

The Jewish World of the Sixteenth Century, Part 2

Michael Leavitt

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Introduction

- Purpose of the lectures
 - Introduce a flavor of the first century of the “early modern” period in Jewish history
 - Identify several key events that have shaped Jewish history ever since that time
- Who am I
 - Former senior intelligence officer at CIA
 - Developed an interest in Jewish studies later in life
 - Began teaching adult Jewish education as a second career

Bibliography

- Wikipedia a very good place to start
- *Encyclopedia Judaica* best for individual topics
- My favorites
 - R. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*
 - J. Neusner, *A Short History of Judaism*
 - R. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History*
 - D. Frank and O. Leaman (eds), *History of Jewish Philosophy*
 - E. Barnavi, *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People*
 - D. B. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History*

Approach

- Background to the sixteenth century
- The Jewish world in four chapters
 - The expelled Iberian Jews (the Sefardim)
 - The new Kabbalists
 - Rabbis and intellectuals
 - The eastward expansion (Poland)

The Medieval Jewish World

- Jewish communities throughout Europe, N. Africa, W. Asia
 - An important part of the Islamic expansion (622 – 1492) into N. Africa, Iberia
 - In Italy continually since destruction of Second Temple (70 to present)
 - Invited to be a part of Charlemagne's empire
- Authority decentralized through most of the period
 - Rabbinical authority in Baghdad until 11th century
 - Authorities in Jewish law in N. France, Spain, Egypt, Italy
 - Networks for trading goods and legal opinions widespread

Jews in Sefard & Ashkenaz

- *Sefard*: Jewish communities in Iberia, N. Africa
 - Jews active in civil service, commerce, literary world under Muslim control (through 13th century)
 - During and after Reconquista, Jews stayed and worked for Christian rulers (11th-15th centuries)
- *Ashkenaz*: Jewish communities in Holy Roman Empire (9th – 14th centuries)
 - Invited to immigrate by newly Christianized local rulers
 - First Crusade (1096) a watershed in Jewish continuity
 - Jewish communities routinely pillaged in 12th - 13th centuries (Germany, France, England)
 - Blood libels in 12th – 14th centuries kept communities at risk
 - Expulsions from W. Europe led to invitations from E. Europe

The Fifteenth Century

- Medieval world transformed to the Early Modern world
- Spain
 - Beginning in 1391, a century of increasing persecution of Jews and “New Christians”
 - Creation of Inquisition to root out Christian heresies
 - Culminates in expulsions, 1492, 1497
- Poland
 - Continuing expulsions from Germany
 - Polish kings protect Jews from local persecutions
 - Lithuania expels but quickly rescinds expulsion for economics
- Ottoman Empire
 - Empire growing in size & influence
 - Jewish immigration moderate mid-century
 - Jews formally invited after expulsions from Iberia
 - Became numerous in Istanbul and Salonika

The Wandering Sefardim

- The Jews of Spain
 - Not the New Christians (conversos, marranos)
 - Remained Jews in spite of increasing persecution
 - Expelled in 1492, 200,000 – 250,000 Jews in Spain at the time
 - 50,000 converted rather than leave
- Jews of the Expulsion
 - Estimate of 200,000 left, 10% died en route
 - 90,000 to Ottoman Empire, 40,000 to Northern Europe, 30,000 to North Africa, 5,000 to Americas, rest elsewhere
 - Maintained much of their culture, including language (Ladino) and a distinct liturgy

The Expulsion: Immediate Effects



Sefardim in 16th Century



Those Left Behind: The New Christians

- 100,000 – 200,000 Spanish Jews converted to Christianity in 15th century
 - Some forced (pain of death)
 - Some volunteered (social/economic advantages)
 - Moslems faced same problems
- New Christians, AKA conversos, marranos found conversion was a mixed blessing
 - Many found distrust from the “real Spaniards”
 - Others accused by Inquisition of not being Christian enough (some practiced Judaism in secret)
- Following the expulsion, many New Christians followed their (former) coreligionists into exile (but many did not)

Life in the New Diaspora

- Who were the Sefardim?
 - Jews who remained Jews throughout
 - Jews who had converted and had returned to Judaism
 - Jews who had converted, went into exile, and remained Christian!
- Three major issues for Sefardim
 - Psychological: second expulsion
 - Theological: what did it mean to be Jewish among the Sefardim
 - Political: how did the rabbis' authority change in exile?

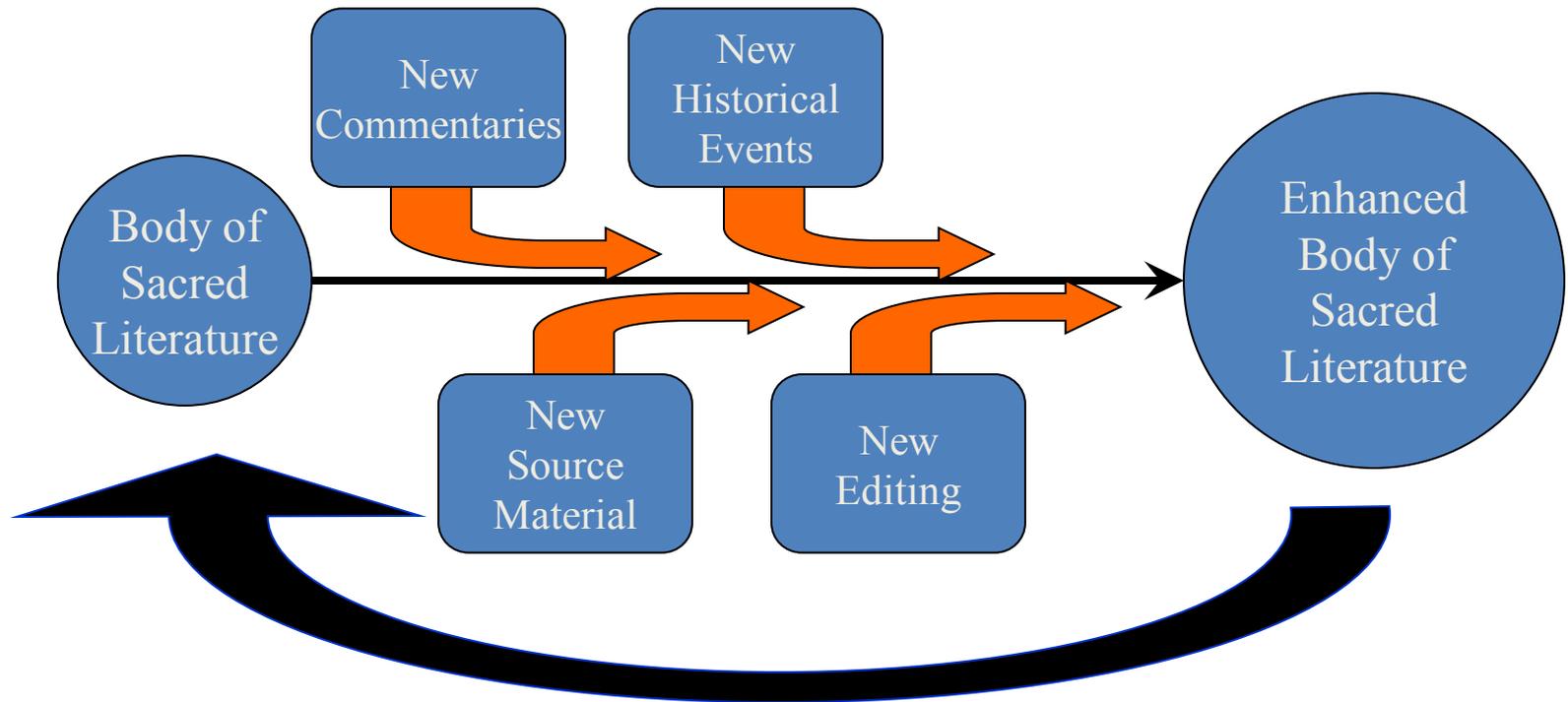
New Beginnings

- Sefardim in Istanbul, Salonika, Italy, Amsterdam entered areas with older Jewish communities
- Established their own communities with little cultural interchange (many became dominant)
- Culturally Spanish enclaves that persisted for centuries
- Weakening of rabbinical authority throughout Sefardic communities

The New Kabbalists, Background

- Jewish Mysticism probably originated around first century
- Based on a profound need to know God, not just God's laws
 - Some want to see/hear/experience God "up close"
 - Others want to understand how God thinks, acts, chooses
- Became "Kabbalah" around 1000, with recognition of God's emanation as key to knowing God
- *The Zohar* in late 13th century became focus of Kabbalists

Sacred Literature Cycle



The *Zohar*

- Collection of mystical commentaries on the Torah
- Issue of its antiquity
- Compiled by Rabbi Moses from León, Spain, 1280s
- Classic form of Jewish literature: the *Midrash*
 - A form of exegesis on the Bible that dates to Talmudic times (200 CE and later)
 - “Fill in the blanks” left by Biblical terseness
 - Stories that illuminate the meaning
 - Traditionally organized by the part of the Torah
 - Major part of the *Zohar*, but far wilder and more imaginative than most classic *Midrashim*

Safed (Tsfat)

- Kabbalah transformed after 1492 expulsions
- Community of mystics formed in Safed, in Ottoman Empire
 - Became an important commercial city with exiles
 - Realities of double exile reinforced, exile of the soul
 - Messianism again became important
 - The need to achieve redemption was widespread
- Community responsible for popularizing Kabbalah
- Kabbalah became widely known 1550-1600
- Two primary Kabbalists
 - R. Moses ben Jacob Cordovero
 - R. Isaac Luria

R. Moses Cordovero (1522-1570)

- One of the greatest theoreticians of Kabbalah
- Mystical philosopher, mystic & *tsaddik*
- Worked on problems of the “mind” of God
- Literary stylist, most work preserved
- Some contemporary Kabbalists consider themselves “Cordoverians”

R. Isaac Luria (1534 – 1572)

- The ARI
- A visionary, imaginative mystic
- Wrote very little himself, work transcribed and interpreted by his disciples
- Created new theosophical structures (internal workings of the Godhead) and creation stories
- Died very young (38)
- Many contemporary Kabbalists trace their ideas directly to Lurianic Kabbalah

Lurianic Creation

- Key concept is contraction (*tsimtsum*) & expansion (*hitpashtut*)
 - *Ayn Sof*—the unknowable aspect of God—initially occupies all of the material & spiritual world
 - *Ayn Sof* withdraws to leave room for something else (*tsimtsum*)
- With a single emanated beam of spiritual energy into the void *Ayn Sof* creates the material world
 - Energy is so intense, it shatters the containers God created to hold it
 - Lets evil (represented by the broken containers) into the broken world
- The task of the Jewish people is to repair the containers, gather up the energy, and “mend the world” (*tikkun olam*)
- Idea of *tikkun olam* has become central in nearly all contemporary Jewish life
- "Broken world" idea comes directly from "double exile" experience

Summary

- Medieval Jewish history
 - Followed Islamic expansion and often remained after contraction
 - Invited to participate in Western European economic expansions
 - Often expelled when economic value (or religious acceptability) declined
- Sefardim
 - Jews and their descendants expelled from Spain and Portugal
 - Moved throughout Ottoman Empire and Europe
 - Brought with them a distinct culture that exists to this day
 - Mixing of Jews and conversos led to weakened Jewish identity
- Kabbalists in Safed
 - Built on esoteric mystical tradition
 - Innovated thinking about nature of God
 - Began the "popularization" of Kabbalah that exists to this day