Springer

Yerushalmi and the Conversos

Author(s): MARINA RUSTOW

Source: *Jewish History*, 2014, Vol. 28, No. 1, Special Issue: From History to Memory: The Scholarly Legacy of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (2014), pp. 11-49

Published by: Springer

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/24709808

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

*Springer* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Jewish History*

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Jewish History (2014) 28: 11–49
DOI: 10.1007/s10835-014-9198-x © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2014

# Yerushalmi and the Conversos

MARINA RUSTOW
*The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, USA*
*E-mail: mrustow@jhu.edu*

**Abstract** In his work on Iberian Jews—openly practicing ones and conversos, on and off the peninsula, before 1492 and 1497 and after—Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi made few explicit methodological statements. But from his earliest work, he made his historiosophical commitments clear and rarely wavered from them. Those commitments included basic trust in inquisitorial sources, the investigation of both marginal and normative Jewish practices, interest in the history of mentalities, and, above all, a focus on the relationship between "immanent" and external causes in Jewish history. This article traces the influence of several mid-twentieth-century historians on Yerushalmi's work and examines his place in twentieth-century debates on conversos and the Inquisition; it also discusses his relationship to microhistory and the problem of historical distance and perspective. The article concludes by considering the apparent contradiction between Yerushalmi's emphasis on the agency and subjectivity of Jews and his trust in the records of an institution that some have characterized as pervasively anti-Jewish.

**Keywords** Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi · Conversos · Marranos · Carlo Ginzburg · Inquisition · Jewish historiography · Sephardim · Iberian history

I have been asked to write about Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's contribution to Sephardi history, and in taking up the assignment, I admit that an irony nags at me. On more than one occasion, Yerushalmi warned his fellow historians against writing about "the Jewish contribution to civilization," an approach he found ruinous to any serious investigation of the inner dynamics of Jewish history. As he put it: "Medieval Jews did not awake each day to ponder, 'What shall I contribute today?' "[1]

The goal, as he saw it, was to understand not merely the Jewish achievements that had altered the course of general history but also the motives that had animated ordinary Jews and how Jews had shaped and reshaped their collective life. "Whether Américo Castro is correct in affirming the 'primary decisive function of the Hispano-Hebrews' in the history of Spain, whatever one's opinion of the function of the Jews in international trade before the rise of Venice and Genoa, however impressed one may be by the staggering list

[1] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Medieval Jewry: From Within and From Without," in *Aspects of Jewish Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Paul Szarmach (Albany, NY, 1979), 21.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

of translations assembled by Steinschneider in that formidable tome *Die Hebräische Übersetzungen des Mittelalters*, history thus focused will only pick up the Jews at their points of outside contact and ignore them when they are alone among themselves."[2] Yerushalmi called this kind of history "Jewish history from without." For him, it could offer up isolated data points or a whole list of them, answers to certain questions of origins or an understanding of some national history or other, but it was not Jewish history. For that, one needed to approach the subject "from within"—to part company from "achievements" and instead penetrate the inchoate beliefs, desires, and intuitions that had shaped Jewish history, however irrecoverable they may be, however deeply buried between the lines.

The irony that nags at me is that Yerushalmi's writing on Sephardi history, likewise, does not lend itself comfortably to a simple enumeration of his historiographic achievements. He was not a historian who believed that to make a contribution one must, perforce, innovate. Instead, he believed, one must interpret, engaging questions larger than the parochial concerns of a minority, while still understanding the minority "from within." His existential concern was with Jewish rather than Sephardi history, and he approached it through questions he regarded as universal. Above all, he believed, one must write well. Yet it is also true that his writings on the Jews of Spain, Portugal, and Provence put forward a set of historiosophical principles that remained remarkably consistent over the course of the four decades of his career. He chose his approaches and his role models early on; as widely as he read, as generously as he praised new work, and as far as he strayed from the Sephardim, he never really wavered from his early theoretical commitments.

In what follows, then, I will revisit Yerushalmi's scholarship on Iberian Jews—openly practicing ones and conversos, on and off the peninsula, before 1492 and 1497 and afterward—with two related problems in mind. The first is the question of his relationship to "immanence" in Jewish history, a term of art in the field that dates to the generation of Yitzhak Baer and Gershom Scholem and describes an emphasis on developments "internal" to the Jewish community.[3] Yerushalmi was not a pure immanentist, but he had an

[2]Yerushalmi, "Medieval Jewry," 21. Yerushalmi's objections are congruent with those of Salo Baron to portraying Jewish history as a story of suffering, another case in which the agenda is set from outside. The apologetic tendency among Jewish historians was no less real when Yerushalmi came of age as a historian, even if their motives were different from those of the nineteenth-century scholars whom Baron criticized. See Michael Brenner's discussion of Cecil Roth and Louis Finkelstein in his *Prophets of the Past: Interpreters of Jewish History*, trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton, NJ, 2010), 152–53.

[3]For the genealogy and valence of the term, see the discussion of Gershom Scholem's thought below. See also David N. Myers, "Was There a 'Jerusalem School'? An Inquiry into the First Generation of Historical Researchers at the Hebrew University," *Studies in Contemporary*

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

abiding interest in the immanentist approach, one that, I will argue, can be traced not only to his precursors within Jewish historiography but also to his commitment to *l'histoire des mentalités*.

The second is a problem of archives and historical epistemology that holds a central place in Sephardi history but has repercussions throughout the historical profession: to what degree can one trust the documents produced by inquisitorial tribunals—or the records of any institution that relies on physical coercion? Yerushalmi addressed this question mainly via the pragmatics of the working historian, hence indirectly, but his theoretical position is implicit (and occasionally explicit) in his writings. He held that even confessions extracted under torture had much to teach the careful interpreter. A radically skeptical position on source material held little interest for him, as I shall argue in the final section of this essay; and in ways that I have found instructive, his position was congruent with that of another early modern historian who has worked in the archives of the Inquisition: Carlo Ginzburg.

Yerushalmi's engagement on these two fronts appears to pull in opposite directions: throughout his oeuvre, he emphasizes the agency and subjectivity of Jews; yet he also gives credence to the records of an institution some have characterized as pervasively and even radically anti-Jewish. I will conclude this essay by arguing that from a strictly methodological point of view, the contradiction is only an apparent one.

## The Judaism of the Conversos

Yerushalmi nurtured an abiding fascination with the question of how heresy and orthodoxy function in a religion that, like Judaism, lacks a centralized clergy, church councils, or an inquisition to regulate belief and praxis. Iberian conversos and crypto-Jews alike offered him a wealth of case studies that allowed him to pose a question that had not yet been adequately addressed: how did converso exiles and their descendants come to resist or, indeed, to internalize rabbinic authority?

The emphasis on the second possibility was significant. Before Yerushalmi, it had been a historiographic axiom that the Hebrew Bible represented the sum total of the Iberian conversos' Judaism—that those who lived on the peninsula lacked access to coherent instruction in rabbinic sources and practices, particularly in the generations after 1492 and 1497, when no professing Jews remained who might have offered them living models. The case once

*Jewry* 10 (1994): 81, and "Is There Still a 'Jerusalem School'? Reflections on the State of Jewish Historical Scholarship in Israel," *Jewish History* 23 (2009): 389–406; Brenner, *Prophets of the Past*, 185–86 (quoting Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, who in turn was following Baer).

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

considered to be paradigmatic was that of Uriel da Costa (ca. 1585–1640), a converso who embraced Judaism while still in Portugal and, in 1614, fled to Hamburg and Amsterdam, where he came to reject the tenets of rabbinic tradition systematically and polemically. Da Costa was excommunicated in Amsterdam and Hamburg; after a humiliating return and a second excommunication, he committed suicide.

Da Costa's crisis of belief had been seen as somehow representative of the experience of early modern conversos: none of the existing religious rubrics of the seventeenth century, let alone of the sixteenth, was capacious enough to accommodate their syncretism. Da Costa was, in the description that Carl Gebhardt (1881–1934) extended to all third-generation Marranos, "a Catholic without faith and a Jew without knowledge, though a Jew by desire."[4] Yerushalmi could not accept that the conversos were innocent of postbiblical Judaism until and unless they chose to "return" to Judaism outside the peninsula: "It is the middle clause" in Gerhardt's description of da Costa, he wrote, "which is troublesome."[5]

Gebhardt was not the only historian who attributed da Costa's revolt against rabbinic Judaism to his converso formation. The Salonica-born historian of crypto-Judaism Israël Salvador Révah (1917–73) also stressed that the antirabbinic contours in the writings of both da Costa and Spinoza had emerged from the crucible of Iberian crypto-Judaism and extrapeninsular converso culture. Révah plumbed the conversos' religious world, identifying the texts and practices to which they had access and from which they managed to cobble together some sort of Judaism. Above all, he did more than anyone before him to take the *mentalités* of the conversos seriously; he had been a student of Lucien Febvre (1878–1956), one of the first historians of popular belief. (I shall return to Febvre below in more direct connection with Yerushalmi.) At the same time, Révah held fast to an idealized notion of Judaism of which the conversos repeatedly fell short: their Jewish practices and beliefs were, for him, a mere simulacrum of the real thing.[6]

---

[4]"Der Marrane ist Katholik ohne Glauben und Jude ohne Wissen, doch Jude im Willen." Carl Gebhardt, introduction to *Die Schriften des Uriel da Costa*, ed. Carl Gebhardt (Amsterdam, 1922), xix.

[5]Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso; A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics* (New York, 1971), 297.

[6]I. S. Révah, *Spinoza et le Dr. Juan de Prado* (Paris, 1959), and "Les Marranes," *Revue des études juives* 118 (1959–60): 29–77. See also the posthumous collections of Révah's writings and lectures at the Collège de France: Israël Salvator Révah, *Des marranes à Spinoza*, ed. Henry Méchoulan, Pierre-François Moreau, and Carsten L. Wilke (Paris, 1995), and *Uriel da Costa et les marranes de Porto: Cours au Collège de France, 1966–1972*, ed. Carsten L. Wilke (Paris, 2004). See further Gérard Nahon, "Les Sephardim, les Marranes, les inquisitions peninsulaires et leurs archives dans les travaux de I. S. Revah," *Revue des études juives* 132

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Révah argued this thesis against a number of historians, chief among them his contemporary António José Saraiva (1917–93). For Saraiva, the conversos routinely appeared in Portuguese sources under the rubric of *homens de negócios*, "men of affairs," because their chief importance was their socio-economic function: they were ubiquitous in trade, commerce, and banking, as well as among physicians and the literate elite, but they had not (in Saraiva's view) maintained an identifiable religious or ethnic coherence. They had quickly begun to intermarry with Old Christians, and their identities as former Jews had all but fallen into desuetude within just a few generations. From here, the thrust of Saraiva's argument followed logically: the Inquisition, established in Spain in 1478–80 and in Portugal in 1536, had not destroyed judaizing on the Iberian peninsula but invented it.[7]

I shall return in the second part of this essay to the Inquisition. The important point for now is that while Révah and Yerushalmi concurred on the ultimate turn to Judaism that many conversos took, they disagreed on the content of that Judaism and on when (and where) the judaizing was likely to have begun. Révah discussed the conversos' "Judaism" rigorously in scare quotes, emphasizing their piecemeal access to it and dubbing them (as Gebhardt had) "potential Jews."[8] Yerushalmi argued instead that "the 'religion of the Marranos' ... ran the entire gamut, from the most attenuated awareness of Jewish roots to a readiness to endure martyrdom for the 'Law of Moses,'" the ultimate commitment to observance of each and every rabbinic commandment and prohibition.[9] If for Révah the religion of the conversos was "a potential Judaism" that could become "a real Judaism" only on entry into an extrapeninsular Jewish community, for Yerushalmi, "*even before he began to Judaize*, every New Christian was a potential Marrano, whom *any of*

(1973): 5–48; Carsten L. Wilke, "L'historien de la 'Nation portugaise' devant le défi de la mobilité: L'étude des réseaux nouveaux-chrétiens depuis I.-S. Révah," *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Calouste Gulbenkian* 48 (2004): 41–53; and Henry Méchoulan and Gérard Nahon, eds., *Mémorial I.-S. Révah: Études sur le marranisme, l'hétérodoxie juive et Spinoza* (Paris, 2001)—a collection of essays that also includes a bibliography of Révah's writings.

[7] A. J. Saraiva, *Para a história da cultura em Portugal* (Lisbon, 1962), 3:107, and *Inquisição e Cristãos-Novos* (Porto, 1969); Révah, "Les Marranes," 47–52; Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Prolegomenon," in Alexandre Herculano, *History of the Origin and Establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal*, trans. John C. Branner, 2nd ed. (New York, 1972), 36.

[8] Révah, "Les Marranes," 55: "Le 'Judaïsme' des Marranes était essentiellement un Judaïsme *potentiel* que l'entrée dans une communauté juive transformait le plus souvent en Judaïsme *réel*. Aux bases essentielles et aux possibilités d'enrichissement du 'Judaïsme' potentiel des Marranes que nous avons mentionnés, il faut ajouter l'action de la persécution inquisitoriale et du racisme péninsulaire" (emphasis in original).

[9] Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 39. On converso martyrdom, see Miriam Bodian, *Dying in the Law of Moses: Crypto-Jewish Martyrdom in the Iberian World* (Bloomington, IN, 2007).

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

*a variety of circumstances* could transform into an active Marrano."[10] To go from "potential" to "active" status, one did not need the chance to embrace Judaism openly outside the peninsula; one needed only the right books, a chance encounter, a crisis of conscience, or some other turn of events.

To put this another way, both Révah and Yerushalmi put to rest any doubts about whether even the most isolated crypto-Jews on the peninsula could have imagined that Judaism consisted entirely of biblical precepts: together they opened the dossier on converso religion, and especially its relationship to rabbinic Judaism. But Yerushalmi went further, demonstrating that conversos on the peninsula had access to rabbinic Judaism even after the expulsions, and not only in the pale or distorted reflection of Christian anti-Jewish polemics and edicts but also in contact with the professing Jews who entered Spain and Portugal both clandestinely and with the full sanction of the authorities in Madrid.[11] If for Gebhardt there had been a *cordon sanitaire* around peninsular conversos, Yerushalmi and Révah demonstrated that the barriers were more porous than he had assumed. But while Révah contended that those barriers held within them only the most fragmented and incomplete reflection of "authentic" Judaism, for Yerushalmi there was no single, ideal Judaism whose standards the conversos had to meet: the Judaism of the conversos was as complex and variegated as any other. It, too, was Judaism *tout court*.[12] Here is how he put it:

---

[10]Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 39–40 (my emphasis).

[11]Ibid., 299 n. 237; Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Professing Jews in Post-Expulsion Spain and Portugal," in *Salo Wttmayer Baron Jubilee Volume, on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Saul Lieberman (Jerusalem, 1974), and *The Re-education of Marranos in the Seventeenth Century*, The Rabbi Louis Feinberg Memorial Lecture in Judaic Studies (Cincinnati, OH, 1980), and "Connaissance du judaïsme et préparation spirituelle chez les marranes revenus au judaïsme au cours du XVIIe siècle," in Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Sefárdica: Essais sur l'histoire des Juifs, des marranes et des nouveaux-chrétiens d'origine hispano-portugaise* (Paris, 1998), 235–54, originally published as "Anusim ha-ḥozrim le-yahadut ba-me'a ha-17: Haskalatam ha-yehudit ve-hakhsharatam ha-nafshit," *Madda'e ha-yahadut* 5, no. 2 (1972): 201–9. On this question, see Bodian, *Dying in the Law of Moses*, 37–39; Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wieges, *Entre el Islam y Occidente: Vida de Samuel Pallache, judío de Fez* (Madrid, 1999), translated by Martin Beagles as *A Man of Three Worlds: Samuel Pallache, a Moroccan Jew in Catholic and Protestant Europe* (Baltimore, 2003).

[12]Yerushalmi's view of a broad range of Jewish practices as equally "authentic" derived directly from Scholem's influence. As he put it in a series of conversations with Sylvie Anne Goldberg: "[Scholem's work] enabled me to understand that the Sabbatians, even after Shabbatai Ṣevi's conversion, and later the Frankists were neither mad nor decadent. They were simply Jews, and it was even possible to reconstruct their views without endorsing them. It made me realize that one could broach even the most extreme Frankist beliefs intelligently." Later in the conversation, his description of his reaction to the encounter with Scholem became, simply, "My God ... Jewish history can be this, too: one can write about *these* kinds

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

> The Marrano is himself a complex variable. What has been termed the "religion of the Marranos" displays only a few fundamental traits which can be isolated. One may speak at best of common *conditioning* factors—primarily, the need for secrecy, the general absence of Jewish books or actual models of normal Jewish life, and the pervasive influence of generations of Christian education and environment. As for expression, one can point to an inner deprecation of Christianity as idolatrous and a consequent rejection of its salvational claims; the atrophy or disappearance of traditional Jewish observances; a fairly obvious syncretism, natural under the circumstances; a reliance on the Old Testament as the most readily available textbook of Judaism; a tendency toward messianism. Beyond this point it becomes increasingly difficult to generalize, and one finds that even the characteristics already mentioned must be modified to take account of many individual cases which do not fit such patterns.[13]

For Yerushalmi, then, Uriel da Costa had rejected rabbinic tradition not because he did not know it, but for the very same reasons for which he had rejected Catholicism itself. After all, he asked, "Why should the erstwhile student of canon law have been so shocked to find that the Judaism of Amsterdam was not quite that of Moses, when he was quite aware that the Catholicism of Coimbra was hardly the Christianity of Jesus?"[14] For Gebhardt and Révah, da Costa had turned to heresy because while on the peninsula he had been cut off from the living sources and models of Jewish praxis, and outside of it he remained alienated from the Jewish communities he found: he had never had a chance to become steeped enough in Judaism, or even familiar enough with it, to sustain a commitment to it. For Yerushalmi, by contrast, da Costa was a heretic by the standards of either Judaism or Christianity: knowledge was not the problem. "The attitude with which he came, rather than his alleged ignorance, would thus prove to have been far more the decisive factor."[15] Da Costa had made a series of choices. He was not a paradigm of the converso experience but only one facet of it; there were other explanatory factors at play that were equally worthy of understanding.

---

of things!" Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and Sylvie Anne Goldberg, *Transmettre l'histoire juive: Entretiens avec Sylvie Anne Goldberg* (Paris, 2012), 22, 170 (my translations).

[13]Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 35.

[14]Ibid., 298–99.

[15]Ibid., 299.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

## Brother against Brother

The case that allowed Yerushalmi to argue this point concretely was that of Fernando (later Isaac) Cardoso (1603/4–83). Cardoso was born in Portugal to New Christian parents and spent half his life living on the peninsula as a Christian, teaching at the university of Valladolid and serving as a physician at the royal court in Madrid (1632–48).[16] Despite all the outward signs of success, in 1648 Cardoso abandoned his career and his identity as a professing Christian for the ghettos of Venice and Verona, where he changed his name to Yshac (Isaac) and openly embraced Judaism for the first time. In Italy, he wrote two works: a philosophical encyclopedia in Latin (*Philosophia libera* [Venice, 1673]) and an apologia for Judaism called *Las excelencias de los hebreos* (Amsterdam, 1679)—the latter his crowning act of loyalty to a Jewish faith in which he had not been raised.[17]

Yerushalmi's study of Cardoso was the first in-depth investigation of a converso who had embraced rabbinic Judaism, but the family had been well known to Jewish historians. The great scholar of Jewish mysticism Gershom Scholem (1897–1982) had written extensively of Miguel (later Abraham) Cardoso (1626–1706), Fernando/Isaac's much younger brother.[18] Miguel/Abraham Cardoso had been born in Spain and fled the peninsula together with his brother in 1648, but whereas the elder brother had turned toward rabbinic Judaism and Jewish apologetics, the younger had embraced Jewish mysticism and messianism, becoming one of two major propagandists of the movement surrounding Shabbetai Ṣevi (1626–76). The other was Nathan of Gaza (1643/44–80), a native Ottoman Jerusalemite of Ashkenazi origin, a rabbinic scholar of exceptional intellectual acumen and, ultimately, the visionary, prophet, and chief architect of the Sabbatian movement. In 1666, when Shabbetai Ṣevi converted to Islam and the movement lost much of its following, both Nathan and the younger Cardoso defended the apostasy in mystical terms as an act of divine necessity, of "redemption through sin."

[16] Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*. See also Yosef Kaplan, review of *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Qiryat sefer* 48 (1973): 669–73, and "Historien des marranes, interprète de la modernité juive," in *L'histoire et la mémoire de l'histoire: Hommage à Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, ed. S. A. Goldberg (Paris, 2012), 15–27.

[17] Yerushalmi calls *Philosophia Libera* "the first major work of general philosophy written by a practicing Jew in a profane language" (*From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 300). To the exceptions and qualifications that Yerushalmi himself offers, one might add that while Latin may not be Hebrew, it is not profane; Greek (Philo) and Judaeo-Arabic (Sa'adya, Maimonides, and countless others) are.

[18] Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Ṣevi: The Mystical Messiah*, trans. R. J. Z. Werblowsky (Princeton, NJ, 1973).

This content downloaded from 137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

(No one did more than Scholem to demonstrate the inner logic of such paradoxes.)[19] Abraham Cardoso's works were burned as heretical in Smyrna; his observance of the *misvot* came under suspicion there and elsewhere; he was excommunicated in Tripoli, Venice, Tunis, and Livorno; but manuscripts of his writings continued to circulate among Sabbatians and their opponents for two centuries after his death.[20]

For Yerushalmi, as for Scholem, Abraham Cardoso's devotion to Sabbatian messianism could be traced back to his converso formation, but for Yerushalmi this was not because it had deprived him of an adequate rabbinic education: rather, it was because it had bestowed on him a specific set of interpretive horizons. "Marranos could understand, perhaps better than other Jews," that Shabbetai Ṣevi's apostasy "might simply be a mask for an inner existence of a radically different order."[21] Yet the example of Isaac's devotion to rabbinic Judaism would not allow Yerushalmi to remain satisfied with that explanation. After the apostasy, the Cardoso brothers had exchanged a series of a letters (Isaac from Verona and Abraham from Tripoli) in which the elder emerged as "inimical to the Sabbatian movement and thoroughly hostile to his brother"; within two years, they had cut off contact with one another.[22] Something else had to explain the different paths they took.

After an exhaustive analysis of the brothers' correspondence, Yerushalmi concluded that "in the final analysis, *the two are separated by a hair*."[23] Both were indelibly Christian in their formation. Abraham had spent two years in Spain studying Christian theology; in explaining the advent of Shabbetai Ṣevi as redeemer, he quoted the same verses of the Hebrew Bible that the Church fathers had cited as foretelling the advent of Jesus, "and [he] knew it." But Abraham's explanation for this, according to Yerushalmi, would have been simple: "the Christians possess the truth in believing that the Messiah must undergo radical suffering; they err only in thinking that he must die."[24] Abraham used, in other words, the theological tools he had acquired as a professing Christian in Iberia in the service of his messianic propaganda, and

[19]Gershom Scholem, "Miṣvah ha-ba'ah ba-'averah," *Kenesset* 2 (1937): 347–92, reprinted in his *Meḥqarim u-meqorot le-toldot ha-Shabta'ut ve-gilguleha* (Jerusalem, 1982), 1–31, and translated by Hillel Halkin as "Redemption through Sin," in Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York, 1971), 78–141.

[20]See also Scholem's studies of Cardoso and his students in Gershom Scholem, *Researches in Sabbateanism* [in Hebrew], ed. Yehuda Liebes (Tel Aviv, 1991), 391–488; and see *Abraham Miguel Cardozo: Selected Writings*, ed. David Halperin (New York, 2001).

[21]Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 304.

[22]Ibid., 314–16.

[23]Ibid., 338–39 (my emphasis). Only parts of the correspondence had survived intact; Yerushalmi reconstructed the rest.

[24]Ibid., 339.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

"to understand this is not to impugn Abraham's conscious Jewish loyalties, which were fierce and total."[25] His brother possessed those same tools but used them to radically divergent ends. In *Las Excelencias*, Isaac employed his philosophical training in the service of the defense of Judaism. He even used Christian categories of thought to describe the commandment of circumcision, a "covenant" without which "the Jews cannot be saved" and a "commandment ... that ... makes satisfaction for the original sin, Adam's sin of disobedience."[26] Isaac's defense of rabbinic Judaism was no less radical and, at times, self-destructive than was Abraham's of Sabbatianism: when he was still a royal physician in Spain, moving in the circles of Lope de Vega (1562–1635), and while the Inquisition was sending scores of New Christians to autos-da-fé under the zealous Grand Inquisitor Diego de Arce Reinoso Ávila y Palomares (1643–65), Fernando/Isaac was attempting to persuade other New Christians of the truth of Judaism—including, possibly, the royal chronicler himself, Rodrigo Méndez Silva (1606–70), who confessed to his inquisitors under torture that Fernando Cardoso had "persuaded him to be a follower of the law of Moses."[27] In brief, Yerushalmi found the complexities of the elder Cardoso's embrace of rabbinic Judaism no less dialectical than Scholem had found the younger's embrace of Sabbatian messianism.

In the life and career of the elder Cardoso, then, Yerushalmi found what he would later call "a veritable laboratory case: two Marranos, brothers no less, one of whom remains an ardent follower of Sabbatianism even after Shabbetai Ṣevi's apostasy while the other opposes it."[28] This case enabled him to demonstrate that there was nothing inevitable about some conversos' attraction to heresy, even if their crypto-Judaism had prepared them for it: rejecting the conventional rabbinic path was hardly endemic to the converso condition.

Yet one must also ponder the ways in which Yerushalmi constructed his analysis of Isaac Cardoso's thought as a series of "backward glances," finding evidence of his Jewish consciousness even before he left the peninsula and pronouncing the *Philosophia libera* "a 'Jewish book.' "[29] Indeed, Yerushalmi dismisses Cardoso's Christian-sounding interpretation of the Jewish commandments as a mere "occasional ... lapse into Christian terminology and categories in expressing traditional Jewish concepts"—as nothing more than "the natural habits of thought and expression acquired through decades of

[25]Ibid., 338.
[26]Ibid., 380.
[27]Ibid., 181.
[28]Yerushalmi and Goldberg, *Transmettre l'histoire juive*, 67.
[29]Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 271, and, more generally, 271–301.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

living as a Christian" or "the ghosts of a past that was dead, but not forgotten."[30] The outward Christian garb did "not really alter the thoroughly Jewish character of the book."[31] On what basis could Yerushalmi distinguish "habits of expression" from the thing expressed, and—especially in delicate circumstances like these—"Christian" from "Jewish"? The seeming essentialism of statements like this caught the attention of one reviewer: "Without questioning Cardoso's Jewish sincerity, can one be equally certain of his Jewish orthodoxy?" wrote Albert Sicroff, a disciple of Américo Castro and author of an important study on the statutes of *limpieza de sangre*. "One might also consider," Sicroff added, "whether Yerushalmi really serves his own presentation of the story of Marranism with his insistence on the 'thoroughly Jewish character' of a book which falls into such Christian 'phraseology.' ... The question is, ultimately, whether Isaac Cardoso is simply to be regarded as a Jew or should be viewed as the inevitably 'hybrid' Marrano whose story is not a simple chapter of the history of Judaism."[32]

Yerushalmi was certainly aware of the problem. He himself had noticed in Cardoso's peninsular writings a conspicuous avoidance of references to Jesus, the Virgin, or the New Testament, so that his Christian origins cut both ways.[33] He also freely acknowledged the Marranos' "syncretism, natural under the circumstances."[34] But his choice of genre (biography) and topic (Marrano apologetics on behalf of rabbinic Judaism) had perhaps led him to read Cardoso's life trajectory through a Jewish prism. The discovery that conversos were susceptible to the lures of judaizing even before they left the peninsula—that they were Yerushalmi's "potential judaizers" rather than Révah's "potential Jews"—might be interpreted in two different ways: as Yerushalmi did, as evidence that the conversos' Jewish roots stretched deeper into the soil of the Iberian peninsula than anyone had yet recognized; or, as Yerushalmi did not, as evidence that Christianity and Judaism under certain circumstances were separated by no more than a hair.[35]

[30]Ibid., 338, 380.
[31]Ibid., 380.
[32]A. A. Sicroff, review of *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Journal of Modern History* 45 (1973): 660, and *Les controverses des statuts de "pureté de sang" en Espagne du XVe au XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1960).
[33]Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 188–93.
[34]Ibid., 35.
[35]Cf. Marina Rustow, "Karaites Real and Imagined: Three Cases of Jewish Heresy," *Past and Present* 197 (2007): 53.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

## Jewish History "From Within"

Behind Yerushalmi's approach to Cardoso—and his commitment to Jewish history "from within"—stood four towering twentieth-century historians who fused the history of ideas with social history. Of these, two held tenaciously to the search for "immanent" (internal or authentically Jewish) explanations in Jewish history; a third insisted on bringing Jewish history beyond the solipsism to which immanence could lead; and a fourth was not a Jewish historian at all but pioneered the history of consciousness, of the thinkable, in the early modern age.

The first of these was the *eminence grise* of the so-called "Jerusalem school" of Jewish historians: Yitzhak (Fritz) Baer (1888–1980), whose *History of the Jews in Christian Spain* remains, many decades after its first publication (German ed. 1929–36; Hebrew eds. 1945 and 1959), a standard work in the field.[36] Baer had brought to Jewish history two methods that Yerushalmi admired and inculcated in his students: decoding the sources—especially rabbinic ones previously neglected by historians—with philological rigor and deep erudition in Jewish law, and offering due consideration to each period "on its own terms."

The closeness Yerushalmi felt to Baer went beyond the kinship of common interests.[37] Yerushalmi reflected on Baer's Iberian Jewish history in

[36]Yitzhak (Fritz) Baer, *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1929–36), also published as *Toldot ha-yehudim bi-Sefarad ha-noṣrit* (Tel Aviv, 1945; 2nd ed., Tel Aviv, 1959). A revised version of the second edition appeared as *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols., trans. Louis Schoffman (Philadelphia, 1961–66). On the rubric "Jerusalem school" and its shifting content from the 1920s onward, see Myers, "Was There a 'Jerusalem School'?" and "Is There Still a 'Jerusalem School'?"; for Yerushalmi's rejection of the term on the grounds that it lumped together radically different historians who should not be made to occupy a single category (Ben-Zion Dinur, Baer, and Scholem), see Yerushalmi and Goldberg, *Transmettre l'histoire juive*, 187. On Baer, see David N. Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (New York, 1995), 109–28; Israel Jacob Yuval, "Yitzhak Baer and the Search for Authentic Judaism," in *The Jewish Past Revisited: Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians*, ed. D. N. Myers and D. B. Ruderman (New Haven, CT, 1998), 77–87; Brenner, *Prophets of the Past*, 171–77; and the additional studies cited in Benjamin Gampel, introduction to *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, by Yitzhak Fritz Baer (Philadelphia, 1992), lii n. 1.

[37]Yerushalmi shared with Baer an abiding interest not just in Sephardi history but also in Shelomo Ibn Verga, a veteran of both Iberian expulsions and author of the Hebrew chronicle *Sheveṭ Yehudah*. Yitzhak Fritz Baer, *Untersuchungen über Quellen und Komposition des Schebet Jehuda* (Berlin, 1923), and introduction to *Shevet Yehudah*, by Shelomo ibn Verga, ed. Azriel Shoḥat (Jerusalem, 1946); Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *The Lisbon Massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yehudah*, Hebrew Union College Annual Supplements (Cincinnati, 1976). Yerushalmi also produced a set of essays on the *Sheveṭ Yehudah* and a lyrical English translation of the text, begun in the 1970s and still unpublished at the time of his death;

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

1999 in a long preface to the French translation of Baer's *Galut*, a meditation on exile first published in German in 1936.[38] With the advent of Nazism, Yerushalmi wrote, for Baer "the Sephardi past, until then latent, suddenly seemed to take on significance again."[39] The book was a warning against the dangers of assimilation, thinly veiled as a history of Jewish exile; one of the things Yerushalmi admired most in it was the sense of existential urgency that had motivated its author.

It was characteristic of Yerusahlmi to express admiration for a historian with whom he disagreed as profoundly as he did with Baer. In his *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, Baer had maintained that Sephardic Jews' exposure to rationalism, philosophy, epicureanism, and the material temptations of courtier culture had corrupted them, tainted what he held to be their authentically Jewish beliefs, and made it all too easy for them to cross the border to baptism. There was only one community of medieval Jews that (for Baer) managed to nurture a commitment to Judaism so profound that they were willing to die in its name: medieval Ashkenazim, who had refused to succumb when at various points they were offered the choice between conversion and death. Baer emphasized this even though the medieval Hebrew chronicles say explicitly that many converted.[40] Sephardi Jews, in Baer's view, had yielded in the face of lesser pressures: their loyalty eroded through pernicious social mingling, they had failed to develop a tradition of martyrdom for the cause.

Historians since Baer, Yerushalmi among them, have demonstrated that Sephardi Jews did in fact develop a robust tradition of dying "in the law of Moses"—not only openly professing Jews but also conversos and their descendants.[41] Others have acknowledged the links (in retrospect, obvious ones) between the Jewish and Christian medieval valorization of martyrdom, thus casting serious doubt on Baer's claims for the purity and "authentic-

these are now due to appear as Solomon Ibn Verga, *The Scepter of Judah* (*Shevet Yehudah*), trans. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, ed. Jeremy Cohen (Cambridge, MA; Tel Aviv, forthcoming).

[38]Yitzhak F. Baer, *Galut* (Berlin, 1936); Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, preface to *Galout: L'imaginaire de l'exil dans le judaïsme*, by Yitzhak F. Baer, trans. Marc de Launay (Paris, 2000).

[39]"Le passé séfarade, toujours latent, semble soudain retrouver une pertinence." Ibid., 23.

[40]The first to point this out was Isaiah Sonne,"On Baer and His Philosophy of History," review of *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, by Yitzhak Fritz Baer, *Jewish Social Studies* 9 (1947): 61–80.

[41]Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 39; Bodian, *Dying in the Law of Moses*. Still others have now demonstrated that Iberian Jews began to convert well before 1391, but not for the reasons Baer might have imagined: see Paola Tartakoff, *Conversion and Inquisition in the Crown of Aragon, 1250–1391* (Philadelphia, 2012).

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

ity" of Ashkenazi traditions of dying for God.[42] It must also be said that Yerushalmi regarded the Spanish Jews who had converted after 1391 in almost Darwinian terms as "the weakest elements" and those who resisted conversion and came to Portugal in 1492 as "the most tenacious" ones.[43] But if Yerushalmi agreed with Baer on this point, there was still an important difference between them: while Baer subjected his conversos to the moral judgment of an interwar German Jew vehemently rejecting the seductions of assimilation, Yerushalmi treated them with even-handedness and empathy.[44] Exposure to philosophical thought and courtier life did not inexorably lead to apostasy: it could also produce a commitment to Judaism so profound that one would risk one's life for it—as had Cardoso and dozens of others whose stories fill the sources of the early modern period, inquisitorial and rabbinic.

Yerushalmi was well aware of the problematic aspects of Baer's work—the shameless romanticism, the nationalist underpinnings, the obsession with authenticity, the blind essentialism. But he also continued to esteem Baer's contributions long after the field had become well aware of their ideological bent. If in *Galut* Baer had cautioned his readers against assimilation, Yerushalmi cautioned readers of Baer against seeing *Galut* solely as a product of his Zionism. After all, Zionist orthodoxies had also dictated contempt for the Jewish Middle Ages as "a shadow-zone, a hiatus between ancient Israel and the modern national reawakening," the nadir of Jewish political powerlessness. Baer insisted instead on "the organic unity of all of Jewish history" and on studying each period "on its own terms" (as Yerushalmi put it).[45] Unlike most Zionists, as well, Baer had given religion its due, seeing in

[42]See esp. Jeremy Cohen, *Sanctifying the Name of God: Jewish Martyrs and Jewish Memories of the First Crusade* (Philadelphia, 2006); and, in a different period and vein, Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA, 1999).

[43]Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 5. In explaining the endurance of crypto-Judaism among Portuguese conversos—a phenomenon observed as early as Spinoza—Yerushalmi pointed to the influx into Portugal in 1492 of the hard-core faithful from Spain and to the greater strength that the Inquisition had in Spain than in Portugal until the two countries were unified in 1580. See also ibid., 41 n. 62; Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Propos de Spinoza sur la survivance du peuple juif," in Yerushalmi, *Sefárdica*, 177–233, originally published as "Spinoza on the Existence of the Jewish People" [in Hebrew], *Proceedings of the Israeli Academy of Sciences* 10 (1973): 171–213; Bodian, *Dying in the Law of Moses*, 213 n. 95.

[44]On Baer's tendency to judge, see Yerushalmi, preface to Baer, *Galout*, 29: "Baer n'a pas seulement reconstruit et analysé l'histoire juive; il l'a *jugée*" (emphasis in original). For the comparison between Baer's judgments and Yerushalmi's empathy, see David N. Myers, "Of Marranos and Memory," in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and David N. Myers (Hanover, NH, 1998), 4–5; on Yerushalmi and historical empathy, see further Marina Rustow, "L'alliance royale et Yerushalmi pour maître," in Goldberg, *L'histoire et la mémoire de l'histoire*, 65.

[45]Yerushalmi, preface to Baer, *Galout*, 44.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

rabbinic Judaism one of the animating forces of Jewish history. If (like nearly every other professional historian of the Jews) Yerushalmi stopped short of embracing Baer's arguments for a quasi-mystical force driving Jewish history, a causality supposed to have defied normal historicity, he nonetheless recognized Baer's treatment of the Middle Ages as an act of empathetic engagement.[46]

Baer, with his value judgments, had obviously fallen short of the ideal of taking each period "on its own terms." Yerushalmi, too, was not entirely averse to judging historical periods by standards extraneous to them: *Zakhor* is, after all, an interrogation of Jewish history between the biblical era and the sixteenth century in search of the reasons why Jews failed to produce distanced historical narrative of the modern type. Yerushalmi nonetheless argued that "far from indicating a gap or flaw in their civilization," that failure "may well reflect a self-sufficiency that ours no longer possesses."[47] More pointedly, he contended that if "many moderns" prefer the history of Hasmonean resistance to Hellenism over the Hanukkah miracle, "that is assuredly a modern problem."[48] Though Baer might have fallen short of the ideal, his attempt to read the Jewish Middle Ages through the eyes of medieval Jews themselves drew Yerushalmi repeatedly back to his work.

The second historian who influenced Yerushalmi was another giant of the "Jerusalem school," Gershom Scholem. Just as Scholem's thought pervades Yerushalmi's work, the concept of "immanence" pervades Scholem's. Beyond his treatment of the kabbalistic problem of divine immanence vs. transcendence, it undergirds his very explanations of the development of kabbalistic concepts according to a logic comprehensible only in inner-Jewish terms. To cite two examples among many: in explaining the origins of one strain of Jewish mysticism, the *shi'ur qomah*, Scholem wrote that while "impulses from the outside are, of course, entirely conceivable ... we must reckon far more seriously with the possibility of an *immanent* development and elaboration of such impulses that may have been much more intense than is generally assumed."[49] And in his book on Shabbetai Ṣevi, Scholem systematically rejected arguments for seventeenth-century Christian millenarianism as a factor in the Jewish messianic tension that helped turn Sabbatianism into a mass movement.[50] If this, too, seems like flagrant

[46]Ibid., 52–53; Myers, "Is There Still a Jerusalem School?" 392. Cf. also Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, repr. ed. (Seattle, 1996), 90–91.
[47]Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 34.
[48]Ibid., 25; cf. ibid., 111 n. 20.
[49]Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. Allan Arkush (Philadelphia; Princeton, NJ, 1987), 20 (my emphasis). See also ibid., 97 (on Ḥasidei Ashkenaz), 238 (on the *Bahir*). His use of the term is so pervasive that the examples could easily be multiplied.
[50]Rustow, "Karaites Real and Imagined," 70–71; Scholem, *Sabbatai Ṣevi*, 101, 152, 166, 211, 233, and, for evidence contradicting his claims, 332–40.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

stacking of the deck (and subsequent scholarship has demonstrated that it was[51]), Scholem's mission—and his genius—lay in insisting upon the inner logic of irrational beliefs, tracing the growth of heretical messianism from the intellectual and mystical soil that had nurtured it, refraining from measuring seemingly unreasonable acts by some presumed normative standard, and embracing unreason as no less inalienably Jewish than reason.[52]

The search for the immanent causes of Jewish history was as fundamental to Yerushalmi as it was to Scholem: it pervades Yerushalmi's writings on Sephardi history, on the dynamics of Jewish memory, and even on Freud, whom Yerushalmi restored to a fin de siècle Jewish context. Yet for Yerushalmi, one arrived at immanent causes in due consideration of the other options, and when he cited them it was not to polemicize against his predecessors but out of the belief in an organic relationship between Jewish ideas and Jewish history. Thus Yerushalmi wrote in *Zakhor* that "the dynamics of Jewish historiography after the Spanish expulsion are *immanent to itself and related to what had happened within Jewry*" rather than affected by "the spirit of Renaissance historical writing" (except, he admitted, in the case of Azariah de' Rossi). He also wrote that "if there are external influences" in Shelomoh Ibn Verga's *Sheveṭ Yehudah*, "they should be sought ... in the Iberian cultural milieu that was closest to him"; and regardless of how much information Jewish chroniclers had drawn from Italian sources, "the elements of humanist culture that crop up in the works of Joseph Ha-Kohen or Gedaliah Ibn Yahia"

---

[51] See Richard H. Popkin, "Jewish Messianism and Christian Millenarianism," in *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (Berkeley, 1980), and "Jewish-Christian Relations in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: The Conception of the Messiah," *Jewish History* 6 (1992): 163–77, and "Christian Jews and Jewish Christians in the 17th Century," in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard H. Popkin and Gordon M. Weiner (Dordrecht, 1994), and "Christian Interest and Concerns about Sabbatai Zevi," in *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, vol. 1, *Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World*, ed. Matt D. Goldish and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht, 2001); David B. Ruderman, "Hope against Hope: Jewish and Christian Messianic Expectations in the Late Middle Ages," in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman (New York, 1992). See also, in a different vein, Pawel Maceijko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755–1816* (Philadelphia, 2011). On Scholem's a priori posting of boundaries between Jews and Christians, see Silvia Berti, "A World Apart? Gershom Scholem and Contemporary Readings of 17th Century Jewish-Christian Relations," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 3 (1996): 212–24.

[52] Or, as Yerushalmi put it: "Before [reading Scholem], the only image I had of Sabbatianism was the unsympathetic one offered by Heinrich Graetz. ... But there, I discovered that Sabbatianism was not a crazy movement, that the phenomenon had an internal logic of its own [*une logique interne qui lui était propre*]." Yerushalmi and Goldberg, *Transmettre l'histoire juive*, 170–71.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

remain, in the end, "external trappings."[53] It was, in other words, either inadequate or mistaken simply to argue that Jewish chroniclers had absorbed the concerns of non-Jewish ones or clothed them in Jewish garb; what they wrote must be explained through the patient accumulation of detailed knowledge about their inner—Jewish—world.

But if Scholem was a model for Yerushalmi, the two differed in one important way. To put it reductively for the moment, Scholem was committed first and foremost to the history of ideas; Yerushalmi was committed equally to ideas and to people as vehicles for them. In Scholem's deeply dialectical periodization of Jewish history, for instance, Sabbatianism in the seventeenth century had "played a highly important part in creating a moral and intellectual atmosphere favorable to the reform movement of the nineteenth century."[54] Likewise, the Christianizing Jewish heresy known as Frankism, "after the French Revolution, became important in fostering the movement towards reform, liberalism and 'enlightenment' in many Jewish circles."[55] The ideas of each period contained the seeds of its successor. Yerushalmi did not disagree with the general arc Scholem had drawn: he, too, believed that the origins of Jewish modernity could be found in the kinds of religious ruptures the Cardoso brothers had witnessed and perpetuated. But if for Scholem the causality lay in kabbalah itself, for Yerushalmi it lay in social and institutional history:

> Against the backdrop of an age which produced a number of significantly "modern" developments in Jewry, [the Marranos] stand out as perhaps the first modern Jews. By virtue of the years each had spent in the Peninsula, these former Marranos constituted the

[53]Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 60 (my emphasis). See also Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Messianic Impulses in Joseph Ha-Kohen," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard D. Cooperman (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 460–87, in which he argues that sixteenth-century Jewish historiography was motivated by messianic tension. Cf. Robert Bonfil, "Some Reflections on the Place of Azariah de Rossi's *Meor Enayim* in the Cultural Milieu of Italian Renaissance Jewry," in Cooperman, *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, 23–48, and "The Historian's Perception of the Jews in the Italian Renaissance," *Revue des études juives* 143 (1984): 59–82, and "How Golden Was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?" in Ruderman, *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture*, 219–51, originally published in *History and Theory* 27 (1988): 78–102; and Amos Funkenstein, "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness," in *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley, 1993), 3–22.

[54]Gershom Scholem, "Sabbatianism and Mystical Heresy," in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1995), 299.

[55]Ibid., 304. For criticisms of Scholem's thesis, see Jacob Katz, "The Suggested Relationship between Sabbateanism, Haskalah, and Reform," in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History Presented to Alexander Altmann*, ed. Siegfried Stein and Raphael Loewe (University, AL, 1979), 83–100, reprinted in Jacob Katz, *Divine Law in Human Hands: Case Studies in Halakhic Flexibility* (Jerusalem, 1998), 504–30.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

> first considerable group of European Jews to have had their most extensive and direct personal experiences completely outside the organic Jewish community and the spiritual universe of normative Jewish tradition. ... In a time when Jews were barred from most European universities, or allowed only sporadic attendance at some, many former Marranos were alumni of Coimbra, Salamanca, Alcalá, or even Toulouse and Paris. Their emotional, religious, and educational experiences as Marranos were hardly calculated to prepare them for life in a Jewish society which, despite the cracks and breaches in its spiritual ramparts, still preserved largely intact the integrity of its traditions. In the return of Marranos to open Jewish life these antitheses were bound to produce interesting, and sometimes violent, repercussions.[56]

There was another difference: Scholem's explanation, for all its deep insight into the immanent spiritual forces driving Jewish history, still believed that the first Jewish modernizers had been eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germans. For Yerushalmi, the path to modernity began with the Sephardim.[57]

Yerushalmi's interest in the search for "immanence," then, arose neither from romantic nationalism as with Baer nor exclusively from Scholem's interest in dialectical immanence. It arose also from an effort to understand the totality of Jewish history in social and intellectual terms. To this kind of history, Yerushalmi had forged his commitment at the anvils of two of the great social historians of the twentieth century: Salo W. Baron and Lucien Febvre.

Baron (1895–1989) was Yerushalmi's doctoral advisor; it was under his guidance that Yerushalmi wrote the dissertation that became *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*.[58] Baron's influence is pervasive in Yerushalmi's attempt to write social and religious history as one and the same.[59] Beyond that, it is not as easy as one might think to connect the two historians and their wide-ranging work. Traces of Baron tend to crop up suddenly but

[56] Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 44.

[57] See Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson, eds., *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship* (Princeton, NJ, 1995).

[58] Yerushalmi, "Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Apologetics" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1966).

[59] Yerushalmi recounted that the only time Baron became angry with him was when, during one of their doctoral seminars, Yerushalmi expressed skepticism about another student's research on American Jewry and asked why he hadn't invested his energy instead in the more important Jewries of Europe and Asia. Baron kept Yerushalmi after class and asked him, with palpable irritation: "Yerushalmi, how could you say those things? You are speaking of the world's largest Jewish community!" Yerushalmi and Goldberg, *Transmettre l'histoire juive*, 40.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

unmistakably—as in Yerushalmi's understanding of the relationship between Jews and Christianity.[60]

In the prescient essay of 1928 in which Baron first decried the "lachrymose theory of pre-Revolutionary woe" that had characterized the Jewish historiography of the nineteenth century, he excoriated previous historians for having allowed their political engagement on the side of Jewish emancipation to shape their histories of Jewish life in medieval Christian Europe. For Heinrich Graetz, Simon Dubnow, and others, whom Baron blamed for depicting the medieval period in Jewish history as one of uninterrupted suffering, it had been self-evident that European Jews deserved legal equality and should never have been denied it in the first place.[61] For Baron, their approach was unassailable on political grounds but indefensible on historical ones: not only had they treated the Jews as objects and victims of history; they had also judged the Middle Ages by post-emancipation standards. In fact, Baron argued, medieval Jews enjoyed more privileges than most Christians and fewer obligations toward the state or the landholding aristocracy; their demographic increases were three times greater than those of the Christian populations of Europe; and their exclusion from the guilds channeled them into finance precisely during the rise of European banking and capital. As for emancipation, it had been not just a great equalizer but also a great trade-off: Jews' legal equality as individuals had deprived them of their privileges as an autonomous community, including the right to be judged by Jewish courts, exemption from military service, and freedom from direct state intervention.

Without Baron's "Ghetto and Emancipation," Yerushalmi could not have written the profoundly anti-lachrymose lecture in which he argued that the church, far from oppressing the Jews of premodern Europe, had in fact protected them. He delivered that talk in response to the Christian theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether, who held the church and its anti-Jewish policies responsible for the long road toward Auschwitz—a position that had been common among liberal Christians in various guises for several decades.[62] Yerushalmi countered that Auschwitz had, in fact, become possible not because of the church but because of the waning of the church's power in the twentieth century: only without theologically and politically robust papal and

[60]For a manifest rather than latent influence, see Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2nd ed., 18 vols. (New York, 1952–83), 4:36.

[61]Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?" *Menorah Journal* 14 (1928): 515–26.

[62]Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Antisemitism and Christian Theology," in *Auschwitz, Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, ed. Eva Fleischner (New York, 1977), 79–92. For a similar but less crudely teleological argument, see James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (London, 1934; repr., Philadelphia, 1961).

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

episcopal protection could the Jews have become victims of the state in the first place.[63] Viewing modernity as a great trade-off was pure Baron; seeing the Sephardim as having anticipated it won Yerushalmi Baron's admiration.[64]

The other important influence on Yerushalmi was Lucien Febvre, especially in his study of Rabelais.[65] Febvre had been among the first proponents of writing histories not just of land tenure and legal status but also of love, death, cruelty, and happiness.[66] As a believer in *histoire totale*, Febvre could not a priori have separated economic conditions from intellectual, aesthetic, or affective ones. His book on Rabelais is, on the face of it, a leisurely but methodical and relentless dismantling of the then-regnant view that Rabelais had been a radical atheist: Febvre pointed out the gross error of attributing to a sixteenth-century author ideas that would become thinkable only two hundred years after his death.[67] At its deepest level, it was also a call to historians to consider not merely the conscious beliefs of the people they studied but also their unconscious presumptions, intellectual horizons, recurrent patterns of thought and expression, and deeply held myths. If in *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto* Yerushalmi lingered on Cardoso's sources, arguments, and modes of expression—even when Cardoso was not particularly innovative, as in the *Philosophia Libera*, a work untouched by the scientific revolution of Galileo, Descartes, and Pascal[68]—Febvre was to blame: by dissecting Cardoso's writings, Yerushalmi wished to chart the limits of the thinkable in the seventeenth century in order better to gauge the century's intellectual horizons and, by extension, to gauge what was particular to Cardoso.[69]

[63] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Response to Rosemary Ruether," in Fleischner, *Auschwitz*, 97–107.

[64] See also Baron's foreword to Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, ix–x, where he quietly supports the thesis about the connection between the conversos and emancipation.

[65] Lucien Febvre, *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle: La religion de Rabelais* (Paris, 1942), translated by Beatrice Gottlieb as *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais* (Cambridge, MA, 1982).

[66] Lucien Febvre, "La sensibilité et l'histoire: Comment reconstituer la vie affective d'autrefois," *Annales d'histoire sociale* 3 (1941): 18; see also Yerushalmi and Goldberg, *Transmettre l'histoire juive*, 28.

[67] It is no longer so clear that the Enlightenment rejection of the supernatural did not have earlier precedents. See, e.g., David Wootton, "Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Unbelief in the Early Modern Period," *Journal of Modern History* 60 (1988): 695–730. Febvre himself partially refuted his own view in his *Origène et des Périers ou l'énigme du Cymbalum Mundi* (Paris, 1942).

[68] Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 232 (and, more generally, 232–51).

[69] Yerushalmi admitted that Febvre was "one of my heroes" (Yerushalmi and Goldberg, *Transmettre l'histoire juive*, 28–29); he also noted that he came to Febvre's work long before that of the rest of the Annales school. He comments on the relatively weak effect that *l'histoire des mentalités* has exerted on Jewish historiography in his preface to S. A. Goldberg, *Les deux*

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

## The Inquisitor and the Rabbi

Cases that offer a large body of writings by a single New Christian are few and far between: da Costa, Spinoza, the Cardoso brothers. They remain the most accessible guide to the converso predicament, even if they are exceptional, and even if autobiographical texts have to be treated with all the caution and skepticism due to any conversion narrative. What better way than a single person's oeuvre to trace the twists and evolutions in consciousness that allowed him or her to inhabit two different skins in a single lifetime?

Beyond those exceptional cases, the evidence for the religious life of conversos falls into two categories: inquisitorial records and rabbinic responsa. It should come as no surprise, then, that the question of these sources' trustworthiness has been one of the central debates in Sephardi history for more than a half century.

The epistemological questions are vexing: how reliable are the records of inquisitorial proceedings? Witnesses bore grudges; defendants lied; confessions were invented out of fear or extracted under torture; notaries kept records in languages different from the ones the defendants spoke; they synthesized the proceedings; inquisitors asked leading questions. But did the entire institution run in bad faith, with the ulterior motive of destroying its victims—in this case, of destroying the conversos as a class, regardless of whether they were really judaizing?

The responsa present their own set of problems. Rabbis had a professional mandate to treat the cases before them within the tight constraints of legal precedent, and that makes it exceptionally difficult to judge how rabbis in general hoped to treat the converso problem. Even more frustratingly for the historian, most of the responsa that have come down to us in edited collections are stripped of geographic, chronological, and prosopographic details that might illuminate the contingencies pushing back against the legal constraints within which rabbis wrote.

It should, of course, be obvious to any historian that the proposition here is not either/or: for one of these sources to be trustworthy, the other need not be tainted. Moreover, since individual conversos almost never appear in both sets of sources, it is not generally necessary to decide to trust one source over the other. One must, however, still decide which body of sources to trust first. Yerushalmi embraced the inquisitorial sources from the beginning of his career and never wavered. And that meant, perforce, believing that the accusations of judaizing that the Inquisition lodged against the conversos could not be dismissed a priori as false.

---

*rives du Yabbok: La maladie et la mort dans le judaïsme ashkénaze, Prague XVIe–XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1989), 8.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Here, too, Yerushalmi had precursors. As early as 1932, Cecil Roth had argued that conversos had judaized all along. Baer and Haim Beinart had weighed in on the same side, and, as Miriam Bodian has recently put it, "no serious scholar today would argue that cryptojudaizing was entirely a fabrication of the Inquisition."[70] The scholar who did the most to entrench this position was I. S. Révah, for whom the Inquisition did not invent crypto-Judaism because it did not have to: judaizing was alive and well on the Iberian peninsula, even if (in Révah's view) full-blown rabbinic Judaism was not. For Révah, inquisitors' accounts of judaizing could be trusted. The Inquisition was an institution of law that enjoyed jurisdiction over baptized Christians, not Jews, so it had a legitimate interest in eradicating judaizing behavior; its proceedings were carried out according to rules; it handed down acquittals as well as condemnations.[71] True, as with any institution, it mattered who carried out its procedures. But if a few inquisitors were sinister tyrants, most were mere functionaries—some cruel, others competent, still others lazy.[72] Crucially for the professional historian, inquisitors made the records of the tribunals for the sole benefit of other inquisitors. The motivation to falsify the record was nil and the archive itself was practically impervious to taint—so Révah had argued.[73]

On the other side of this debate were Ellis Rivkin (1918–2010), António José Saraiva, and Benzion Netanyahu (1910–2012). Each, for slightly different reasons, cast doubt on the conversos' crypto-Judaism and, by extension, on the reliability of inquisitorial sources—or, vice-versa, they cast doubt on the reliability of inquisitorial sources, and thus on the conversos' crypto-Judaism.

Rivkin was the most radically skeptical. He held that "the Marranos were imprisoned, pauperized, and burnt because of a structural need" reducible to royal centralization, confiscation of wealth, and demotion of an entire class

---

[70]Cecil Roth, *A History of the Marranos*, 5th ed. (New York, 1992), 168–94; Yitzhak Baer, "The Jews and the Converso Problem," chap. 12 in *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol. 2, and "The Inquisition," chap. 14 in *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol. 2; Haim Beinart, *Anusim be-din ha-inquiziṣiyah* (Tel Aviv, 1965), and "The Converso Community in 15th Century Spain," in *The Sephardi Heritage: Essays on the History and Cultural Contribution of the Jews of Spain and Portugal*, vol. 1, *The Jews in Spain and Portugal before and after the Expulsion of 1492*, ed. R. D. Barnett (New York, 1971), 425–56, and "The Converso Community in 16th and 17th Century Spain," in Barnett, *The Sephardi Heritage*, 1:457–78; Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington, 1999), 174–75 n. 4.

[71]Révah, "Les Marranes," 44.

[72]Ibid., 46.

[73]Ibid., 47. This is not quite the same as the view that the Inquisition in general was relatively benign, for which see Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (New Haven, CT, 1998).

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

from positions of power. "Whatever was necessary to achieve that end was resorted to, irrespective of its truth or falsity." For that reason, "the documents of the Inquisition cannot be used as evidence for the religious life of the conversos, but are a source only for what the Inquisition wanted the people to believe about the conversos."[74] Rivkin proposes limiting the utility of historical sources to their function as records of the institutions that produced them, a seemingly reasonable stance. But in fact he betrays a lack of firsthand knowledge of the Iberian context when he says that the purpose of inquisitorial documents was to make "the people" believe the conversos were judaizing: "the people" never entered into it. Saraiva, too, was wedded to a structural argument that foregrounded the conversos' economic function vis-à-vis the Crown; since I have touched on his views above I will not linger on them here.[75]

Netanyahu's reasons were different from either of these, and they were also more troubling. He, too, argued that the conversos had not judaized and that "the aim of the Inquisition ... was not to eradicate a Jewish heresy from the midst of the Marrano group, but to eradicate the Marrano group from the midst of the Spanish people."[76] For Netanyahu, what had motivated the Inquisition was anti-Judaism—even racial antisemitism—and inquisitorial sources, as the records of an extensive conspiracy, lacked empirical value for the study of converso history.[77] Rabbinic responsa, by contrast, for Netanyahu demonstrated that crypto-Judaism had been wiped out within a few generations of 1391.

It is, of course, the prerogative of the historian to evaluate his or her sources with a double standard. At the same time, it must be said that responsa are a particularly delicate kind of source. Who can really fathom the motives of the rabbinic legal specialists who struggled to handle the converso problem as best they could? Jewish law, like any legal system based on precedent, must adapt old rulings to new and unforeseen situations; the very

[74] Ellis Rivkin, "The Utilization of Non-Jewish Sources for the Reconstruction of Jewish History," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 48 (1957): 193.

[75] See n. 7 above.

[76] Benzion Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain: From the Late XIVth to the Early XVIth Century according to Contemporary Hebrew Sources* (New York, 1966), 4.

[77] Yerushalmi did not deny the centrality of racial antisemitism in fifteenth-century Spanish history; on the contrary, he attempted to analyze it, but not as a motive for the establishment of the Inquisition. See his *Assimilation and Racial Anti-semitism: The Iberian and the German Models*, Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture, no. 26 (New York, 1982), in which he takes for granted the naturalness of racial categories. For the argument that these categories too must be historicized, see David Nirenberg, "Conversion, Sex, and Segregation: Jews and Christians in Medieval Spain," *American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 1065–93, and "Enmity and Assimilation: Jews, Christians, and Converts in Medieval Spain," *Common Knowledge* 9 (2003): 137–55.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

authority of the system is predicated on the appearance of seamless and incremental development, unaffected by the vagaries of personal predisposition or mere contingency. At the same time, wherever the conversos migrated, halakhic authorities found themselves facing unprecedented dilemmas that required a considerable degree of legal independence and ingenuity, and even, at times, a cavalier disregard for precedent.[78]

To picture the situation concretely, consider the following situation, culled from a pair of responsa by Yom Ṭov Ṣahalon of Safed (1559–1639) cited by both Netanyahu and Yerushalmi.[79] Ṣahalon was asked to adjudicate a case on which several other rabbis had already offered their opinions. Around 1610, a converso couple fled Portugal and embraced Judaism in Italy or the Ottoman Empire. (As usual in responsa, details such as names of people and places appear only if legally relevant.) The couple had been married in Portugal as practicing Christians, hence in a Christian rite. On fleeing the peninsula and arriving in an openly Jewish community, they were married again in a second, Jewish, ceremony, probably at the behest of local rabbis, since by the early seventeenth century rabbinic authorities were more than a little concerned about the halakhic validity of converso unions.

But then the husband died. Since the couple had no children, the widow was now subject to the biblical laws of levirate marriage. These required her either to marry her dead husband's brother in order to continue the family's male line, or else to be freed from her levirate obligation through a legal procedure called *ḥaliṣa*. Only her levir—her brother-in-law—could perform *ḥaliṣa*. Without his consent to it, the widow would remain unable to remarry—in Jewish legal terms, she would be an *'agunah* or "chained woman."

The dilemma was that the levir was living in Portugal as a Christian. He refused to leave, despite the widow's persistent efforts to convince him to do so. The excuse he offered was that he was married with a wife and children of his own. It is unclear whether he simply did not wish to leave them alone or whether, equally understandably, he balked at participating in a Jewish rite

[78] See Gerson Cohen, review of *The Marranos of Spain*, by Benzion Netanyahu, *Jewish Social Studies* 29 (1967): 178–84. For more recent manifestations of the same debate, see John Edwards, "Was the Spanish Inquisition Truthful?," review of *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*, by Benzion Netanyahu, and *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain*, by Norman Roth, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 87 (1997): 351–66.

[79] Yom Ṭov Ṣahalon, *She'elot u-teshuvot* (Venice, 1694), nos. 148 and 201. See Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 26–27 n. 39; Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain*, 75 n. 194; and H. J. Zimmels, *Die Marranen in der rabbinischen Literatur: Forschungen und Quellen zur Geschichte und Kulturgeschichte der Anussim* (Berlin, 1932), 152. This précis is taken from my analysis of the responsa and their rabbinic precedents in an unpublished paper, "A Seventeenth-Century Portuguese Marrana and Her Recalcitrant Levir."

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

that might lead to his denunciation to the Inquisition. Either way, the widow seemed destined to remain an *'agunah* and alone for the rest of her days. In practice, she faced the choice of remaining alone as a Jew or flouting the halakhah by remarrying as a Christian.

And so, from the annals of Jewish law, the rabbinic authorities charged with deciding her case recruited a deus ex machina. According to classical rabbinic texts, the widow of a man who dies childless incurs no levirate tie if his brother is found not to be Jewish.[80] Simple, then: declare the brother not to be Jewish—after all, he was living as a Christian and had no intent of leaving the peninsula—and free her from her levirate tie. But there lay the rub: to declare a converso not Jewish would risk flouting legal precedent or setting a dangerous new one. Starting in the early Middle Ages, the halakhah had unequivocally considered the status of "Jew" to be ineradicable by conversion. It was a matter not of biology but of legal designation and jurisdiction: if you were born Jewish, you remained subject to rabbinic authority regardless of whether you happened to be baptized and the church now possessed authority over you—in other words, you remained Jewish even if the church had the power to make your double status highly inconvenient for you.[81] Centuries of rabbinic consensus could not simply be eradicated with the stroke of a pen.

One can probably sense where this is leading. For the rabbis to follow this medieval precedent and consider the levir ineradicably Jewish would also have been to force the widow to remain alone for the rest of her days. But if she remarried in contravention of her *'agunah* status, the rabbis would have had no choice but to rule her children the product of a forbidden relationship (*mamzerim*) and therefore marriageable only to other *mamzerim*. To save her from legally mandated solitude—and, in practice, probably to save her from abandoning Judaism again—one would indeed have had to wipe away the levir's Jewishness with a stroke of the pen and risk jeopardizing the legal status of tens of thousands of conversos by needlessly casting doubt on their Judaism.

So what did the rabbis do? Three of them ruled that the levir was to be considered a gentile for specific reasons, citing either his refusal to leave Portugal or broader doubts about the conversos' Jewishness. In other words, they chose to amputate the body to save the limb. But Yom Ṭov Ṣahalon demurred, opting to amputate the limb to save the body—which sounds like the right thing to do, unless you are the widow. This ruling condemned her to *'agunah* status while confirming the peninsular conversos as Jews "even

[80] Or, more exactly, the levirate tie is never incurred in the first place if the brothers' mother had converted to Judaism after her first son's conception: Mishnah Yevamot 11:2.

[81] Jacob Katz, "'Though He Sinned, He Remains an Israelite'" [in Hebrew], *Tarbiẓ* 27 (1958): 203–17.

This content downloaded from 137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

unto a thousand generations." (Ultimately, however, the ending was happy for everyone, since the widow took matters into her own hands and remarried while remaining committed to Judaism. Faced with a fait accompli, in a second responsum Ṣahalon ruled that her marriage was permitted and her children not *mamzerim* on the basis of a rabbinic loophole permitting the retroactive annulment of levirate ties.)[82]

Impossible dilemmas such as this one repeatedly crossed the desks of rabbis in Italy, Amsterdam, and the Ottoman Empire throughout the early modern period. Is it better to sacrifice one individual's happiness so as to uphold a halakhic precedent and avoid tainting an entire group, or to act humanely in an individual case on the theory that how the halakha regards the peninsular conversos is a moot question, above all to the peninsular conversos themselves? Under such circumstances, rabbinic decisions were subject to a welter of considerations—legal conventions, short-term contingencies, long-term implications.

Yerushalmi, faced with early modern rabbis' divergent opinions on a single case, attempted to grasp the dilemmas they faced.[83] For Netanyahu, by contrast, the rabbis had declared the levir not Jewish because of "their conviction that the Marrano camp as a whole was Christianized beyond recovery."[84] There was no crypto-Judaism; the Inquisition had continued to pursue the conversos not in order to wipe out the threat of Judaism from the body Catholic but in order to destroy the New Christians as a class.[85] The difference between the two historians goes beyond the question of whether rabbinic responsa are trustworthy as sources; the question is rather one of context and empathy.

As for inquisitorial sources, Yerushalmi's views are clear in his work on the conversos. While Isaac Cardoso was never tried by the Inquisition (as Yerushalmi put it: "We can hardly allow our thirst for documents to begrudge him his good fortune"[86]), a friar in Italy had denounced him as a judaizer to the Inquisition in Venice; this was the only reason Yerushalmi knew that he had served the Spanish Crown as a physician. Though the denunciation in Venice came to nothing (in Spain it would surely have led to disaster), it left the archival traces on which Yerushalmi depended for information about Cardoso's peninsular incarnation.[87] Likewise, the only reason Yerushalmi knew

[82]"Thus," wrote Yerushalmi, even Ṣahalon "felt obliged to ignore his theoretical position out of concern for the plight of the woman." Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 27 n. 39.

[83]Ibid., 26–27.

[84]Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain*, 73.

[85]See further Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 22 n. 34.

[86]Ibid., xiv.

[87]Ibid., 210–11.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

that Cardoso had actively proselytized among other conversos in Spain was that the court chronicler Mendez Silva had told his inquisitors as much while they were torturing him.[88] To Yerushalmi, there was no reason to mistrust inquisitors as sources of information on what the peninsular conversos were or were not doing: they took no less deep and abiding an interest in the question than the rabbis did.

In embracing the validity of inquisitorial sources, Yerushalmi followed not only Révah but also his own contribution to the question in a paper he had written for Baron early in his doctoral studies.[89] It was a study of the first papal inquisition, in southern France, which would serve as a procedural and institutional model for the later Iberian inquisitions. Yerushalmi offers a close reading of an inquisitorial manual written by Bernard Gui (1261/62–1331), a Dominican friar who served as inquisitor of Toulouse between 1307 and 1323. The work summed up the state of the inquisitor's art based on previous manuals, archival documents, and Bernard's own experience in the tribunals.[90] Yerushalmi focused on the section of the treatise dealing with baptized Jews, since Bernard's tenure had been bracketed by two expulsions of the Jews from France, after which many Jews had chosen baptism. Some fled to the Crown of Aragon, while others reentered France or remained there and relapsed—hence the Inquisition's interest in them. Most temptingly for the Jewish historian, Bernard also discussed the practices and beliefs of some of the Jewish *relapsi*, including rites of "rejudaization" unattested anywhere in Jewish literature.

Yerushalmi recognized the significance of Bernard's work for Jewish history on several counts: its synthesis and establishment of inquisitorial precedent, procedure, and theory; its information about the *relapsi*; and its origins in fourteenth-century France. Jewish conversion had never become a mass phenomenon there, and hence Bernard was innocent of the ulterior motives ascribed to the later Iberian institutions.[91] Yerushalmi thus asked all the same questions of Bernard's manual that had pervaded the scholarship on Iberia: "How much credibility can be attributed to Bernard's data on Jewish beliefs and practices? What were his sources of information? Should we not assume that his own bias precludes any accurate presentation of the true facts?" His

[88]Ibid., 181.

[89]Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "The Inquisition and the Jews of France in the Time of Bernard Gui," *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (1970): 317–76. The essay dates to 1961; see Baron, *Social and Religious History*, 13:305–6 n. 6.

[90]This is the same Bernard Gui later immortalized in Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (New York, 1980). Yerushalmi used to amuse himself and his graduate students by noting that he had discovered Bernard Gui before Umberto Eco did but had not sold nearly as many books.

[91]Yerushalmi, "Inquisition and the Jews of France," 335.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

answer to all these questions was that even if we cannot trust Bernard's manual as a transparent record of reality, there are a number of reasons not to dismiss it a priori.

> Bernard Gui's treatise is not a polemic against heretics or against Jews. Nor is it a propaganda tract meant to be circulated among a wide audience. It is solely and exclusively a guide for inquisitors, meant to be used by them as a reference work in the course of their official duties, and destined for their eyes alone. As such it must necessarily aim at the greatest possible degree of accuracy. Conscious invention or distortion of information would only mislead the inquisitorial tribunals and thus defeat the very purpose of the work. We must, therefore, begin with the assumption that Bernard Gui recorded what he believed to be the actual facts. Certainly it is possible that Bernard's own sources sometimes contained faulty information, or that in the process of transmission facts may have been distorted. But it would be a serious methodological error to reject information on Jewish matters merely because it comes to us from the pen of an inquisitor.[92]

Inquisitorial sources are, then, to be embraced, even in "Jewish matters." Not that Yerushalmi did not know that the historian must interpret those sources carefully; nor was he unaware of the problems associated with information obtained under conditions of psychological pressure or physical violence. Indeed, Bernard Gui, in discussing the varying degrees of coercion admissible in declaring a conversion to Christianity to be valid, says himself that only if the Jew has been led to the baptismal font by means of "absolute force" is he or she permitted to return to Judaism. In practical application, this clause was obviously a matter of the inquisitor's discretion: how should one define "absolute"? Among the *relapsi* Bernard discusses was a German Jew of Toulouse named Barukh who had been baptized on threat of death by a band of Pastoureaux during the Shepherds' Crusade; the Inquisition had not allowed him to return to Judaism on the reasoning that the force had not been "absolute" after all.[93] But inquisitorial justice is not the same as the trustworthiness of inquisitorial documents. This is how Yerushalmi later put it:

> We can easily concede that [the] purposes [of the Iberian inquisition] were not exclusively religious but were mixed with certain political and pragmatic considerations. Still, one fact is

[92]Ibid., 354.

[93]On the Shepherds' Crusade, see David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), 43–51.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

> germane: the archival records of the Inquisition were kept in the very strictest secrecy for the use of inquisitors alone, and remained so until the abolition or the Holy Office in the nineteenth century. To regard these documents as a means of spreading the fiction of crypto-Judaism for propaganda purposes presents a strange dilemma. It would mean that, in recording the details of judaizing practices into the dossiers of the accused, the inquisitors were purposely transcribing a tissue of lies for the perusal of other inquisitors who were engaged in the same conspiracy. But this is manifestly absurd. Certainly we must approach these documents critically, bearing in mind the possibility of false denunciations, motives of confiscation, confessions extracted under torture, and similar factors. This is merely an invitation to the exercise of scholarly caution. It cannot possibly justify an a priori rejection of masses of inquisitorial documents spanning some three centuries and ranging from Spain and Portugal to Goa in the east and Chile in the west. Of distortions there may be many, but the recording of Judaizing confessions was not an intramural game. To view the inquisitors as involved in what amounts to a universal conspiracy of fabrication *is to ignore the mentality of men of a bygone day*, and to flatter them with Machiavellian intentions and capabilities somewhat beyond their reach. ... The inquisitorial notaries did not level the recorded testimonies of witnesses to conform to one another, nor did they omit or disguise the doubts which even some of the inquisitors themselves entertained as to the guilt of the accused. Even in [cases] where justice was perverted, the documents were not.[94]

Yerushalmi's assessment of inquisitorial documents no doubt draws on many intellectual sources. His insistence on treating his subjects with understanding included not just Jews but also inquisitors. Révah's writings had convinced him to regard the Inquisition as an institution of law.[95] Baron had predisposed him to give the church the benefit of the doubt; he would not

[94]Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 23–24 (my emphasis). More recently, Mark Gregory Pegg, in writing about the southern French Inquisition a century before Bernard Gui, has emphasized that inquisitorial procedure represented a juridical advance over the judicial ordeal in that it was reproducible and relied on a human arbiter of innocence and guilt rather than on divine intervention. Mark Gregory Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels: The Great Inquisition of 1245–1246* (Princeton, NJ, 2001), 49.

[95]One imagines that Yerushalmi was also aware of research on the history of the "Black Legend," though he does not cite it. See, e.g., Benjamin Keen, "The Black Legend Revisited: Assumptions and Realities," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 49 (1969): 703–19.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

have considered antisemitism an explanatory factor in Jewish history before exhausting other options. (He used to quote Baron's dictum that antisemitism is a topic essentially external to the history of the Jews.)[96] His debt to Febvre forced him to consider whether inquisitors could possibly have had in mind the fabrication of vast quantities of documentation or confessions. But there is also temperament to consider. Yerushalmi was not an adept of postmodern aporias. For him, there was no reason to jettison the baby of recoverable fact with the bathwater of a methodologically challenging source.

## The Miller and the Marrano

The questions raised in the debate over inquisitorial sources obviously extend well beyond the history of the converso diaspora. They resurface in discussions concerning those accused of heresy and witchcraft; they recur in any study of records produced by loci of institutional power; they even touch on the very foundation of the historian's craft. Yerushalmi did not discuss what was at stake in these issues. But Carlo Ginzburg has done so in a way that can clarify some of the methodological stakes for Yerushalmi.

In his study of the Friulian miller Domenico Scandella, known as Menocchio, Ginzburg reconstructed not just the books that Menocchio had read but also how he had understood them. He did so by comparing the records of the Sant'Uffizio of Udine, which tried Menocchio for heresy between 1583 and 1599, with printed popular literature of the period. In the parallax between the miller's library and his description of his readings to his inquisitors, Ginzburg found the vestiges of a tenacious "peasant religion" that was "fundamentally pre-Christian" and "deeply rooted in the European countryside."[97] Ginzburg had made a similar breakthrough in his book on the Benandanti, visionaries of the Friuli tried for witchcraft during the same period: the inquisitorial and learned sources on their rituals seemed hopelessly impenetrable, but he discovered a breach in the edifice "by way of the discrepancies between the questions of the judges and the replies of the accused—discrepancies unattributable to either suggestive questioning or ... torture."[98]

[96] Yerushalmi and Goldberg, *Transmettre l'histoire juive*, 122.

[97] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore, 1992), 112. See also Andrea del Col, ed., *Domenico Scandella Known as Menocchio: His Trials before the Inquisition (1583–1599)*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Binghamton, NY, 1996).

[98] Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, 6. See also Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore, 1983).

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Ginzburg was well aware that the epistemological questions he faced extended far beyond the Inquisition. He also knew that his answers ran contrary to the historical approaches that had been taken in the wake of the linguistic turn.

> The fact that a source is not "objective" (for that matter, neither is an inventory) does not mean that it is useless. ... But the fear of falling into a notorious, naive positivism, combined with the exasperated awareness of the ideological distortion that may lurk behind the most normal and seemingly innocent process of perception, prompts many historians today to discard popular culture together with the sources that provide a more or less distorted picture of it.... A number of scholars have begun to ask themselves whether "popular culture exists outside the act that suppresses it." The question is rhetorical, and the reply is obviously negative. This type of skepticism seems paradoxical at first glance since behind it stand the studies of Michel Foucault, the scholar who, with his *Histoire de la folie*, has most authoritatively drawn attention to the exclusions, prohibitions, and limits through which our culture came into being historically. But on second glance, it is a paradox only in appearance. What interests Foucault primarily are the act and the criteria of exclusion, the excluded a little less so.[99]

Like Yerushalmi, Ginzburg defended inquisitorial sources on the basis of their utility in providing evidence for otherwise undocumentable phenomena. Rivkin, Saraiva, and Netanyahu, for Yerushalmi as for others, were guilty of the form of historical bias known as the genetic fallacy—dismissing the inquisitorial records by virtue of their origins. For Ginzburg, Foucault was guilty of something else: washing his hands of the signified, and with it the historian's duty to consider both sides of the power relationship, not just the hegemonic but also the subaltern.[100]

---

[99]Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, xvii–xviii.

[100]In the second paragraph of the original Italian edition of *The Cheese and the Worms*, Ginzburg explains that he is setting out to investigate Menocchio as a member of the "classi subalterne del passato" (subaltern classes of the past), and he adds a footnote explaining his deliberate choice of the term in reference to Gramsci and his avoidance of "le connotazioni paternalistiche più o meno deliberate di 'classi inferiori'" (the more or less deliberately paternalistic implications of the term "lower classes"). Carlo Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi* (Torino, 1976), xi, xxvi n. The implication is that the historian has a professional duty to investigate the "excluded" and that only thus can one understand the broader power dynamics at work in society as a whole. The published English translation obscures all this by rendering "classi subalterne" as "subordinate classes" (Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, xiii).

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Ginzburg admitted, of course, that the burden of proof fell on the historian to demonstrate that peasant culture was recoverable at all.[101] But between the two poles that marked the archival and printed sources, on the one hand, and the lost oral culture of the agrarian Friuli, on the other, lay a wide spectrum. The poststructuralist iteration of the divorce between the signifier and the signified placed its trust in the written record, not in some vanished, irrecoverable past. But this was too simple an answer to the complex problems the historian faced. Ginzburg believed that it was possible to mediate between them by means of a sensitive and careful act of reading.

Yerushalmi was certainly aware of this problem, even if he expressed it in pragmatic rather than theoretical terms: "Let us recognize at the outset that few phenomena can be more elusive of historical scrutiny than a secret religion whose subterranean life has been documented largely by its antagonists."[102] True, Cardoso's writings had survived, while Ginzburg had to reconstruct Menocchio's beliefs through a painstaking comparison of the books he read and what he was reported to have told his inquisitors about them. But just as Ginzburg used that interpretive parallax to reconstruct a lost world, so Yerushalmi found in Cardoso's oeuvre traces of Judaism while he was still on the peninsula and traces of Christianity once he had escaped it.

Both Ginzburg and Yerushalmi, then, held that the historian could penetrate the surface of the records left by the Inquisition to reconstruct not just the "act of exclusion" but also the "excluded." Both distanced themselves from the "naive positivism" that was one potential outcome of such an approach; but they were both neopositivistic in that they set out to recover an underground culture only partly attested in written sources, even to recover (à la Febvre) the interpretive horizons of their subjects. And perhaps most significantly of all, both insisted upon the utility of studying the individual case. For Yerushalmi, the single case was superior to the broader-gauge study: Cardoso had "ultimately forced me to open afresh the question of how much postbiblical Jewish information was available to certain Marranos on the Peninsula" and enabled him to answer it by provisionally sparing him the duty of considering the conversos "as a class."[103] Ginzburg put the matter this way:

---

[101] Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, 154–55. And he did not convince everyone: see, e.g., Perry Anderson, "Nocturnal Enquiry: Carlo Ginzburg," in *A Zone of Engagement* (London, 1992), 207–29, criticizing Ginzburg's later book *Ecstasies* for its presumption of an unchanging rural world. See Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (Chicago, 1991), originally published as *Storia notturna* (Turin, 1989). But in the end Anderson's admiration outweighs his criticisms: see Perry Anderson, "The Force of the Anomaly," *London Review of Books*, April 26, 2012, 3–13, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v34/n08/perry-anderson/the-force-of-the-anomaly.

[102] Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 23.

[103] Ibid., 35.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

> At a time when virtual teams of scholars have embarked on vast projects in the *quantitative* history of ideas or *serialized* religious history, to undertake a narrow investigation on a solitary miller may seem paradoxical or absurd, practically a return to handweaving in an age of power looms. . . . [But] even a limited case (and Menocchio certainly is this) can be representative: in a negative sense, because it helps to explain what should be understood, in a given situation, as being "in the statistical majority"; or, positively, because it permits us to define the latent possibilities of something (popular culture) otherwise known to us only through fragmentary and distorted documents, almost all of which originate in the "archives of the repression."[104]

The Cardoso study was a microhistory and can be productively understood as one. Yerushalmi's embrace of the individual case and the inquisitorial archive was less polemical than Ginzburg's; it also seems more naive, in large part because of a generalized reluctance to engage in lengthy theoretical discussions.[105]

The closest Yerushalmi came to an abstract discussion of method was his claim, in another context, that he had little "faith in the facticity of archives" or in "the archival document as somehow the ultimate arbiter of historical truth." By this he did not mean that archives are of necessity tainted; he meant that archives of themselves do not carry secrets but can only be made to yield them by the experienced historian. He said this in a lecture on the Freud archive, especially that part of it that was (and, in part, still is) off-limits to researchers: Series Z, which contains correspondence and other documents sealed by Freud's executors for many decades into the future. The lecture

[104]Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, xx–xxi (emphasis in original).

[105]Neither author commented extensively on the other in print. For Yerushalmi's comments on Carlo Ginzburg's *History, Rhetoric, and Proof: The Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures* (Hanover, NH, 1999), see Yerushalmi and Goldberg, *Transmettre l'histoire juive*, 82; and on Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Series Z: An Archival Fantasy," *JEP, European Journal of Psychoanalysis* 3–4 (1996–97), http://www.psychomedia.it/jep/number3-4/yerushalmi.htm. For Ginzburg's comments on Yerushalmi, see Carlo Ginzburg, "Distance and Perspective: Two Metaphors," in *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance* (New York, 2001), 139–56. On the problem of neopositivism, literary theory, and history in Ginzburg's work, see Anderson, "Force of the Anomaly," where he observes (in a way perhaps even more applicable to Yerushalmi than to Ginzburg) that the concern with epistemology, or rather the rejection of postmodernism and poststructuralism, may have served "to parry the danger of a scepticism that could permit denial of the Judeocide." He then goes on to suggest more convincing etiologies for what he calls Ginzburg's neopositivism, but the observation raises an irony in light of Yerushalmi's early reception in France, on which see Sylvie Anne Goldberg, "Yerushalmi in a French Key: (French) History and (French) Memory," in this issue.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

was Yerushalmi's attempt to offer the perspective of a professional historian, a veteran of archives, on the near-messianic hopes—of either revelation or scandal—surrounding the sealed segments of Freud's papers.[106] Yerushalmi argued that Series Z had little chance of revealing anything revolutionary about psychoanalysis or about Freud. In the process, he laid out the qualities that rendered archives good hunting grounds for the historian: they should be "naive," that is, "created and maintained for purposes other than those which we, as historians, seek," and they should be dusty, "handled by as few people as possible" since their organization. By these criteria, the Freud archives, carefully redacted by Freud and then curated by Anna Freud and Kurt Eissler, were hopelessly tainted.

As usual, Yerushalmi approached the question with empathy for all the characters involved. Why should Freud *fille* and Eissler not wish to protect the reputation of Freud *père*, to shape his legacy and memory for future generations? But his empathy had limits: he had no patience for "those on either side of the Freudian fence who think that within Series Z is to be found a decisive resolution to any of the really burning problems that face psychoanalysis and the writing of its history."[107] These individuals, he wrote, "are deluding themselves with a credulous, positivist conception of archives more appropriate to the nineteenth century than to ours." Archives are nothing without good questions and careful interpreters to answer them:

> What does understanding Freud's teaching mean? For me, as a historian, it entails coming as close as possible to his own intentions. ... At least in his published works Freud was consciously trying to communicate various ideas to his readers. That these works, like all texts, also contain latent meanings of which he was unaware, that they can be approached with a variety of hermeneutic strategies, does not absolve us from rigorously seeking their conscious intentionality which, alone, can keep us from flying off the deep end. For that, not only is the value of a correct text self-evident, but any information relevant to its evolution, whether through variants or revisions, or through letters in which Freud discusses work in progress. It is in this sense that the letters in Series Z may make their most important contribution. But even then the archives are only an aid. Ultimately the student must bring to an understanding of Freud's work his or her philological, literary, and historical instincts, and an entire culture derived from other fields.[108]

---

[106] Yerushalmi, "Series Z."

[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid. This essay (in its lecture form, delivered at the conference "Memory: The Question of Archives" held under the auspices of the Freud Museum and the Société Internationale

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

This is a statement of neopositivist method if there ever was one. It also appears, at first glance, to gloss lightly and euphemistically over a longstanding principle of literary interpretation: the "death of the author" and the consequent irrecoverability of authorial intent, which had dominated literary theory in some form since Wimsatt and Beardsley's 1946 essay "The Intentional Fallacy" (and which probably had much to do with the entrenchment of Freud and psychoanalysis in the study of literature).[109] Most historians, Yerushalmi among them, would concede that authorial intent is irrecoverable, and that even if it were susceptible of reconstruction it could hardly exhaust the question of motive. But let us admit openly that most historians also believe they have a duty to provide at least some informed speculation on motive, to the extent that they can gauge the contours of the thinkable in the period they study. Even Foucault admitted as much.[110]

This was as close to a statement of method as Yerushalmi ever came. But if he did not engage in extensive theorizing on the epistemological questions that dogged his field, it was not out of unreconstructed positivism. There were standards of writerly elegance to uphold; there was the ultimate goal of lucidity. He himself used to deny that he followed a historical "method";[111] but

---

d'Histoire de la Psychanalyse, London, June 3–5, 1994) apparently inspired Jacques Derrida to read Yerushalmi's *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven, CT, 1991) and then write *Mal d'archive: Une impression freudienne* (Paris, 1995), translated by Eric Prenowitz as *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago, 1998). In a "debate" at the New School in New York (on which see Yerushalmi and Goldberg, *Transmettre l'histoire juive*, 102), Yerushalmi trumped Derrida's claims about Freud's attenuated Jewishness with a reading of the Hebrew inscription that Freud's father had written in the Bible he gave him on his thirteenth birthday. Derrida admitted that Yerushalmi was better equipped than he to interpret the inscription. Yerushalmi later described the encounter laconically this way: "He analyzed my book in a very original fashion, as was his way. Some of the things he said were things that hadn't even occurred to me. However, he sometimes saw things in a way that didn't convince me at all. Among other things we disagreed on the question of the Hebrew inscription Freud's father had written in the copy of the Bible that he gave to Freud as a gift. I saw this as an indication that Freud knew Hebrew well, and he thought that I was trying to depict Freud as having stronger ties to Judaism than he really had. He even argued that I was really trying to circumcise Freud." See Alit Karp, "A Void—or Avoiding the Issue," *Haaretz*, October 15, 2004.

[109] William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *Sewanee Review* 54 (1946): 468–88.

[110] Most obviously in Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris, 1966), translated by Alan Sheridan as *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1970).

[111] "I have no 'method,' except in the very limited sense in which I continue to believe that what one calls a 'philological-historical approach' or a 'critical approach' can lead one to close approximations of the truth. And even if one may always object that one is inevitably still in the realm of the probable rather than of certainty, I am no less convinced that this approach can lead closer to the truth. But beyond this, I really don't have a method in the sense of sociology

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

that is not to say he did not hold a coherent theoretical position. If his writing Jewish history "from within" appears to run contrary to his trust in what inquisitorial manuals and trials said about Jews, the contradiction is only an apparent one. What undergirds them both is his commitment to *l'histoire des mentalités*. In the essay in which Yerushalmi posited the opposition between Jewish history "from within" and "from without," he argued that Western medievalists, by virtue of linguistic barriers and inherited biases, "are constrained ... to view the Jews in an essentially external manner."[112] But he equally criticized historians of the Jews who failed to consider the total context of the period whose Jews they researched. As much as he followed Baer and Scholem in his conviction that Jewish history must be explained in Jewish terms, he also followed Baron in his conviction that Jewish history can never be explained only in Jewish terms—and that entering into the minds of the non-Jews who determined the constraints (even severe ones) under which Jews operated was sometimes the shortest route to understanding the Jews' situation as they themselves might have understood it.

## Immanence and Perspective

Perhaps the best way to conclude this attempt to understand Yerushalmi's rendering of Sephardic history "from within" is to offer one of his own early attempts to emerge from the dark mines of archival and historiographic complexity with the gleaming, lucid gem of a durable generalization.

One of Yerushalmi's first published works was a review of an edited volume called *The Sephardi Heritage*. The book is one of those lumpy collections that reflect the interests of the scholars who happen to have contributed to them rather than recasting a field or putting forward what is really important about it. Instead of simply offering the hurried reader a précis of the volume's contents, as many reviewers might have done, Yerushalmi instead sketched out his own ideas about what was missing from it. And what was missing, he thought, was an attempt to determine whether the culture of Sephardi Jews was really sui generis, and if so, how. His answer:

> This was, in effect, the only Jewry which lived in such long and intimate contact with both Christendom and Islam, a confluence as decisive for the Jews as for Spain itself. From this fundamental datum so much else derived: the proverbial hubris and elitism

or anthropology, even though I read the literature in those fields." Yerushalmi and Goldberg, *Transmettre l'histoire juive*, 31; see also ibid., 79–80, 125–26.

[112]Yerushalmi, "Medieval Jewry," 2.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

> of a Jewry which was not only justly proud of its cultural accomplishments, but which had constantly to define itself in the face of the triumphalist taunts of both the other militant faiths; hence also the particular vitality and richness of Jewish religious polemic in Spain; the creative and tragic tension of being caught up between the opposing sides of the Reconquista; the unprecedented scope of power and autonomy which that protracted struggle made possible for Jews on the one hand, and the desperate resistance to the intense missionary drive of the victorious religion, fired in that very struggle, on the other. . . . The need to take into account such subtler subjects as the historical myths of the Sephardim; the assumptions and aspirations of the courtier class; yearning for Zion, coupled with an unusual sense of permanence and attachment to the soil of Spain. And if one is to turn to culture, then not only in order to garner the fruits of the Jewish-Arabic symbiosis in the Cordoban Caliphate, but to examine the filters which determined what was admitted and what left out. If to evoke the Jewish astronomers and physicians at Christian courts, then also with a view to understanding how these men could live simultaneously in two radically different spheres. Finally, if, as is surely imperative, the vital testimony of popular culture is embraced as well, then it is not sufficient to trace the linguistic peculiarities of Ladino, nor to document the extent to which otherwise lost medieval Spanish balladry can be retrieved from post-expulsion Sephardic romances. Something else must be recovered—a sense of that social reality in the cities of medieval Spain which enabled the Jews to absorb so much of the folk culture and sensibility of their neighbors as to endow their descendants with an indelible hispanicity even in dispersion. In short, the "Sephardi heritage" *transcends* the sum of its intellectual achievements and cultural contributions.[113]

One can easily see, in retrospect, that Yerushalmi's entire problem boils down to the book's title: "heritage" smacked to him of "contributions," and "contributions" of apologetics at worst, antiquarianism at best. What was needed, instead, was a bit of transcendence, of the kind that for Yerushalmi came only from a deep understanding of immanence.[114]

[113] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, review of *The Sephardi Heritage*, vol. 1, ed. R. D. Barnett, *Speculum* 48 (1973): 730–33 (my emphasis). See also Yerushalmi's *Sephardic Jewry between Cross and Crescent* (Cambridge, MA, 1979).

[114] What may also have been needed was a truly synthetic history of Sephardi Jews; Yerushalmi never produced one, even though he probably could have, and I wonder whether

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

I leave it to the reader to judge whether the *Aufhebung* of immanence and transcendence that characterizes modern historical praxis—the idea "that the past must be understood both on its own terms and as a link in the chain that in the last analysis leads to ourselves"—is nothing but "a secularized projection of the Christian ambivalence toward the Jews," as Carlo Ginzburg argues in "Distance and Perspective."[115] Historical perspective, his argument runs, has its origins in Christian supersessionism—in the notion that Old Testament types are at once themselves and their Christian antitypes. "Our way of knowing the past is," he concludes, "imbued with the Christian attitude of superiority toward the Jews."[116] When Ginzburg claims that premodern Jews wrote history in a far less distanced manner, it is an idea he borrows from Yerushalmi's *Zakhor*, though Ginzburg also notes that this can be true "in any culture" possessed of "collective memory."[117] If Ginzburg's opposition between a "Jewish" and a "Christian" historical praxis is tenable as a loose heuristic, then Yerushalmi's writings—the tension they maintain between "immanence" and perspective—might be characterized as no less syncretic or even Marranistic than Cardoso's.

Then again, one need not accept these definitions of historical praxis as "Jewish" and "Christian," respectively.[118] If *Zakhor* was partially responsible for such an essentialized conception of Jewish historiography until the modern age, Yerushalmi's writings on Iberian Jews are, in the last analysis, unencumbered by such essentialism. Even though Yerushalmi traced Cardoso's judaizing all the way back to Madrid itself, he did so only because he refused to dismiss as tainted the inquisitorial documentation that provided evidence of it; and even though Cardoso allowed Yerushalmi to reopen the case of the conversos' Jewish commitments, he never once claimed that Cardoso was even remotely representative of the converso experience.[119] After all, Yerushalmi died still believing that "rabbinic Judaism has not yet found its

---

he was reluctant in part because he did not know Ottoman Turkish. His work on the conversos focused solely on Christian Europe, though this was hardly the case in his graduate seminars.

[115]Ginzburg, "Distance and Perspective," 148.

[116]Ibid., 155; cf. ibid., 154.

[117]Ibid., 141.

[118]Ginzburg mitigates the essentialism as regards the Augustinian idea when he says that "the context in which ideas originate only partly determines the uses to which they are later put" (ibid., 155). Yerushalmi's and Ginzburg's mutual interest in the question of a specifically "Jewish" historiography also points to the shared influence of Arnaldo Momigliano. See, e.g., Arnaldo Momigliano, *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Middletown, CT, 1977; repr., Chicago, 2012), and "The Origins of Universal History," *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, 3rd ser., 12 (1982): 533–60.

[119]As he put it, "Orobio de Castro is not Cardoso, and nor is Cardoso Orobio de Castro." Yerushalmi and Goldberg, *Transmettre l'histoire juive*, 79. See Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro* (Oxford, 1989).

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Gershom Scholem"—a historian who could throw off the mental shackles of what normative and prescriptive texts said Jews should have been doing and thinking and take seriously instead what they were in fact doing and thinking.[120] Cardoso was important to Yerushalmi not because he allowed him to demonstrate, against Netanyahu and Saraiva, that conversos also judaized, but because the path "back" to Judaism that Cardoso took was so littered with Christian debris that it forced Yerushalmi—and in turn forced his readers—to rethink the very horizons of Judaism at the dawn of modernity.

**Acknowledgements** Warm thanks to Miriam Bodian, Piero Capelli, Lois Dubin, Yaacob Dweck, Richard Kagan, David Nirenberg, and Gabrielle Spiegel for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.

[120]Yerushalmi and Goldberg, *Transmettre l'histoire juive*, 172.

This content downloaded from
137.83.217.149 on Sun, 14 Feb 2021 15:33:04 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms