Sefer Hasidim* was considered a rich source of moralistic homilies and social commentary and was published in several editions. Although unconnected directly with late Polish pietism, which bore the same name, its impact upon Eastern European Jewry was not insignificant.
 2. The phenomenon of German pietism, like several other aspects of Ashkenazic Jewish culture, suggests a greater awareness of Christian culture on the part of the Jewish minority than is commonly assumed and a creative response to what it saw and absorbed.

Essential Reading:

Ivan Marcus, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany*.

Haim Soloveitchik, "Three Themes in the *Sefer Hasidim*," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 1 (1976): 311–357.

Supplementary Reading:

Talya Fishman, "The Penitential System of Hasidei Ashkenaz and the Problem of Cultural Boundaries," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1999): 201–229.

Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 80–118.

Questions to Consider:

1. Does asceticism have roots in classical Judaism or is its emphasis in German pietism primarily a response to a specific cultural moment? Does the monkish ideal have any precedent in Judaism, or is it alien to its nature?
2. How does the historian determine whether a movement like pietism is a response to internal or external circumstances? Is Ivan Marcus perhaps correct that speculations about the origins of this movement cannot be demonstrated and remain only as speculations?

Lecture Sixteen

The Medieval Jewish-Christian Debate

Scope: The 12th and 13th centuries mark a reevaluation of and departure from previous official church policy regarding the Jews. The prevalent Augustinian tolerance was displaced by a more aggressive policy of vilifying Judaism and missionizing among Jews. A critical feature of the new Christian strategy was the public disputation, a staged spectacle in which Jews were forced to participate. The disputation was not an open debate between two equal partners but rather a demonstration of Christian superiority contrived in advance. In such a forced disputation held in Paris in 1239, Nicholas Donin, a recent convert, accused his former coreligionists of establishing an alien, secret tradition in their Talmudic literature with the express purpose of denigrating Christianity. The Talmud was the primary cause of their diabolical behavior, their perfidiousness, and their antipathy toward Christianity, so he claimed, and thus the Talmud was the ultimate cause of their “heresy.” The final outcome of this public denunciation of post-biblical literature was the incineration of Talmudic tomes in France.

In 1263 in Barcelona, another convert named Pablo Christiani (d. 1274) employed a different tactic in attempting to defeat his formidable Jewish opponent, the aforementioned Moses Nahmanides. He argued that rabbinic literature could be employed to demonstrate Christian truth. His method was essentially an extension of the method that Christian missionaries had used for centuries in “discovering” *testimonia* of their faith in biblical passages. Instead of eradicating all rabbinic literature, he claimed to discover “nuggets” of Christian truth among the dung heaps of rabbinic verbiage. Nahmanides ably sought to undermine the clever interpretations of rabbinic passages that Christiani selected to exploit. This Christian method was soon followed and embellished by other churchmen, most notably Raymond Martini (1220–1285) in his massive *Pugio Fidei* (*The Dagger of Faith*, ca. 1280). That both strategies—denigrating rabbinic literature while using it simultaneously to demonstrate Christian truth—directly contradicted each other proved to be no obstacle to these clerics. Both tactics could be utilized in the service of the Christian mission whether or not they were consistent with each other.

Outline

- I. By the late 12th and 13th centuries, Jews experienced a new aggressive assault on Judaism and the Jewish community throughout all sectors of Christian society.

- A. One of its most conspicuous manifestations was the spectacle of the so-called “public disputation.”
1. Prior to the 13th century, Jews and Christians had long written polemics against each other’s faith, some of them emanating from real private or public encounters.
 2. By the 12th century, the art of Jewish-Christian debate had become more sophisticated, with each party appealing to philosophical arguments as well as capitalizing on an intimate awareness of the other’s sacred texts.
 3. Public disputations, especially those staged in Paris in 1239–1240 and in Barcelona in 1263, brought the debate to an entirely new level as a grand spectacle of public ridicule and pressure on the Jewish participants and their communities.
 4. The debate was never an open discussion but rather a demonstration of supposed Christian intellectual superiority contrived in advance; the sole aim was Christian self-affirmation and Jewish defeat, leading to conversion.
- B. The Paris disputation focused on the perfidies of the Talmud and post-biblical Jewish literature.
1. Nicolas Donin, a former Jew with expertise in rabbinic literature, argued that the Talmud constituted a kind of heresy against the Christian faith.
 2. He identified numerous passages in rabbinic literature that blasphemed Jesus and Christianity.
 3. More significantly, he claimed that the Jewish substitution of the oral law (the Talmud) for the written law (the Old Testament) had vitiated the right of Jews to Christian protection under the terms articulated by Augustine.
 4. Donin showed a striking awareness that Judaism was no longer identical with biblical religion but, like Christianity, had evolved into a different religion grounded in rabbinic law and interpretation. It was this transformation that he labeled a willful heresy, not simply a case of Jewish blindness.
 5. The impact of the Paris disputation was the burning of Talmudic manuscripts throughout France and the emigration of a large number of French rabbis to the land of Israel.
- C. The Barcelona disputation employed a different strategy in citing rabbinic passages to demonstrate the veracity of Christianity.
1. The Barcelona debate was carefully staged between the Christian protagonist Pablo Christiani, a convert well versed in rabbinic literature, and his formidable Jewish opponent Moses Nahmanides.

2. Christiani attempted to demonstrate that the messiah had already come and that he was Jesus by employing obscure rabbinic passages that allegedly substantiated the Christian position.
3. Nahmanides attempted to respond to each and every passage by pointing out its ambiguity and its lack of authority in defining the position of the rabbis.
4. At one point, Nahmanides boldly maintained that Judaism rested on its legal utterances and not on its homiletic ones, which Christiani was exploiting for his own purposes. The rabbinic homilies called *aggadah* could not serve as the basis of determining normative Jewish belief.
5. The outcome of the Barcelona debate was unclear, according to the two protocols that documented the proceedings, a Hebrew and a Latin one. Nahmanides soon left Spain for the land of Israel, although his account of the disputation painted him as the clear winner.

II. The Paris and Barcelona debates left their imprints on future Jewish-Christian encounters.

- A. Both debates demonstrate how a greater intimacy with Judaism and its sacred writings need not lead to a greater appreciation or toleration of its existence.
- B. The Paris assault on the Talmud established a precedent for Talmud burnings, especially those that the papacy initiated in the 16th century.
- C. The tactics of Pablo Christiani were exploited even more in the writing of the *Pugio Fidei* (*The Dagger of Faith*) by Raymond Martini, a comprehensive inventory of rabbinic writing that Christians could utilize as “witness” of their true faith. Other Christian writers continued to use the same tactic, trying to extract Christian “nuggets” from the “dung heap” of rabbinic exegesis.
- D. Later Christian exploitation of kabbalistic passages to demonstrate Christian beliefs was an extension of Christiani’s method.
- E. Donin’s negation of the entire Talmud obviously contradicted Christiani’s selective use of its passages taken out of context. They articulated two different positions that co-existed among the Catholic leadership.

Essential Reading:

Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response*.

Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Semitism*.

Supplementary Reading:

Hyman Maccoby, ed. and trans., *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages*.

Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How could Donin label the creation of the Talmud by post-biblical Jews a willful heresy? In what way had it violated Christianity's understanding of itself and its relation to Judaism and the Jewish people?
2. Was Nahmanides accurate in arguing before Christiani that Jews only considered the law of Judaism binding, not the homilies of rabbis through the generations, who were only speaking for themselves? Was this formulation merely a debating tactic or a valid characterization of rabbinic literature and its authoritative teachings?

Lecture Seventeen

Understanding Medieval Anti-Semitism

Scope: Evidence of a steady decline in medieval Jewish life from the 12th century on can be detected from a variety of markers. They include the tightening of the legal status of all Jews defined by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II in 1236 as *servi camerae* (chamber serfs). In this same period, Jews were increasingly restricted from commercial activity and forced to lend money on interest. Jews thus uncomfortably assumed a distasteful but necessary occupation within medieval Europe. The image of the Jew as usurer represented only one dimension of a composite stereotype emerging with growing intensity within popular Christian literary and visual culture in which Jews were accused of the infamous blood libel, host desecration, well poisoning, and more. New discriminatory legislation regarding Jewish usury, or regarding their special, identifiable clothing, enhanced a growing alienation of Jews from European society, leading ultimately to their expulsion from most of western Europe.

Historians have offered a variety of explanations for this severe decline. Attributing it merely to church doctrines toward the Jews does not sufficiently explain the particular deterioration evident only in this later period. A more promising explanation can be located in the actual changes European society was undergoing in the 12th and 13th centuries. The Crusades and their destructiveness were symptomatic of a deeper anxiety that plagued European culture, a fear of the impotence of Christian civilization, of Muslim domination from without, and of heresy and inner dissolution from within. Fear of the Jews should be seen in relation to a growing intolerance of nonconformity in general. It should be linked to increasing urbanization and social stratification of medieval society, to an increasingly more complex social and political order, and a more differentiated economic one. The emergence of town life and commercial guilds, which excluded Jews, the strengthening of central government, which exploited them for its own purposes, and the shrinking of economic resources over all sectors of society might account for anti-Jewish antagonism as well. In short, the new violence against Jews represents a sensitive barometer of wider and deeper social, economic, and political strains affecting all levels of Christian society by the end of the Middle Ages.

Outline

- I. The public disputation was only one manifestation of a radical change in the status of Jews in European society by the 13th century.

A. There are several indications of a severe decline in both the economic and social life of Jews.

1. The legal definition of the Jews as *servi camerae* universally defined their subservient status in Christian countries.
2. Their relative economic freedom in the early Middle Ages, especially to own land, was now eliminated and an increasing number of Jews were forced to lend money on interest. This in turn made them an even great target of Christian hostility.
3. The fourth Lateran council obliged them to wear identifiable marks on their clothing and made them more conspicuous in the public arena.

B. In the popular consciousness, a negative image of the Jew powerfully emerged in poetry, drama, and in art.

1. In the 13th century, Jews were first accused of the infamous blood libel, using the blood of Christian children to bake unleavened bread on Passover.
2. They were accused of host desecration, utilizing the wafer of the Eucharist for their own diabolical schemes, and of image desecration, mutilating images of Christ.
3. They were blamed for poisoning wells, especially at times of horrendous plagues and famines.
4. Composite images of Jews as agents of the devil, practitioners of black magic, usurious exploiters of society, and plotters of society's doom were widely disseminated, especially through iconography.

C. The ultimate result of this new estrangement of Jews was their expulsion from most of western Europe.

1. In the 13th and 14th centuries, Jews were expelled first from England and then from France on several occasions.
2. By the 15th century, they were removed from many German cities, from Spain, and from Portugal. By 1500, few Jews lived in western Europe, other than in parts of Italy, southern France, and some areas of Germany.

Historians have offered several explanations for this severe decline in Jewish life.

A. The notion that Christian theology and the church are the root causes is inadequate as an explanation of so highly complex a phenomenon.

1. The church had interacted with Jews for centuries before and had shown a relative level of tolerance toward them. In the Middle Ages, Jews often turned to the papacy for protection and legal support.

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2. The historian must distinguish between basic Christian beliefs and the use to which these beliefs were put by specific individuals in specific circumstances.
 3. Christian theology did offer a standing incitation to maltreatment and hostility, but it was not always acted upon. The doctrines remained the same but the hostility did not.
 4. With increased ecclesiastical involvement in secular affairs, and secular rulers purporting to speak in the name of Christianity, the categories of secular and religious became blurred. Who actually spoke on behalf of the church and Christian values in late medieval society?
- B. There is, accordingly, a need to offer a more nuanced explanation of hostility toward Jews in this era.
1. Jewish decline coincided with the rise and empowerment of royal authority. The monarchy of England buttressed its political and economic power by expelling its Jews, and its example was followed elsewhere.
 2. The growing power of municipal and commercial organizations easily excluded Jews.
 3. The growing irrational and conspiratorial fears related to Christian doubt and impotence, the failure of the Crusades, and the growing threat of Islam by the 15th century, all created an environment of fear and hate among many beleaguered minorities among which the Jews were conspicuous. Christianity became “a persecuting society,” as several historians have demonstrated.
 4. Economic and social instability and decline, including a severe economic contraction, also contributed to anti-Jewish prejudice.
 5. The roles of specific subgroups within the church, such as those played by Dominican and Franciscan friars, and the conspicuous presence of former Jews, who vilified their former co-religionists were also contributing factors.
 6. In sum, the historian trying to understand the emergence of aggressive behavior toward Judaism and Jews in the late Middle Ages must consider a variety of social, political, economic, intellectual, and psychological factors.

Essential Reading:

Marc Saperstein, *Moments of Crisis in Jewish-Christian Relations*, pp. 14–25.

Gavin Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Anti-Semitism*.

Supplementary Reading:

David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*.

Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How was it possible for medieval Jews to view the papacy as a relatively fair protector of its interests and to seek out its protection in moments of crisis? What can this teach us about understanding the relationship between Christian theology and anti-Semitism?
2. How did a Christian persecuting society emerge in the late Middle Ages, one which lashed out at alleged heretics, homosexuals, and Jews? What can intense aggression toward the Jews teach us about the nature of Christian society and culture in any specific moment in history?

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Scope

Lecture Eighteen

Notes on the Medieval Jewish Family

Please be advised that parts of this lecture contain some explicit discussion of sexual matters and may be unsuitable for children.

Scope: One of the most unusual features of the Crusade chronicles is their depiction of the prominence of female martyrs, memorialized as paragons of purity and virtue. They offer only one indication of a relatively neglected area of the history of medieval Jewish culture: the study of Jewish women and their families both in relation to male Jews and to non-Jewish women. In recent years, scholarship has focused more seriously and more consistently on gender, the place of women in medieval Jewish society, and the nature of family life. The results are already dramatic. In the Islamic world, thanks to a rich repository of sources in the Cairo *genizah*, Jewish women appear frequently as merchants, primary bread earners, and even conspicuous in the public sphere. In northern Europe, the source material for constructing the lives of women and families is less available. Nevertheless, much can be gleaned from rabbinical legal and homiletic works, especially rabbinic responsa. Although the medieval Jewish family was patriarchal, and smaller than its early modern counterpart, Jewish women are occasionally prominent in the sources, usually marrying young, managing households. On rare occasions, such as the case of the well-known Dulcea of Worms, wife of a prominent rabbi, they were highly educated as well. In some rare moments, Jewish women were aware of and even communicated with non-Jewish women outside their own communities.

Issues of family dynamics, attitudes toward sexuality and sexual behavior, and a faint sense of women's spirituality have also been recently studied in this and later periods. The potential of these new directions of research is illustrated by two textual examples: (1) an ethical will written by an Ashkenazic Jew in Mainz from the middle of the 14th century, which lays out his hopes and expectations for his sons and daughters toward him and toward each other; and (2) part of a commentary written by a 13th-century Provençal Jew offering a remarkable comparison between the sexual behavior of Christian men and women and their Jewish counterparts as perceived by the author.

Outline

- I. This lecture attempts to make some preliminary observations about the study of Jewish women and families in medieval Europe.
 - A. The field has recently made great strides stimulated by the study of gender and the medieval family in general, and pursued by a small group of researchers informed by these studies and equipped to read rabbinic sources.
 - B. Individual women, such as the educated and socially concerned Dulcea of Worms, are occasionally visible in rabbinic sources in Ashkenaz.
 - C. In the Islamic orbit, the *genizah* material has afforded scholars a rich picture of families, independent mothers running households, sometimes on their own, and women active in business and trade.
 - D. Women are conspicuous in the Crusade chronicles as martyrs, even acting more boldly and decisively than their husbands in slaughtering their families.
 - E. Women's lives have recently been studied in regard to laws of menstruation and laws and practices pertaining to feminine roles in the family.
 - F. Women and families have also been meaningfully compared with their counterparts in Christian and Muslim societies.
 - G. The study of Jewish women has offered new avenues for exploring the interactions between Jews and non-Jews, for example, with respect to Christian wet nurses and servants who frequented Jewish households.
 - H. Ceremonies such as circumcision, the initiation ceremony for beginning students, as well as ceremonies surrounding death have been studied to demonstrate the ways in which they emerge in a kind of silent conversation with similar ceremonies in the majority culture.
 - I. The theme of gender and the appearance of female images in Jewish thought as male constructions of human sexuality, especially in the kabbalah, have interested other scholars.
 - J. The study of Jewish legal and moralistic sources has yielded considerable data on attitudes to sexual behavior, procreation, and the dynamics of human relationships in and out of marriage.
- II. We look at two rich illustrations of the kind of sources available for understanding the Ashkenazic family in the Middle Ages.
 - A. The first example is the ethical will of an Eliezer Ben Samuel of Mainz who died in 1357.
 1. Eliezer's will, left to his children and grandchildren as a private document, presents an idealized picture of how he perceived his

family, the behavior of his sons and daughters, and his hopes for their future.

2. The will is unique in that it was composed by a non-intellectual, a simple Jew with the means to have such a document written. It was also written several years after the Black Death and during the severe decline of Jewish life in Mainz.
 3. The will describes the author's ethical concerns, his support of study and the synagogue, his worry about the modesty of his daughters, his desire to limit their leisure activities such as gambling, his concern that they find Jewish communities to live in, and his preoccupation with cleanliness of body and mouth, even until the day of his death.
- B.** The second example is a homiletic commentary written by an obscure author named Isaac Ben Yedidah from 13th-century Provence.
1. The passage compares the advantages of a Jewish circumcised man over his uncircumcised Christian counterpart in performing the sexual act quickly and efficiently.
 2. The description assumes a certain stereotype of a Christian man as a sexual giant, whereas the Jew is presented as an ineffectual lover and indifferent to pleasing his woman.
 3. The text stands in sharp contrast to the conventional view of Christian celibacy and sexual abstinence as compared with a Jewish tradition that granted legitimacy to sexual pleasure.
 4. The passage has little regard for female sexual satisfaction, as the circumcised male reaches a climax as quickly as he can before meeting his partner's needs. Circumcision, in this author's estimation, limits the sexual encounter to procreation alone and might even restrict illicit sexual relationships based on pleasure alone.
 5. Reflecting the idiosyncratic perceptions and fantasies of one author alone, the text reveals the potential for finding open and unencumbered discussions of sexuality even in an obscure medieval rabbinic text.

Essential Reading:

Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: The Medieval Jewish Experience*.

S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Genizah*, vol. 3, "The Family."

Supplementary Reading:

Ivan Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe*.

Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are the challenges for studying the history of Jewish women and families in pre-modern Europe? Can the researcher ever expect to hear the voices of women and see their presence in his/her sources?
2. What can the study of gender, women, and families contribute to the study of Jewish history in general? How is the Jewish past perceived differently when considered from these relatively neglected perspectives?

Lecture Nineteen

The Decline and Expulsion of Spanish Jewry

Scope: Of all the medieval Jewish communities living within the Christian orbit, Spanish Jewry was the oldest and the largest. Uniquely situated between the Muslim and Christian worlds, it was stimulated simultaneously by elements of both civilizations. Until the end of the 14th century, the Jewish community remained secure, despite Christian hostility toward Jews elsewhere in Europe. All of this changed in 1391. Aggravated by economic instability, class hatred, and religious fanaticism, anti-Jewish violence erupted through the major cities of Castille and Aragon. What was unique about 1391 was not the violence but the reaction of the victims. For the first time in Jewish history, thousands of Jews converted en masse to Christianity, either traumatized by the physical brutality, motivated by economic factors, or even finding spiritual solace in Christianity. After a period of relative stability, Christian hostility again surfaced in 1412 during a prolonged public disputation in the city of Tortosa. Thousands more willingly converted in its aftermath and throughout the 15th century.

The waves of conversion to Christianity eventually resulted in a new socioeconomic group called New Christians or *conversos* (the term *Marrano*, or swine, was often used in referring to this group). The apparent opportunities now afforded these neophytes were short-lived. Resentment toward their new status was soon accompanied by charges of backsliding, reverting to their original faith, and insincerely practicing Christianity. By the 1480s, the Inquisition was established to root out and punish these alleged “heretics” to the Christian faith. Historians have long debated the complex issues of determining whether such conversions were voluntary or made under duress, and whether the Inquisition was motivated purely by religious factors or was rather driven by economic or political concerns.

In March 1492, the king and queen of a united Spanish monarchy signed an edict expelling its Jews, ostensibly to prevent them from contaminating the Christian faith through their ongoing contacts with the *conversos*. The expulsion of the Jews represented more than an isolated national tragedy. It represented the culmination of Jewish expulsions from Christian lands in western Europe, signaling the retreat of the Jewish presence from most of the European continent. From the vantage point of contemporary Jews, this painful departure marked a low point in the history of their people.

Outline

- I. The decline of Hispanic Jewry represented a major retreat from the promise of co-existence that Spain had once offered members of all three western faith communities.
 - A. The deterioration of Jewish-Christian relations was gradual and came after other Jewish communities in northern Europe had already been expelled.
 1. By the end of the 14th century, economic instability, class hatred, and religious fanaticism unleashed a major pogrom in 1391 against Jews living in Castille and Aragon.
 2. The year 1391 was unique, not in the ferocity of the attacks, but in the unprecedented response of the victims: large numbers chose to accept the baptismal font and convert to Christianity.
 3. Jews were motivated to convert for a variety of reasons including fear of persecution, economic pressure, and even for religious reasons.
 4. In 1412–1414, another public disputation took place in the city of Tortosa. Despite the valiant efforts of Jewish spokesmen to defend the integrity of Judaism, the humiliating spectacle encouraged even more to convert.
 5. By the middle of the 15th century, almost a third of Spanish Jewry had converted, creating a *converso* or new Christian community that generally lived alongside the Jewish one.
 6. These *conversos*, also called derogatorily *Marranos* (swine), were accused by church authorities of backsliding, practicing Judaism in secret, and practicing their new religion insincerely. An inquisition was eventually established to root out the alleged *converso* heresy and to punish those whose conversion had not been authentic.
 - B. Historians have long debated whether these conversions were forced or voluntary, what reasons prompted the conversions, and whether converts continued to practice Judaism secretly or lived fully as Christians.
 1. Historians like Yitzhak Baer and Cecil Roth took the Inquisition at its word, insisting that the *conversos* were in fact crypto-Jews who remained loyal to their faith even under the challenging conditions that their forced conversion had created.
 2. Ben Zion Netanyahu argued that the Inquisition was primarily motivated by political and economic considerations, not religious ones. Its charges were generally false; most of the *conversos* were sincere Christians; and the Inquisition was an ideological tool to undermine a successful economic group in Spain.
 3. Most historians, while cautious about the use of inquisitional testimonies, do not dismiss meticulous evidence out of hand. Marranos and their fate have been linked with *Moriscos* (Muslims

forced to convert to Christianity) who have been increasingly studied comparatively as part of a broader historical phenomenon.

- II. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain was a major turning point in Jewish history.
- A. The expulsion presented the culmination of Jewish expulsions from western Europe, closing a chapter of Jewish civilization in medieval Europe.
 - B. The edict of expulsion ostensibly removed the Jews in order to accelerate the integration of the *conversos*, who indeed did become a less conspicuous target of the Spanish Inquisition after 1492.
 - C. The expulsion probably involved some 100,000 to 150,000 Jews, many of whom immigrated to Portugal where they were forcibly converted in 1497. Others traveled to Italy and to the Ottoman Empire, where they were openly welcomed and played a major role in the resurgence of Jewish life in these regions.
 - D. For the generation of exiles, the expulsion appeared to be a low point in Jewish history, signaling the imminent coming of the Jewish messiah. This reaction was clearly articulated by Isaac Abrabanel (1437–1508), Spanish Jewry’s most famous thinker and political leader.
 - E. In the course of the 16th century, several Jewish and *converso* writers, especially Samuel Usque (ca. 1530–ca. 1596) and Solomon Ibn Verga (late 15th – early 16th century), composed dialogical histories in which they attempted to understand the deeper meaning of the expulsion from the perspective of the Jewish experience, past, present, and future.

Essential Reading:

Haim Beinart, “The Expulsion from Spain: Causes and Results,” in Haim Beinart, ed., *Moreshet Sepharad: The Sephardic Legacy*, vol. 2, pp. 11–41.

Moshe Idel, “Religion, Thought, and Attitudes: The Impact of the Expulsion upon the Jews, in Elie Kedourie, ed., *Spain and the Jews: The Sephardi Experience 1492 and After*, pp. 123–139.

Supplementary Reading:

Benjamin Gampel, “A Letter to a Wayward Teacher: The Transformation of Sephardic Culture in Christian Iberia,” in David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, pp. 389–447.

Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols.

Questions to Consider:

1. The most challenging question about the history of Hispanic Jewry is how the relatively stable relations among Jews, Muslims, and Christians, often

idealized by the word *convivencia*, ultimately deteriorated into outright hostility, persecution, and expulsion. What brought about this radical decline?

2. How do you assess the debate between historians over the true intentions of the Inquisition, the motivations of the converts, and the existence or non-existence of crypto or secret Judaism in the 15th century? Can inquisitorial dossiers yield a truthful picture of the victims and their real motivations?

Lecture Twenty

Italian Jewry in the Early Modern Period

Scope: By the end of the 15th century, as a result of the migrations of Jews from the Iberian peninsula and from western and central Europe, new Jewish communities emerged in Italy, in the Ottoman Empire, and in eastern Europe. These new communities were created in the context of significant social, political, and intellectual changes including the Renaissance and Reformation, the discovery of the New World, the knowledge explosion engendered by the printing press, religious wars, economic fluctuations, and more.

In the city-states of northern Italy, a small number of Jewish intellectuals were exposed to new currents of thought and literary expression associated with the Renaissance. One interesting example of the Jewish encounter with Renaissance humanism was that of Judah Messer Leon, a doctor and philosopher living in the second half of the 15th century, who composed and published a rhetorical handbook based on classical texts but who argued that the font and exemplar of the rhetorical art was the Hebrew Bible. The most significant interaction between Jewish culture and the Renaissance occurred in Florence in the circle of the illustrious Neo-Platonic philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494). Pico and his colleagues were drawn to the study of Hebrew sources, especially the kabbalah, as a means of spiritualizing their own religion and universalizing it with other cultures and religions. Pico's encounter with Jewish mysticism precipitated enormous interest in the study of Hebrew sources by Christians for generations to come. It also left its mark on contemporary Jewish thought as well, beginning with Pico's own Jewish interlocutors, especially Yohanan Alemanno (ca. 1435–1505), who like Pico, recast the kabbalah in a Neo-Platonic and a magical perspective.

By the late 16th century, the erection of the ghetto system throughout the Italian peninsula ushered in a new era of Jewish-Christian relations and a restructuring of Jewish cultural life. Despite the obvious segregation imposed by the new urban neighborhoods, the new settings paradoxically intensified interaction among Christians and Jews in Italy and among Jews in other communities throughout Europe.

Outline

- I. The emergence of small Jewish communities in northern and central Italy coincided with the Renaissance, Reformation, and the new technology of print.

A. By the end of the 15th century, some individual Jewish scholars in Italy encountered new currents of thought and literary expressions associated with Renaissance humanism.

1. A remarkable example of a Jewish response to the new humanist preoccupation with rhetoric was the publication of *Nofet Zufim* (*The Honeycomb's Flow*), written by Judah Messer Leon, a physician and philosopher living in the environs of Padua and Mantua around 1475.
2. Messer Leon, in addressing his own students of medicine, translated large sections of Latin rhetorical handbooks, but exclusively used biblical prophetic examples to illustrate the principles that he was teaching.
3. His innovation was to claim that Israel, not Greece or Rome, was the font of rhetoric, that the prophets were the greatest orators, and that when Jews integrated rhetoric into the curriculum of Jewish studies, they were reclaiming their own birthright.
4. Messer Leon was the first author to take full advantage of the new technology of print, publishing his book during his own lifetime.

B. The most significant encounter between Jewish thought and the Renaissance took place in the circle of the humanist and Neo-Platonic philosopher Pico della Mirandola.

1. Pico and his associates believed in the notion of ancient theology, that a single truth pervades all cultures, and that the role of the theologian is to discover that unity in ancient pagan and Jewish cultures and to connect it with a universalized Christianity.
2. Pico was interested in Hebrew studies, along with those in Greek and Latin, and he was especially fascinated by the kabbalah, as an esoteric lore, as an exegetical tool for comprehending arcane texts, and as a source of higher magical power.
3. Pico commissioned a former rabbi, who took the name of Flavius Mithridates, to translate an entire library of Hebrew works. Mithridates not only translated them, but slanted his translations in such a way as to bring out the correlations in the Jewish texts with paganism and Christianity for which Pico was looking.
4. Pico's most important Jewish teacher was Yohanan Alemanno, whom Pico asked to interpret the biblical Song of Songs, a favorite text of Pico's circle in Florence.
5. Alemanno and his colleagues were fascinated by many of the same issues as those of their Christian interlocutors such as prophecy, magic, and Neo-Platonism, and especially in finding cross-cultural correlations among all of them.
6. Alemanno left extensive Hebrew writings that recast the Jewish tradition in a magical and Neo-Platonic mold. He in turn left his imprint on the development of Jewish thought in Italy for several centuries.

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7. Pico's "Christian kabbalah" left its mark on a significant group of thinkers, scientists, and artists who found the kabbalah an inspiring resource for Christian culture and studied it with great enthusiasm. The publication of Hebrew books clearly enhanced Christian Hebraism in kabbalah and in other fields.
- II. By the second half of the 16th century, the Jewish communities underwent a social and cultural transformation through the erection of the ghetto system.
- A. By decree of Pope Paul IV, Jews were required to live in enclosed quarters in the large cities of Italy, ostensibly to minimize their "contamination" of Christians and to facilitate their conversion to Christianity.
 - B. The ghettoization of Italian Jewry was one of several restrictive activities, including the burning of the Talmud and the subsequent censorship of Hebrew books, which were part of a larger series of measures associated with the Counter-Reformation.
 - C. The emergence of the ghettos accelerated the concentration of Jews in large cities, often creating congested and squalid living conditions.
 - D. Ghettos did not spell the end of Jewish-Christian interactions. On the contrary, Jews living contiguous to Christians often interacted with them more frequently and more casually.
 - E. The Venetian ghetto, created as early as 1516, exemplified how ghetto conditions could generate a dynamic Jewish culture, especially galvanized by its highly successful printing presses, frequent collaborations between Jews and Christians, and by a large number of Jewish students of medicine from all over Europe who attended its regional university in Padua.

Essential Reading:

Cecil Roth, "Jewish Society in the Renaissance Environment," in Haim H. Ben-Sasson and Samuel Ettinger, eds., *Jewish Society Throughout the Ages*, pp. 239–250.

David Ruderman, "The Italian Renaissance and Jewish Thought," in Albert Rabil, Jr., ed., *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, vol. 1, pp. 382–433.

Supplementary Reading:

Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*.

David Ruderman, ed., *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*

Questions to Consider:

1. What did Pico and his colleagues find so attractive about Judaism, and why the kabbalah in particular? Was their interest in the kabbalah the same as that of Jews? What is the difference between Christian and Jewish kabbalah?
2. Looking at the historical record, were ghettos good or bad for Jews? What advantages did it afford them along with the obvious disadvantages? Did the architects of the ghetto succeed in their efforts to seal off Jews from Christians and to persuade them to convert?

Lecture Twenty-One

Kabbalah and Society in 16th-Century Safed

Scope: The Spanish emigration of 1492 infused new vitality into Jewish cultural and religious life in Ottoman lands. New centers of rabbinic and kabbalistic scholarship emerged in Salonika, Cairo, Constantinople, and other cities throughout the vast empire. The town of Safed in northern Galilee especially attracted large numbers of Jews, many of whom earned their living from the manufacture and trade of cloth. More important, the town drew leading scholars to its academies of learning, even eclipsing those in Jerusalem. Such luminaries as the great codifier Joseph Karo (1488–1575) and the kabbalist Moses Cordovero (1522–1570) both lived in Safed. The spiritual ambiance of the city was nourished by well-publicized midnight prayer vigils, public fasting and ablutions, and prayers recited at the graves of ancient sages.

Such was the religious and psychological climate that attracted Isaac Luria (1534–1572) to Safed in 1569, only three years before his premature death. Along with his colleague and disciple Hayyim Vital (1542–1620), he left an enormous impact on a generation of his co-religionists and beyond, responded directly to the spiritual needs of his community through a dramatic kabbalistic myth of creation, rupture, and ultimate repair and redemption of the individual soul, the nation, as well as the entire cosmos. Luria's system was understood fully by only a small coterie of his followers; but the general thrust of the cosmic mending process he called *tikkun* was later communicated to a larger following of disciples through popular moral literature and liturgy. It captured the experience of exile for every Jew and the singular vocation of the Jewish people to “gather divine sparks” to cleanse the entire world. Lurianic kabbalah represented a movement of mystical reform embedded in a vision of national and cosmic regeneration. The original myth of Luria was ultimately re-interpreted by a variety of Jewish and even Christian expositors when it eventually reached Italy and Europe. Nevertheless, the notion of mystical reform remained at its core.

Outline

- I. The large number of Spanish Jewish refugees who settled in the Ottoman Empire infused a new economic and cultural energy into the region.
 - A. Spanish Jews and their powerful cultural traditions overwhelmed those of other Jews indigenous to the area and soon left their mark on the shaping of a new Sephardic culture within an Islamic society.

1. Sephardic Jews settled in Constantinople, Salonika, Cairo, and Jerusalem, and other cities, transporting their institutions of Jewish communal life with them: the rabbinate, Jewish academies of learning, and elaborate social services to the needy.
 2. They also established a Hebrew press, long before the publication of books in Arabic, that published many rabbinic works and other works in Hebrew and Ladino, the Jewish-Spanish dialect of the refugees.
- B. The small town of Safed, in the Galilee region of Palestine, experienced a new vitality in the 16th century.
1. Safed was an important center for the production of cloth and an entrepot of trade throughout the region.
 2. It attracted Jewish luminaries like Moses Cordovero, the kabbalist and prolific writer, and Joseph Karo, author of the *Shulhan Arukh*, the code of law which, when combined with the notes of Moses Isserles, the Ashkenazic rabbi of Krakow, became the essential legal guide for all Jewish communities.
- II. Isaac Luria arrived in Safed only three years before his death, but, together with his colleague and disciple Hayyim Vital (1542–1620), left an enduring mark on the spiritual life of the community.
- A. Gershom Scholem’s masterful reconstruction of Luria’s kabbalistic system has linked his esoteric myth to the larger cultural concerns of his age.
1. Scholem explained how Luria began his myth with the creation of the world. It began when God diminished himself in order to open up a space to create the world.
 2. The spiritual blueprint of the world was created in the form of light shooting into a space that eventually congealed, revealing the figure of a primordial man. Either by necessity or accident, vessels holding this divine light suddenly shattered, creating a catastrophe for the order of divine creation.
 3. With “the breaking of the vessels,” the need arose to relocate the broken shards that held the divine sparks. Gathering divine sparks became the only means of restoring the divine order that had existed prior to the rupture of the breaking of the vessels.
 4. The myth of creation, its rupture, and its eventual repair—called *tikkun*—relates the story simultaneously of the cosmos itself, of the career of the Jewish people, and of every individual Jewish soul. It is the role of the Jewish people to “gather the sparks” and repair the world through their religious and mystical activities.
 5. For Scholem, Lurianic kabbalah captured the imagination of its generation, becoming the ultimate response to the tragedy of 1492 and its aftermath. Kabbalah, not philosophy, provided an enduring myth for Jews to find meaning in their new circumstances.

6. Scholem also argued that Lurianic kabbalah became the ideological foundation for Sabbatianism, the messianic movement surrounding Shabbetai Zevi of the next century, and provided the mythic framework to legitimate the movement even after its alleged messiah had converted to Islam.
- B. Scholem's reconstruction of Luria has been subject to criticism and refinement in recent years.
1. Moshe Idel has argued that Lurianic notions were not as novel as Scholem suggested, that they were less messianic than he had intimated, that they were less known throughout the world Jewish community than he imagined, and that they cannot offer a sufficient explanation in themselves for the emergence of Sabbatianism 100 years later.
 2. Ronit Meroz has reconstructed a somewhat different image of Hayyim Vital, making him less an appreciative disciple of Luria and more an independent thinker in his own right, with strong interests in Jewish magic.
 3. Idel has also studied the European reception of Lurianic kabbalah, especially in Italy, where its mythic and performative aspects were downplayed in favor of its interpretation as an esoteric philosophy, more in line with other occult and spiritual philosophies of the late Renaissance and Baroque eras. It was this version of Lurianic kabbalah that was eventually translated into Latin and reached a community of Christian students of Jewish mysticism.

Essential Reading:

Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 244–286.

Solomon Schechter, "Safed in the Sixteenth Century," in Judah Goldin, ed., *The Jewish Expression*, pp. 258–321 (also found in Solomon Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, pp. 231–296).

Supplementary Reading:

Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 126–182.

Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What was attractive about the Lurianic myth to Jews who lived in Luria's generation, to Christians who studied his work in Latin translation, and to Scholem and the culture of his times?
2. What was the importance of Safed in the 16th century that it attracted such a large population of merchants and mystics? How do you account for the

heroic image of Luria and the dissemination of his teachings in the 16th century and beyond, given the fact that he hardly wrote at all?

Lecture Twenty-Two

Shabbetai Zevi—The Mystical Messiah

Scope: Some 100 years after Luria's death, the Jewish community experienced an explosion of millenarian fervor focused on the frenzied behavior of a self-proclaimed messiah named Shabbetai Zevi (1626–1676). Born in Smyrna, he wandered through various cities in the Ottoman Empire before encountering his soon-to-be prophet and ideological spokesman Nathan of Gaza (1643–1680). His declaration that he was the messiah soon led to his incarceration by the authorities and his conversion to Islam. What was left for his ardent followers was to construct a theological interpretation of his strange behavior based on notions found in Lurianic kabbalah. They argued that his alleged sin was actually a holy act; that he had descended to the realm of evil to liberate the divine sparks; that the destruction of the Torah really implied its affirmation, the secret of which will be known to the entire world when the messiah publicly reveals himself.

Historians have attempted to explain the wide appeal of this nihilistic ideology, among both radical fringes like the Doenmeh of the Ottoman Empire, who themselves converted to Islam, and the Frankists, the supporters of Jacob Frank (1726–1791), who converted to Christianity in Poland, as well as to more moderate followers who espoused messianic aspirations while behaving within the norms of Jewish tradition. Some argue that Jewish suffering and despair were factors; others see the appeal of Lurianic kabbalah as the driving force of this messianic movement; still others have emphasized the powerful agency of the *convertos* living in the Ottoman world and beyond and their inclination to believe in a Jesus-like Jewish messianic figure, living, like them, with the secret of dual religious lives. By the next century, Sabbateanism, the ideology bearing Shabbetai's name, became a codeword for much of the heretical, deviant, and antinomian behavior within the Jewish community, offering a severe challenge to rabbinic authority and traditional norms of Jewish communal life.

Outline

- I. Shabbetai Zevi's messiahship and its bizarre aftermath in the 17th and 18th centuries precipitated a significant crisis in Jewish culture throughout Europe.
 - A. As in the case of Isaac Luria, Gershom Scholem has offered the most complete and compelling reconstruction of this affair.
 1. For Scholem, Shabbetai's life, his bizarre behavior, his wanderings—from his birthplace in Smyrna to Egypt, then to Gaza

where he met his prophet Nathan of Gaza, and finally to Jerusalem—all contributed to his mystical/messianic aura.

2. The crisis of his movement emerged when he chose to convert to Islam when questioned and imprisoned by Ottoman authorities.
 3. Scholem, while considering a variety of factors to explain Shabbetai's appeal to his following, argued that the dissemination of Lurianic kabbalah provided a meaningful ideological context to make sense of the messiah's behavior and to make credible, even as a Muslim, his messiahship.
 4. Luria's depiction of a world in captivity and the need to rescue the divine sparks provided the background to understand the Sabbatean notion of the holiness of sin. The messiah was actually entering the world of evil, wrestling with evil to extract the divine sparks leading to *tikkun*.
 5. Shabbetai's conversion simply signaled his descent into evil that would lead to ultimate good.
 6. Scholem elaborately showed how Shabbetai's followers consisted of moderates who continued to live within the norms of Judaism and extremists who followed the messiah into a state of sin.
 7. The Doenmeh eventually converted to Islam in imitation of their messiah, whereas Jacob Frank and his followers converted to Christianity in their efforts to break the yoke of Jewish norms. Both groups preached antinomianism and nihilism in openly breaking with rabbinic authority.
- B. Scholem's interpretation has also been challenged and refined by recent scholars of Sabbateanism.
1. Moshe Idel has raised questions about seeing Lurianic kabbalah as the primary explanation of Sabbateanism's success.
 2. Yehudah Liebes has stressed the spiritual and religious reformation within Sabbateanism over the earthly, political one.
 3. Yaakov Barnai and others have developed an insight mentioned by Scholem about the connection between Marranism and Sabbatianism. In Smyrna itself, *converso* traders were active, thus suggesting a close proximity between these two phenomena of the 17th century.
 4. Some of the foremost ideologues of the movement, such as Abraham Cardozo (1626–1706), were of *converso* origin and saw the messiah as a suffering servant and *anus* (forced one—*converso*) like themselves. Clearly their intense messianic interests attracted them to the movement.

- II. If one looks beyond the immediate context of either the Sabbateans or the *conversos*, it might be possible to speculate on a broader connection between Sabbateanism and an ever-wider phenomenon plaguing European society as a whole.

- A. By the 18th century, a series of communal crises broke out across Jewish communities in Europe, all in the name of the Sabbateans.
1. In the first decade of the century, Nehemiah Hayon (ca. 1655–ca. 1730), a disciple of Cardozo, publicly revealed the secret of God in a manner reminiscent of the Trinity. He was condemned as a Sabbatean.
 2. Later in the century, a fierce battle erupted between two powerful German rabbis: Jacob Emden (1697–1776) and Jonathan Eybeschutz (1690/95–1764). The latter was accused by the former of being a Sabbatean and revealing certain syncretistic proclivities with respect to Christianity.
 3. Moses Hayyim Luzzatto (1707–1746), a kabbalist in Padua, was called a Sabbatean because of his prophetic activities.
- B. Sabbatianism was part of a larger phenomenon of enthusiasm prevalent throughout 18th-century Europe.
1. Enthusiasts were defined as those who arrived at the truth by means of their own personal, prophetic, or rational capacities. Their autonomy took precedence over any normative body, religious or secular.
 2. The debates over Sabbateans by the 18th century had little to do with the messiahship of Shabbetai Zevi and more to do with a crisis of rabbinic authority within the Jewish community.
 3. The deviants were labeled Sabbatean by their anti-enthusiast opponents. The crisis of Judaism as triggered by Sabbateanism had its precise analogue in the larger Christian world and its struggle between various dissenters and the establishment they were challenging.
 4. The greatest enthusiast within the Jewish community of the 17th century was Benedict Spinoza. It is no coincidence that his revolt against authority coincided with that of the Sabbateans of all stripes.
 5. Scholem had seen the beginnings of Jewish modernity in the Sabbatean revolt against tradition and the rabbis. When connected with the converso phenomenon and with the wider revolts against traditional authority taking place in Europe, including Spinoza's well-known rational assault, Scholem's insight appears to still ring true.

Essential Reading:

Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 287–324.

Matt Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets*.

Supplementary Reading:

Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–76*.

Yehudah Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, pp. 93–114.

Questions to Consider:

1. Consider a possible analogy between Jesus's messiahship and that of Shabbatai Zevi. Although the content of their teaching was radically different, their movements both emerged from a paradox: either the Jewish messiah died on a cross, or he converted to Islam. In each case, the followers were faced with the immediate need to make sense out of this unexpected bizarre twist. Can you develop this further?
2. In what way were the Sabbateans the first modern Jews? If one accepts Scholem's assumption, does it force the historian to consider the beginnings of a modern consciousness long before the conventional dates of enlightenment and emancipation at the end of the 18th century? Does it make a difference to argue that a modern consciousness emerged not from a rational sensibility but from a mystical/messianic one?

Lecture Twenty-Three

The Rise of Eastern European Jewry

Scope: Jews began migrating to Poland in the 14th and 15th centuries. Laboring under few economic restrictions, they assumed diversified economic roles in the service of the Polish king and nobility, such as leasing land, taxing farms, trading, and manufacturing. Most important, they took advantage of the opportunity offered to them to establish their own autonomous governments. In its heyday in the early 17th century, a super-communal structure, known as the Council of Four Lands (Great Poland, Little Poland, Podolia-Galicia, and Volhynia) represented all the Jews of this wide area, collecting their taxes, representing their interests before governmental officials, as well as handling all internal communal issues.

The traditions of Ashkenazic rabbinical scholarship reached unsurpassed heights in this receptive political and social climate of Eastern Europe. Major academies of Jewish law were located in every major Jewish population center. Commentaries and codes, kabbalistic and ethical tracts, sermons and biblical commentary were all products of this cultural effervescence of Judaic learning. Despite their relative isolation from the centers of Western European culture, Eastern European Jews were stimulated by an active market of books published in Venice, Amsterdam, and the Ottoman Empire, and later in Poland itself, which opened them to the thinking and cultural interests of other communities. They also encountered Jewish travelers and migrants from outside of Poland, while some Eastern European Jews traveled and migrated to the south and the west. Despite a major setback in 1648, with the massacre of large numbers of Jews at the hands of the Cossacks, Eastern European Jewry became the largest Jewish community in early modern Europe by the end of the century.

Outline

- I. The emergence of a large, powerful, and autonomous Jewish community in Eastern Europe is surely a critical dimension of the transformation of early modern Jewry.
 - A. From the 13th century, Jews moved eastward from Germanic lands to settle in Poland and Lithuania.
 1. As early as 1264, Prince Boleslas Pius of Great Poland and Kalish granted privileges to Jews as “freemen attached to the treasury.”
 2. The Polish frontier lands offered hospitable conditions for Jewish immigrants who migrated in increasingly larger numbers by the 15th century.

3. In this agricultural country, Jews were not restricted to money lending but discovered other profitable occupations in trade, tax and revenue farming, and estate lease holding, especially as financial agents of the king.
 4. The royal government and large noble landowners welcomed the Jews, whereas the clergy and burghers looked more ambivalently at their coming. Jews lived both on land owned by the nobility and by the king.
- B. The most prominent feature of these new Jewish settlements was the creation of an elaborate network of local and regional organization.
1. Given the weak royal government and the many legal autonomous structures that were tolerated by it, the Jewish community and its leaders were given wide prerogatives as well.
 2. By the 16th century, the Council of Four Lands—Great Poland, Little Poland, Podolia-Galicia and Volynia—was established, creating an autonomous Jewish community throughout a vast territory, representing Jewish interests before the local and royal governments.
 3. In this system, rabbis and cantors were hired by the oligarchic council of wealthy Jews who controlled Jewish life and on whom they depended as well as on the secular authorities who oversaw these structures.
- C. From the 15th century, Jewish cultural and religious life flourished, especially in rabbinic study.
1. The academies of rabbinic learning were prominent in large centers such as Krakow from the late 15th century.
 2. In the 16th century, luminaries such as Moses Isserles (1520–1572) and Solomon Luria (1510–1573) dominated intellectual life in the area and attracted large numbers of students to their academies.
 3. Because of print, the relatively insulated rabbinic culture of Eastern Europe was soon invaded by books published in Italy and the Ottoman Empire, introducing titles and authors previously unknown and unstudied.
 4. Print also created a virtual transformation of an oral culture, where rabbinic insights were transmitted through teaching in the academies to a written/printed form. The printed Talmud and legal codes arrested the more fluid process that had previously been in place.
 5. Isserles himself was aware of the importance of the printed book when he committed his originally oral comments to writing and allowed them to be published in the Krakow edition of Joseph Karo's *Shulhan Arukh*, creating a law code that could be used by both Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews.

6. Under relatively optimum conditions, Jewish population growth was dramatic, exploding especially by the 17th and 18th centuries.
 7. Jews in Eastern Europe were never oblivious to their surroundings, and despite their high degree of autonomy, their emphasis on rabbinic learning, and their Yiddish speech, Jews shared with non-Jews a common Polish mentality of shared associations and experiences.
 8. What they lacked was what one historian has called “a beckoning bourgeoisie,” that is, unlike their counterparts in Italy, Amsterdam, and elsewhere, they were less attracted by the majority culture and less motivated to adopt its language and its culture.
- II.** By the middle of the 17th century, the Jewish community in Eastern Europe was victimized by a vicious pogrom and by economic decline.
- A. The Cossack uprising of 1648 severely damaged the Jewish community.
 - B. Led by Bogdan Chmielnicki, an insurgency against the Polish Catholic nobility and clergy on the part of Ukrainian Cossacks was directed against the Jews who were fully identified as leaseholders of the Poles.
 - C. Perhaps as many as 50,000 to 100,000 Jews were massacred or sold into slavery by the Cossacks and their Tartar allies.
 - D. Nevertheless, the Jewish community survived the catastrophe; its communal structure remained intact for another 100 years, and its numbers continued to grow. By the 18th century, it was the largest Jewish community in Europe, and it would remain so until the 20th century.

Essential Reading:

Moshe Rosman, “Innovative Tradition: Jewish Culture in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,” in David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, pp. 519–570.

Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity*.

Supplementary Reading:

Bernard Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland, 1100–1800*.

Edward Fram, *Ideals Face Reality: Jewish Law and Life in Poland, 1500–1655*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How did the largest Jewish community in the world emerge in Eastern Europe over only several centuries? What were the conditions that precipitated its remarkable growth and development?

2. In what ways did the seemingly insulated rabbinic culture of Poland-Lithuania interact with the larger cultural world of its immediate surroundings and with European society as a whole? How did new ideas and approaches infiltrate its seemingly sealed cultural boundaries? What was the impact of these new encounters on the formation of Jewish culture in this region?

Lecture Twenty-Four

The Sephardim of Amsterdam

Scope: When Portugal's Jewish community, mostly comprising exiles from Spain, was forcibly converted to Christianity in 1497, a new chapter in the history of the conversos was opened. While Spain's converso problem diminished after 1492, Portugal's problem became more acute throughout the 16th century. When Spain annexed Portugal in 1580, Portuguese *conversos*, fleeing the Lisbon Inquisition, returned to Spain, which soon proved as unwelcoming to them as it had been a century earlier. Converso refugees exited the Iberian peninsula in large numbers to southern France, Livorno, and Pisa, to Hamburg, and especially to Amsterdam by the end of the 16th century. Amsterdam had asserted its independence from Spain and was clearly in a favorable position to invite former victims of Spanish persecution to settle within its borders.

Amsterdam's open borders quickly provided a boon to the city's burgeoning capitalist economy. The former *conversos* were active in international trade, in manufacturing, in banking, and in printing. Commercial interchange was accompanied as well by intellectual and religious interactions with the Protestant majority. Highly educated, literate in Latin, Spanish, and Portuguese, the *conversos* chose to return to Judaism as adults, initiating a passage from one culture to another that involved considerable intellectual adjustment and emotional stress. For some converso leaders like Isaac Orobio de Castro (1617–1687), the transition to Judaism involved fully claiming his birthright as a Jew and becoming an effective spokesman for traditional Judaism. For Menasseh Ben Israel (1604–1657), it meant a fascination with millenarianism and working on behalf of Jewish resettlement in England. Other *conversos* in Amsterdam became ardent followers of Shabbetai Zevi, while a few others like Uriel de Castro (1585–1640) and Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677) deserted the Jewish community in search of their own autonomous ideals.

In looking back at our journey through some 1,000 years of Jewish history in Europe and the Middle East, in regions under Christian or Muslim domination, we have witnessed radical changes over time as well as some apparent continuities. One indicator of change is to compare how Saadia used reason to buttress Jewish faith at the beginning of our course, whereas Spinoza used it to undermine it at its end, surely a harbinger of the secular assault on faith in the modern era.

What do not appear to change so clearly are the high and low points of group interaction between Christians and Muslims and their Jewish minorities. What we learn from the historical record is that, at certain

times and places such as in medieval Spain, in Carolingian France, and within the Ottoman Empire, all three religious communities were capable of tolerating and even appreciating aspects of each other's cultures. At other times, such as that of the Crusades, and during the 13th and the 15th centuries, intolerance and open hostility ruled the day. The factors that explain co-existence, or the lack of it, are complex and cannot be reduced to simplistic determinations, something this course has tried to demonstrate. We should also not expect that history can offer us a blueprint on how we might learn to tolerate and appreciate the "other" in our own day. But what history might point to, in the end, is the possibility that all three religious communities are capable, as they were in the past, of co-existing with each other, of learning from each other, and even, at rare moments, of appreciating each other. It is with this precious hope that we conclude our course.

Outline

- I. The forced conversion of the newly arrived Jews in Portugal in 1497 initiated a new chapter in the history of the *conversos* in Portugal and beyond.
 - A. While the converso problem in Spain became less acute after the Jews had been expelled, the new conditions in Portugal clearly inflamed passions against this newly formed converso community.
 - B. *Conversos* were attacked in Lisbon as early as 1506; the Inquisition was established there by 1540.
 - C. When Portugal annexed Spain in 1580, many of the *conversos* migrated back to Spain in search of better economic opportunities and relief from religious persecution.
 - D. The new immigrants evoked a negative reaction within Spanish society, reviving its inquisitional activities against the *conversos*.
 - E. Whereas laws discriminating against *conversos* because of race existed as early as the middle of the 15th century, new statutes to preserve *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) and the attitudes that promoted them became prominent throughout the Iberian peninsula by the end of the 16th century.
 - F. Conversion was soon felt to be inadequate. Today's Christian was still recognizable as yesterday's Jew—an economic competitor in Christian façade.
 - G. The blood statutes were an attempt to restrict the *conversos* economically and socially and were the first legal manifestations of racial anti-Semitism prior to the modern era.
 - H. The ultimate result of this new level of hostility was the mass emigrations of *conversos* to Livorno and Pisa, to southern France, to

Hamburg, and especially to Amsterdam. Eventually, they also settled in London and in the New World.

- II. Amsterdam's Jewish community arose as a major commercial and cultural center at the same time as the golden age of the Dutch republic.
 - A. Former *conversos* returning to Judaism were welcomed by the nation that had just established its independence from Spain and was willing to accept its former citizens.
 - 1. The new Jewish immigrants found a welcoming environment in which to employ their significant economic skills as merchants, bankers, printers, and manufacturers.
 - 2. The *conversos* returning to Judaism were highly educated. Many held university degrees, and were fluent in Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin.
 - 3. Their transition from their Catholic to their Jewish selves was complex, painful, and even traumatic at times. Their expectations of their new Jewish identity were often different than the reality that they came to know in the newly organized Jewish community of Amsterdam.
 - 4. Some former *conversos* became zealots for their newly discovered faith. Men like Orobio de Castro defended Judaism from Protestant assaults and attempted to persuade other *conversos* to embrace the Jewish faith.
 - B. While the community was ostensibly traditional, there were many new and unusual elements in its composition.
 - 1. Most of its members belonged to the large synagogue but lived secular lifestyles. They saw themselves more as members of an ethnic rather than a religious community.
 - 2. Some headed in the direction of messianic and millenary activity. Menasseh Ben Israel believed that redemption would be near once Jews resettled in all parts of the world, including among the Indians in the New World, who he believed were the 10 lost tribes.
 - 3. As we have seen, many former *conversos* in Amsterdam and elsewhere were ardent followers of Shabbetai Zevi and saw an image of themselves in his persona.
 - 4. A small but conspicuous group became religious skeptics, unable to accept the dictates of Jewish religion after deserting the Catholic one. Men like Uriel da Costa and Benedict Spinoza rejected the religious norms of the Jewish community and constructed new identities based on their own rational and personal inclinations.
 - C. The legacy of Amsterdam's Jewish community was significant as an incubator of modern Jewish consciousness.
 - 1. Amsterdam's *conversos*, returning to the Jewish fold, had affirmed their Jewishness as a matter of choice and individual conscience.

Their self-definition was not imposed on them by either Catholic or Jewish authorities.

2. These *conversos* have also been called the first modern Jews in electing to be Jewish after an intense exposure to Christian culture and society, and in exhibiting multiple loyalties—to Judaism, to vestiges of their Christian past, and to their Iberian ancestry.

III. In concluding our course with the Jewish community of 17th-century Amsterdam, we complete a journey that began 1,000 years earlier, crossing the Middle East, the Mediterranean basin, and both Western and Eastern Europe.

- A. This long period displayed obvious continuities as well as radical discontinuities in Jewish life under Islam and Christendom.
 1. During this time, Jews lived under Jewish law; they were granted considerable autonomy to run their own affairs by local governments; and they saw themselves as part of a global community extending beyond the Christian-Muslim divide.
 2. Differing cultural environments over so long a time also generated unique political, economic, and cultural differences among Jews. Major political, technological, or religious changes were especially evident in the early modern period.
 3. One interesting barometer of change is how Saadia in the 10th century used reason to buttress Jewish faith, while Spinoza in the 17th century used reason to undermine that faith in the new secularizing climate of Amsterdam.
- B. We can chart no linear progress in the ability of all three religious communities to tolerate and even appreciate each other, only high and low points over time.
 1. High points of relative tolerance such as those in medieval Spain, or in Carolingian France, or in the Ottoman empire were balanced by the sheer brutality of the period of the Crusades, the 13th century, and that of the Inquisition.
 2. No easy explanations can be offered, for example, to comprehend how relative coexistence in Spain could ultimately give way to virulent forms of racial hatred several hundred years later.
 3. Although the complex historical record that we have tried to reconstruct in this course can hardly offer us a blueprint on how to live together in our own time, it at least offers the promise that coexistence is possible and indeed that it is worth striving for.

Essential Reading:

Yosef Kaplan, "Bon Judesmo: The Western Sephardic Diaspora," in David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, pp. 638–669.

Yosef Kaplan, *An Alternative Path to Modernity: The Sephardic Diaspora in Western Europe*.

Supplementary Reading:

Daniel Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam*.

Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What were the conditions that created the first expressions of racial anti-Semitism in Spain and Portugal? Why wasn't conversion a sufficient resolution in Iberian Catholic society? What were the consequences of this new form of anti-Jewish hostility for modern European experience?
2. In what ways were the Sephardic Jews of Amsterdam the first modern Jews? How was their experience as Jews different from that of others who lived previously or from their contemporaries who lived in other regions of Europe? Can one locate signs of modernity in both the converso and Sabbatean experiences, and how are the two intertwined?

Timeline

- 622 The *Hijra*, Mohammed's flight from Mecca to Medina
- 622–624 Mohammed's unsuccessful attempts to win the support of the Jews of Yatrib (Medina)
- 630 Mohammed's conquest of Mecca
- 632 Mohammed's death
- 661–750 The Umayyad dynasty centered in Damascus
- 711 Muslim conquest of Spain
- 750–762 Accession of the Abbasid dynasty and foundation of its capital in Baghdad
- ca. 760 Beginning of activity of Anan Ben David, founder of the Karaites
- 820–828 Letters of Agobard of Lyon written about the Jews
- ca. 825 Louis the Pious's charters with individual Jews
- ca. 905 Saadia's diatribe against the Karaites
- 910 Beginning of Fatimid rule in North Africa
- 921–923 Controversy over the calendar between the Palestinian Ben Meir and the Gaonim in Baghdad
- 928 Saadia Ben Joseph becomes Gaon of Sura
- 930 Saadia's struggle with the Exilarch David Ben Zakkai
- 929–961 Reign of Abd al-Rahman III and ascendancy of Hasdai Ibn Shaprut in Umayyad Spain
- 1085 Conquest of Toledo, beginning of the Christian *reconquista*
- 1094–1145 Almoravides rule of Andalusia and escape of many Jews
- 1140–1148 Conquests of the Almohades in North Africa and Jewish suffering

1096	.....	The First Crusade is called by Urban II
1144	.....	First instance of the blood libel in Norwich, England
1171	.....	Blood libel in Blois recognized by the local government
1215	.....	Fourth Lateran Council legislating Jewish badge and prohibiting immoderate usury
1240	.....	Disputation of Paris
1242	.....	Burning of Talmud in France
1263	.....	Disputation of Barcelona
1264	.....	First Jewish charter in Poland by Duke Boleslas Pius of Great Poland and Kalish
1280–1285	.....	Composition of the <i>Sefer ha-Zohar</i> by Moses de Leon
1348	.....	Black death attributed to a Jewish plot
1391	.....	Pogroms in Castille and Aragon
1412–1414	.....	Disputation of Tortosa
1449	.....	First racial laws against <i>conversos</i> passed in Toledo
1480	.....	Establishment of the Inquisition in Seville
1486	.....	Composition of the <i>Oration on the Dignity of Man</i> by Pico
1492	.....	Expulsion of the Jews from Spain
1497	.....	Mass conversion of the Jews of Portugal
1516	.....	First ghetto in Venice established
1520–1523	.....	Publication of the first edition of the Talmud in Venice by Daniel Bomberg, a Christian printer
1540	.....	Inquisition established in Lisbon
1553	.....	Burning of Talmud in Italy
1555	.....	Erection of the ghetto in Rome
1570–1571	.....	Publication of Krakow edition of <i>Shulhan Arukh</i> of Joseph Karo with Moses Isserles' additions

1570–1572	Isaac Luria's years in Safed
1623	Establishment of Menasseh Ben Israel's printing press in Amsterdam
1648–1649	Persecution of the Jews in Polish Ukraine by the Cossacks
1665–1666	Self-declaration by Shabbetai Zevi as the messiah
1670	Publication of Spinoza's <i>Theological-Political Treatise</i>

Glossary

Adversus Judaeos: The various anti-Judaic writings produced by the church fathers roughly between the 2nd and 6th centuries.

Aggadah: The nonlegalistic parts of rabbinic literature, stories, and homilies.

Almohades: A radical Muslim religious and political movement, originating in North Africa, that initiated persecutions and forced conversions against non-Muslims in Africa and Spain in the 12th century.

Antinomianism: Literally, “against the law,” referring here to the radical stance taken against rabbinic norms by some of the followers of the messianic figure Shabbetai Zevi.

Anus, Anusim: The Hebrew term for the *conversos* or “*Marranos*,” literally meaning “forced ones,” thus implying that these individuals did not convert to Christianity voluntarily.

Ba’alei Tosafot: The students of Rashi in northern France in the 12th and 13th centuries who composed comments, additions, and raised questions regarding his commentary on the Talmud. Eventually, their comments were printed on the pages of the Talmud alongside Rashi’s commentary.

Blood libel: The notorious charge that the Jews murdered Christian children in order to use their blood to make unleavened bread on Passover. The charge first surfaced in the 12th century and re-appeared constantly in Christian communities through the 20th century.

Breaking of the vessels: The doctrine in the Lurianic *kabbalah* that when God created the spiritual prototype of the world, a crisis emerged, breaking the vessels storing the divine light and creating a catastrophe throughout the entire cosmos. It is the role of the Jewish people to overcome this crisis.

Burning of the Talmud: A reference to the decree of Pope Paul IV in 1553 to burn all copies of the Talmud throughout Italy. The Talmud had been previously torched in France in 1242 in the aftermath of the disputation of Paris.

Carolingian: A reference to the period of Charlemagne (742–814), king of the Franks and his successors.

Christian *kabbalah*: The study of the Jewish esoteric and mystical traditions by Christians, pursued especially by the Renaissance scholar Pico della Mirandola and his associates in Tuscany at the end of the 15th century, but attracting other scholars for centuries to come.

Conversos, (referred to negatively as Marranos): Jews who were baptized either forcefully or voluntarily in Spain and Portugal from the 15th century on, many of whom returned to Judaism by the 17th century.

Convivencia: The Spanish term used to describe the alleged ideal harmony achieved among Jews, Christians, and Muslims under Muslim rule in Spain/Andalusia from the 10th century on.

Council of Four Lands: The central body of Jewish self-government in Poland, together with the Council of the Land of Lithuania, from 1580 to 1764. The four lands included Great Poland, Little Poland, Podolia-Galicia, and Volhynia.

Counter-Reformation: The Catholic reformation, initiated by the pope, to counter the threat of the Protestant reformation of the 16th century.

Dhimmi: Jewish and Christian monotheists, living under Islam, who were treated as protected subjects by the rules known as the Pact of Omar. They were allowed to live under their own religion in exchange for paying special taxes and not offending Islam.

Diaspora: The area outside the land of Israel settled by Jews.

Doenmeh: A sect of adherents of Shabbetai Zevi who converted to Islam in imitation of the messiah's personal apostasy.

Ein-sof: Literally, "the Infinite," that part of the Divinity that human beings are incapable of knowing, according to the kabbalists who composed the *Sefer ha-Zohar*.

Enthusiasts: A term often associated with individuals who lived in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe who arrived at what they considered the truth to be through their own rational or irrational powers, challenging the conventional mores of political, medical, or ecclesiastical authorities.

Exilarch: The Jewish official, who served with the *geonim*, as the leadership of the Jewish community in Abbasid Baghdad. He claimed ancestry from the house of David.

Fourth Lateran Council: The church council of 1215 that determined that Jews had to wear a special badge on their clothing and were prohibited from taking excessive usury from Christians.

Frankists: Followers of Jacob Frank, the radical follower of Shabbetai Zevi, who eventually converted to Christianity and advocated a radical, nihilistic stance toward traditional Judaism.

Gaon, geonim (pl.): The heads of the two major Babylonian academies of Sura and Pumbedita during the Abbasid period of Islamic rule in Baghdad.

Gemarah: The exegetical elaborations on the Mishnah by the rabbis who lived roughly between the 3rd and 6th centuries both in Babylonia and in Palestine.

Genizah: A cemetery or closed chamber for burying old Hebrew books. Usually refers to the famous archives of Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic manuscripts found in

Cairo at the end of the 19th century, revolutionizing the study of Jews under medieval Islam.

Ghetto: The enclosed, urban quarters restricted to Jewish residents, first appearing in Venice in 1516 and spreading throughout Italy in the later 16th and 17th centuries.

Hadith: The collected oral traditions of Islam depicting discrete parts of Mohammed's life, eventually collected and reduced to writing.

Halakhic: Pertaining to Jewish legal writing.

Hekhalot: Literally the palaces, referring to the ascent of the mystic to heaven and his vision of the divine palaces in ancient Jewish mysticism of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

Inquisition: A general reference to the tribunal of the Catholic Church erected to examine and try heretics. More specifically, it applies to the Spanish Inquisition of the 15th century, examining especially the alleged heresy of the *conversos*.

Kabbalah: The mystical and esoteric traditions of Judaism, which first appeared publicly in the 13th century in Spain and Provence and continue to flourish into the modern period.

Kalam: Generally, the discussions and debates in medieval Islam attempting to reconcile the Koran with contemporary doctrine and reason. It became the ordinary term for Islamic theology.

Khazars: A people of Turkic stock who established an independent and sovereign kingdom in southeastern Europe between the 7th and 10th centuries. During part of this time, the leading Khazars professed Judaism.

Kiddush ha-Shem: The sanctification of God's name, the ideal especially associated with the Jewish martyrs of the first crusade of 1096 who opted to kill themselves rather than convert to the Christian faith.

Koran: The sacred scriptures of Islam conceived as the revelation of Allah to his prophet Mohammed.

Legal responsa: Responses to legal queries written by rabbis from the early Middle Ages on to individuals and communities in search of legal counsel based on Jewish law.

Marranos, Marranism: Literally in Spanish, "swine," a derogatory reference to the *conversos* originating from Spain and Portugal from the 15th century on, who were accused by the Inquisition of heresy.

Merkavah: Literally, the chariot mentioned in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 1, which refers to the early texts and fragments of ancient Jewish mysticism that describe visions of heavenly ascent.

Messianism: A powerful stream of classical Judaism, calling for the redemption of humankind by a personal savior and the return of the Jews to the land of Israel.

Midrash, midrashim: Generally denoting rabbinic biblical commentary and homiletics; also refers to a particular genre of rabbinic literature that includes both.

Mishnah: The legal digest of Jewish law edited by Judah the Prince; completed around 200 C.E., it serves as the basis of all subsequent Jewish law.

Mishneh Torah: Moses Maimonides's code of Jewish law composed in Hebrew in the 12th century, which became one of the primary summations of Jewish legal thinking and practice for medieval and modern Jewry.

Mysticism: As used in reference to Judaism, the doctrines and activities of those seeking a direct and unmediated connection or union with the divine source of reality.

Moriscos: Moors or Muslims who remained in Spain after the Christian conquest of Granada in 1492, forced to convert or to practice their former faith in secret.

Pharisees: A sectarian Jewish group emerging in Palestine in the first centuries before the common era, arguing for the sanctity of a twofold law, one written in the Bible and one oral, based on the interpretations of the rabbis.

Piyyut: The long tradition of liturgical poetry in Hebrew, first emerging in Palestine in late antiquity and continuing throughout the diaspora for centuries.

Pogrom: A massacre, riot, or other disturbance, officially instigated, referring especially to one directed against Jews.

Public disputation: The medieval spectacle of Jews publicly debating Christians, orchestrated to embarrass the Jews and encourage their conversions. The most important disputations were in Paris, Barcelona, and Tortosa.

Purity of blood (*limpieza de sangre*): A reference to a doctrine of racial purity emerging in Spain as early as 1449, justifying discriminating treatment of recent converts from Judaism and Islam who were not deemed legitimately Christian.

Radhanites: Long-distance Jewish merchants who originated in the district of Radhan near Baghdad and extended their operations as far as China and Spain in early Abbasid times.

Rabbinic Judaism or Rabbinic tradition: A reference to the beliefs and practices of traditional or classical Judaism constructed by the rabbis in the first centuries of the common era and accepted universally by Jews until modern times.

Reconquista: The reconquest of Muslim Spain by the Christians, beginning in 1085 with the conquest of Toledo and concluding with that of Granada in 1492.

Responsum, responsa: A reference to the rabbinic rulings composed by rabbis from the early Middle Ages until the present on specific cases of Jewish law requiring their immediate attention. This literature, also found in other faith communities, especially Islam, was an important supplement and elucidation of the legal tradition of Judaism as embodied in the Talmud and medieval legal codes.

Sabbateanism: The movement of the followers of Shabbetai Zevi who declared himself the Jewish messiah in 1665 but eventually converted to Islam, leading his followers to either despair in him or to interpret his bizarre behavior in mystical and nihilistic terms.

Sadducees: An ancient Jewish sect that challenged the views of the Pharisees, upholding only the written law of Judaism and accepting the exclusive authority of the priesthood over the rabbis.

Sefer ha-Zohar: The classic work of theosophical *kabbalah*, composed in the circle of Moses de Leon in Castille in the 13th century.

Sefirot: Those 10 aspects of the divine world knowable to human beings; the focus of the mystical commentary of the 13th century *Sefer ha-Zohar*.

Sephardic Jews: In the Middle Ages, the term generally referred to Jews living in Muslim lands, while **Ashkenazic** Jews referred to Jews living in Christian northern Europe. These categories blurred after the Christian conquest of Muslim Spain and after the expulsion of the Jews from Iberia at the end of the 15th century.

Servi camerae: Literally, chamber or royal serfs; the term defined the legal status of Jews in the Middle Ages, appearing first in the Holy Roman Empire in the 13th century.

Synoptic gospels: The first three gospels—Mark, Matthew, and Luke—of the New Testament, presenting the same narrative of the life and death of Jesus, as opposed to the fourth Gospel of John.

Talmud: The body of rabbinic literature, appearing in both a Palestinian and Babylonian recension, composed roughly between the 2nd and 6th centuries of the common era. The Talmud consists of the *Mishnah*, a simple exposition of Jewish law completed in Palestine by the end of the 2nd century, and the *Gemarah*, elaborations, discussions, and legal refinements of the *Mishnah* completed in subsequent centuries. The Talmud became the primary text of traditional study for Jews throughout the ages and was accompanied by many medieval commentaries in its printed editions, especially that of Rashi.

Tikkun: The doctrine in Lurianic *kabbalah* of the restitution of the divine sparks and the repair of the cosmos, to be brought about by the Jewish people itself.

Torah: Specifically, the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch, but generally Jewish sacred literature.

Biographical Notes

Note: The following notes include some key figures mentioned in the course outlines who are not major subjects of the lectures.

Isaac Ben Judah Abrabanel (1437–1508). Jewish statesman, philosopher, and biblical commentator in Portugal, Spain, and Italy. Due to his business and political connections, he was an influential figure in Christian circles in all of the communities in which he lived. He played an important role in trying to avert the edict of expulsion in Spain but eventually left, despite his prestige and wealth, for Naples. He wrote extensive philosophical commentaries on most of the biblical works, composed an extensive trilogy on the messianic passages in the Bible and rabbinic literature, and wrote an important commentary on the Passover Haggadah. He was well trained in classical literature and Christian theology and in the political world of his day. At the same time, he predicted the imminent coming of the messiah in 1503 and devoted much of his energy to messianic interests. He also wrote on Maimonides' philosophy, on history, and on political thought.

Abraham Ben Samuel Abulafia (1240–after 1291). Kabbalist and chief architect of the branch of kabbalah called ecstatic or prophetic kabbalah. Born in Spain, he traveled widely in Europe, especially in Italy, where he is said to have tried to arrange a meeting with the pope. He was fascinated by Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and wrote a mystical commentary on it in which he fused the mystical and the rational. He was particularly interested in reflecting on Hebrew letters, especially associated with the Divine name, by which the kabbalist could alter his state of being to achieve union with God. The emphasis on mystical meditations, with a focus on altering the state of consciousness of the believer, as opposed to exploring the divine world of the *sefirot*, offered a clear contrast to the kabbalah of the *Sefer ha-Zohar*, often called theosophic kabbalah. Abulafia had a major impact on later kabbalah especially in 16th-century Safed.

Agobard of Lyons (779–840). Archbishop of Lyons and early writer on the Jews, he devoted six of his letters to the Jewish question of the 9th century. He was the first to complain about the Jews of his day, attempting to enforce the ecclesiastical principles of their subordination and lack of influence on Christian society. He was particularly upset about Jews owning Christian slaves, about the selling of their commodities in the public market, about the influence of their preachers, and about the positive image they had assumed in Christian society. He attempted to paint their religion as one of superstitions and conceits and to discourage social contacts between Jews and Christians.

Yohanan Alemanno (ca. 1435–1505). Erudite philosopher and doctor and Jewish teacher of the famous Pico della Mirandola. Pico interacted with Alemanno in Florence, even requesting that he explain to him the meaning of the biblical Song of Songs. Alemanno left extensive Hebrew writings on a wide

range of topics. He was particularly fascinated, like his student, by Neo-Platonic philosophy and magic. He interpreted kabbalah in a Neo-Platonic key, bringing out the correlations among Jewish, pagan, and Christian wisdom. He elevated the study of magic in the Jewish curriculum and interpreted the biblical worship service in a magical way. His approach to kabbalah found a following among Jewish students in Italy, who continued to merge kabbalah with magic and philosophy for several centuries.

Uriel da Costa (1585–1640). *Converso* philosopher and free thinker who fled to Amsterdam from Portugal and attempted to return to Judaism. He discovered the Jewish beliefs and observances of the community practice to be at variance with what he considered Judaism to be. He wrote several works against rabbinic law, was excommunicated, and eventually took his own life. His troubled relationship with Catholicism and Judaism was recorded in an autobiography published some years after his death.

Anan Ben David (8th century). Considered to be the founder of the Karaite sect. The late rabbinic and Karaite accounts of his rise to power are unreliable. He seems to have emerged from a noble rabbinic family, was passed over for appointment as either an exilarch or *gaon*, and conceived the idea of founding his own religious sect that would be granted Muslim legitimacy. He composed the *Sefer ha-Mitsvot* (*Book of the Commandments*), a guide to religious law, which repudiated rabbinic authority and Talmudic tradition. He adopted a rigorous and ascetic approach to law, more stringent than that of the rabbis themselves. Despite his status as founder, some of his positions appear to be at variance with those of 10th century Karaite writers.

Nicholas Donin (13th century). A convert to Christianity, he led the attack against the Talmud in 1240 in Paris. He was originally a student of the Paris rabbi Jechiel Ben Joseph who excommunicated him. He compiled a list of 35 accusations against the Talmud, which led to the disputation of Paris, a public forum for these accusations. In this debate, he actually confronted his former teacher. He claimed not only that the Talmud contained blasphemies against Jesus but that it was heretical in shaping the people of the Old Testament into a different religion, that of the rabbis. The result of his efforts was the burning of the Talmud in France in 1242.

Dulcea of Worms (d. 1196). Wife of R. Eleazar Ben Judah of Worms, who memorialized her in a eulogistic poem after her murder by Christians. Eleazar's unusual portrait paints his wife as an economic supporter of the household and as a partner in running a school in their home where she actually taught women. He considered her a pietist in her own right, learned in Jewish sources, and an expert on liturgical recitation. Dulcea, who made ritual fringes for prayer shawls among her many everyday activities, was also an expert on Jewish law in matters pertaining to the household. Eleazar's love for his wife is beautifully portrayed in his poem, which also demonstrates the degree to which exceptional

women could excel within the norms of a patriarchal family structure in the Middle Ages.

Jacob Frank (1726–1791). Founder of a sect called the Frankists, representing the last and most radical stage of the Sabbatean movement, originating from the messiahship and eventual conversion of Shabbetai Zevi to Islam in the previous century. Frank had personal contact with extremists of this movement in the Ottoman Empire. On his return to Poland, he preached a nihilist ideology overturning the norms and practices of traditional Judaism. He considered himself as the messiah, empowered to destroy rabbinic Judaism in the name of his own principles. He and a group of his followers eventually converted to Christianity, although he was soon arrested by the Inquisition for his heretical tendencies. His followers engendered a crisis and fear within the organized Jewish community and some continued to follow revolutionary religious and political paths well into the next century.

Rabeinu Gershom Ben Judah Me'or Ha-Golah (ca. 960–1028). One of the first rabbinic scholars in medieval northern Europe and founder of the rabbinic academy in Mainz. His exegesis on the Talmud and his various legal enactments called *takkanot* established the foundations of Ashkenazic communal and intellectual life for generations to come.

Moses Ben Israel Isserles (1525–1572). Rabbi and codifier of Krakow. He was deeply committed to the study of the Talmud but also had an appreciation for secular knowledge, especially astronomy. He wrote extensive notes on Joseph Karo's rabbinic commentary and added critical glosses to the latter's code of Jewish law. Through his notes, published together with Karo's work in Krakow, he gained acceptance for this Sephardic code among Ashkenazic Jews. In his *Torat ha-Olah*, he attempted to reconcile philosophical and kabbalistic language. He engendered considerable opposition from some of his contemporaries on his advocacy of Polish Jewish custom and for his codification of the law in print, which severely arrested the fluidity and influence of contemporary rabbis who were now subservient to a book.

Joseph Ben Ephraim Karo (1488–1575). Legal codifier and mystic. He was raised in the Ottoman Empire, eventually settling in Safed where he was regarded as the leading scholar. His major legal work was the *Beit Yosef*, an exhaustive commentary on a previous legal code called the *Arba'ah Turim* of Jacob Ben Asher. But he is most well known for his authorship of his own code, the *Shulkhan Arukh*, which became the authoritative code of Jewish law for all Jews, being printed in many editions. He wrote a commentary on Maimonides' code as well. He was also a kabbalist, composing a mystical diary describing his encounters with angelic figures. The complexity of his intellectual and spiritual preoccupations and his influence make him an important subject in understanding 16th-century Jewish life.

Moses Ben Nahman, Nahmanides (1194–1270). Spanish rabbi, leading Talmudic scholar, kabbalist, biblical exegete, and polemicist. Nahmanides was a

major figure of Jewish life in Catalonia and took on the responsibility of debating Pablo Christianiti and defending the Jewish position in the famous disputation of Barcelona in 1263. Most of his written work consists of comments on the Talmud, but he also wrote sermons, a commentary on the Pentateuch, and a work on redemption called *Sefer ha-Ge'ulah*. He played a leading, moderating role in the dispute over Moses Maimonides' writings that flared up in the 13th century. While his biblical commentary was not explicitly kabbalistic, hints of his kabbalist interests can be located in the commentary, and he was considered by later students of the subject as one of the early "fathers" of this emerging field of study.

Nathan of Gaza (1643–1680). A major leader and ideologue of the Sabbatean movement. He was a significant kabbalist thinker in his own right and became the principal architect of constructing the Sabbatean ideology after Shabbetai Zevi's conversion to Islam. He initially met the alleged messiah prior to the public announcement of his messiahship. He counseled and encouraged Shabbetai, and played a critical role in publicizing his mission and message. During the long period of Shabbetai's incarceration, he wrote widely in many letters, explaining his apostasy in Lurianic terms, attempting to make credible Shabbetai's mission to those Jews hesitating to consider him the true messiah. Nathan's significance was in providing a theological legitimation in print of Shabbetai's bizarre behavior, including his apostasy.

Gershom Scholem (1897–1982). One of the most important scholars of Judaic Studies in the 20th century, and pioneer in the academic study of the Jewish esoteric and mystical traditions at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Scholem was clearly the most influential scholar to establish the philological and historical foundations of the field, exploring the beginnings of the kabbalah in antiquity until the emergence of Polish Hasidism in the 18th century. His many books, especially his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* and his grand biography of the mystical messianic figure Shabbetai Zevi, were highly influential. Before settling in Israel, Scholem was a prominent intellectual figure in Germany, maintaining a close relationship with other intellectual figures such as Walter Benjamin and Martin Buber.

Jacob Ben Meir Tam (Rabbeinu) (ca. 1100–1171). Grandson of Rashi, tosafist and leading Jewish scholar in France in the 12th century. He had a high opinion of his own leadership and insisted that his legal authority should be decisive throughout France. In addition to his many statements in the *tosafot*, he composed an important rabbinic work called *Sefer ha-Yashar*, which includes some of the many *responsa* he wrote. He also wrote Hebrew poetry, and on Hebrew grammar. During the blood libel at Blois in 1171, the year of his death, he played an important role in organizing a community-wide response to the tragedy.

Solomon Ibn Verga (second half of 15th century—first quarter of 16th century). Author of a historiographical work known as *Shevet Yehudah* (*The Scepter of*

Judah), consisting of a series of imaginary dialogues, embedded in a history of persecutions, which serve as a backdrop for exploring the contemporary tribulations affecting the Jewish people of his day. In a dialogue he created between a Spanish king and his secular Christian advisor, he reflected on the psychological and sociological reasons that Jews were hated. Ibn Verga found this neutral Christian scholar an effective spokesman for his thoughtful ruminations on the dynamics of Jewish-Christian relations in the past and present. As a partial attempt to understand the Jewish condition from a nontheological point of view, *The Scepter of Judah* clearly was a novel departure from most of the other works that conceived of the expulsion as divine punishment.

Hayyim Ben Joseph Vital (1542–1620). Leading kabbalist in Safed, disciple and colleague of Isaac Luria. He was responsible for committing to writing and organizing much of Luria's spiritual legacy, and interpreting it as well. He left Safed for Jerusalem and eventually settled in Damascus. Among his many writings was a collection of autobiographical notes called *Sefer Hezyonot*, including stories and dreams he had experienced as well as those of others. His multivolume work elaborating the teachings of Isaac Luria is called *Ez ha-Hayyim* and is divided into eight sections. Vital was more than an expositor of Luria. He also wrote a commentary on the *Sefer ha-Zohar*, following the system of the other important kabbalist of his day Moses Cordovero. He also wrote on magic, alchemy, and on the transmigration of the soul.

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Essential Reading:

Altmann, Alexander, Issac Heinemann, and Hans Lewy, eds. and trans. *Three Jewish Philosophers*. New York: Atheneum, 1973. Three ample selections of the translated writings of Philo, Saadia, and ha-Levi, with good introductions and notes.

Barnavi, Eli, ed. *An Historical Atlas of the Jewish People*. New York: Schocken Books, 1992. A wonderful atlas, time line, with notes on every period of Jewish history, beautifully illustrated as well.

Baron, S. W. *Ancient and Medieval Jewish History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1972. A collection of some of the best essays of one of the most important historians of the 20th century, especially on the medieval period.

Baumgarten, Elisheva. *Mothers and Children: The Medieval Jewish Experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. A new and important interpretation of a previously neglected subject, based on the author's doctoral dissertation.

Beinart, Haim, ed. *Moreshet Sepharad: The Sephardi Legacy*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992. The most authoritative summary of Sephardic Jewish scholarship, prepared for the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Most of the contributors are Israeli scholars.

Ben-Sasson, Haim H., and Samuel Ettinger, eds. *Jewish Society Throughout the Ages*. New York: Schocken Books, 1971. An older history written by the leading scholars of some 30 years ago, and written from the perspective of Israeli historiography. Still valuable although outdated.

Biale, David, ed. *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*. New York: Schocken Books, 2002. The best one-volume synthesis we have, with a fresh and updated bibliography. The emphasis is on the new cultural history, so traditional intellectual history is relatively neglected. The essays by Gafni, Scheindlin, Marcus, Rosman, and Kaplan are gems.

Chazan, Robert. *In the Year 1096: The First Crusade and the Jews*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1996. An accessible summary of the events and the evidence, based on the author's previous research and on that of others.

Chazan, Robert. *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989. A useful summary of an important dimension of Jewish-Christian relations in the fateful 13th century.

Cohen, Jeremy, ed. *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1991. A valuable collection of essays providing a rich introduction to the subject until the Reformation.

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Cohen's newest book is a radical re-reading of the Hebrew crusade chronicles, emphasizing their literary background rather than their historical accuracy.

Cohen, Mark. *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. A very useful comparison between the Jewish communities under medieval Islam and Christendom. A helpful review and supplement to this course.

Drory, Rina. *Models and Contacts: Arabic Literature and its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture*. Leiden: Brill, 2000. A highly insightful reading of medieval literary encounters between Judaism and Islam. No better work on the subject.

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Guttman, Julius. *Philosophies of Judaism*. Garden City, NJ: Doubleday and Co., 1964. The standard one-volume synthesis of the subject, considerably outdated but a useful starting point for the beginner.

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Kaplan, Yosef. *An Alternative Path to Modernity: The Sephardic Diaspora in Western Europe*. Leiden: Brill, 2000. A recently translated collection of some of the most important essays by the leading historian of the *converso* diaspora in western Europe.

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- Brody, Robert. *The Gaonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998. A comprehensive history of this subject in English, utilizing and summarizing the latest scholarship written in Hebrew.
- Chazan, Robert. *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and its Aftermath*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992. A careful and judicious presentation of the disputation and its aftermath, with ample discussions of other scholarly treatments with which Chazan agrees or disagrees.
- Cohen, Gerson D., *A Critical Edition . . . of the Book of Tradition (Sefer ha-Qabbalah) by Abraham Ibn Daud*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967. A classic interpretation and textual analysis of a seminal medieval text. Cohen is at his best in uncovering Ibn Daud's messianic scheme of interpreting Jewish history. A model of how to read imaginatively a medieval text.
- Cohen, Jeremy. *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999. An important synthesis of the image of the Jew in patristic and medieval Christian thought. Cohen occasionally returns to his earlier work, responds to his critics, and even offers some revisions.
- Einbinder, Susan. *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002. A sensitive and eloquent reading of some of the Hebrew poetic dirges written during the crusade period. An important supplement to the many studies of the prose chronicles.
- Fine, Lawrence. *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. A new and useful biography of Luria, based on a comprehensive reading of primary and secondary works. The only work of its kind in English.
- Fishman, Talya. "The Penitential System of Hasidei Ashkenaz and the Problem of Cultural Boundaries," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1999): 201–29. A fresh interpretation of the origins of German pietism against its Christian penitential background. A thoughtful revisiting of Yitzhak Baer's thesis on the Franciscan parallels with Jewish pietism.
- Fram, Edward. *Ideals Face Reality: Jewish Law and Life in Poland 1500–1655*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997. A recent study of the rabbinic dimension of early modern Jewish history in Poland, based especially on Jewish legal sources.

Gager, John. *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983. A careful discussion of the emergence of anti-Semitism among pagans and Christians, offering a corrective to some of the Ruether thesis.

Goitein, S. D. *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Genizah*. 6 vols. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967–93. The masterpiece of the pioneer of *genizah* scholarship. A mine of information critical for students of Jewish and medieval history and culture.

Goodman, Lenn, ed. and trans., *The Book of Theodicy by Saadia Ben Joseph Al-Fayyumi*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988. An able translation and detailed commentary on one of Saadia's major works.

Grossman, Avraham. *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe*. Hanover: Brandeis University Press, published by University Press of New England, 2004. The latest work of this senior scholar of Ashkenazic Jewish culture, based on a wide and deep reading of Jewish legal sources.

ha-Levi, Judah. *The Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel*, introduction by Henry Slonimsky. New York: Schocken Books, 1964. The standard translation of this classic work, soon to be replaced by a new translation still in progress. Slonimsky offers a thoughtful introduction to the work.

———. *On the Sea*, translated by Gabriel Levin. Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 1997. A recent English translation of some of ha-Levi's poems. Other anthologies do exist on his poetry and those of his colleagues, including the Scheindlin volumes mentioned above.

Idel, Moshe. *Messianic Mystics*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998. A revisionist work addressing a major theme previously treated by Gershom Scholem. Idel sees various forms of messianism in the long history of the phenomenon. Original and provocative although a difficult read.

Kanarfogel, Ephraim. *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992. An invaluable treatment of the culture of medieval Ashkenazic Jewry based on a thorough reading of Jewish legal sources.

Katz, Jacob. *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times*. New York: Schocken Books, 1961. A classic study of the subject by one of the major social historians of the Jewish experience in the 20th century. Written from the perspective of the Jewish minority and based on rabbinic sources.

Liebes, Yehuda. *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993. One of two small books of translated essays written by one of the most creative scholars of the kabbalah today, who primarily writes in Hebrew and is relatively unknown to those who cannot read most of his books.

- Maccoby, Hyam, ed. and trans. *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages*. Rutherford, Madison, and Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1982. Partial translations, summaries, and studies of the Paris, Barcelona, and Tortosa debates. Useful but not the last word on the subject.
- Maimonides, Moses. *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963. The authoritative translation by Pines with the provocative reading of Maimonides by Leo Strauss also included.
- Malter, Henry. *Saadia Gaon: His Life and Works*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1942. The standard biography of the man, outdated but still useful in its comprehensiveness.
- Marcus, Ivan. *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. A small but stimulating book on one important ritual in the medieval Jewish world, studied anthropologically and comparatively, and offering a model for future research.
- Meyer, Michael. *Ideas of Jewish History*. New York: Behrman House, 1974. (Review of Meyer by Jacob Neusner in *History and Theory* 14(1975): 212–26 reprinted in Ada Rapaport-Albert, *Essays in Jewish Historiography (History and Theory)*, Beiheft 27, 1988, 176–90). A useful anthology of reflections on the meaning of Jewish history from antiquity to the 20th century. Neusner's review is provocative and should be read and discussed together with Meyer's introduction.
- Nemoy, Leon, ed. and trans. *A Karaite Anthology*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1952. The best anthology of Karaite works over several centuries in English or in any language. Nemoy's introductions are also valuable in situating the thinkers whom he presents.
- Nirenberg, David. *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. A fascinating exploration of some of the ways violence both facilitated and disrupted the co-existence of Muslim and Jewish minorities with the Christian majority in the 14th-century Crown of Aragon. The book demonstrates the complexity of explaining persecution in the Middle Ages.
- Rosenblatt, Samuel, ed. and trans. *Saadia Gaon's Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1948. The standard translation of Saadia's major philosophical work in its entirety.
- Ruderman, David, ed. *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*. New York: New York University Press, 1992. A collection of some of the most important essays on the subject especially focusing on the first Jewish encounters with Renaissance culture and the shaping of Jewish culture in the era of the ghetto.
- Scholem, Gershom. *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973. The classic biography of this complex historical figure

and the early years of the movement surrounding his messiahship. Masterful and exhaustive.

Stillman, Norman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979. An excellent presentation of Jewish history under Islam, together with a wide array of well-translated primary documents. Stillman has produced a second volume of his important work covering the modern era.

Stow, Kenneth. *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992. A synthesis and interpretation both based on previous scholarship and an original perspective on the sources. Leaves out Spain but offers broad overviews of social and cultural trends in the rest of medieval Europe.

Swetschinski, Daniel. *Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam*. London: Litmann Library of Jewish Civilization, 2000. An exciting and original interpretation of this epoch in Jewish history, based on the author's dissertation. An important contribution to the field.

Trachtenberg, Joshua. *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983. Written originally in 1944, the work was an important contribution to the subject. Although it is most outdated and fails to properly contextualize its findings, it still represents a powerful summary of the composite portrait of the images of medieval Jews in Christian society at the end of the Middle Ages.

Twersky, Isadore. *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980. The most important work of Twersky, based on a lifetime of study of Maimonides' legal work, demonstrating especially the philosophic dimensions of his treatment of Jewish law.

Weinryb, Bernard. *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100–1800*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973. Until recently, the standard English study of the subject. Although it is outdated and its interpretations have sometimes been challenged, it is still a work of enduring scholarship and insight.

Wolfson, Elliot. *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. An outstanding reading of medieval kabbalah by the most important American scholar of the subject. Not an easy read.

Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971. An elegant and rich intellectual biography of a 17th-century *converso* physician and apologist for Judaism.

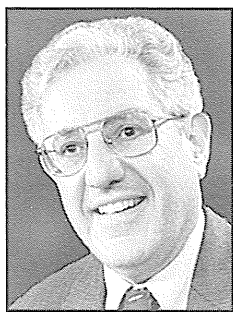
Yuval, Yisrael. *"Two Nations in Your Womb": Perception of Jews and Christians*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, forthcoming in English. A provocative and highly original reading of the history

of Jewish-Christian relations. Its Hebrew version has already evoked much commentary and criticism.

Internet Resources:

<http://www.library.upenn.edu/cajs/>. This is the address of the library of the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies of the University of Pennsylvania, containing links to numerous sites and resources pertaining to Jewish history.

<http://www.hum.huji.ac.il/dinur/>. This is the address of the Jewish historical research center of the Ben Zion Dinur Institute at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. It too offers many resources and links to other sites of interest to students of this course.



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