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ENTANGLED STORIES: THE RED JEWS IN PREMODERN YIDDISH AND GERMAN APOCALYPTIC LORE

by

Rebekka Voß

“Far, far away from our areas, somewhere beyond the Mountains of Darkness, on the other side of the Sambatyon River...there lives a nation known as the Red Jews.”¹ The Red Jews are best known from classic Yiddish writing, most notably from Mendele’s *Kitser masoes Binyomin hashlishi* (*The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third*). This novel, first published in 1878, represents the initial appearance of the Red Jews in modern Yiddish literature. This comical travelogue describes the adventures of Benjamin, who sets off in search of the legendary Red Jews.² But who are these Red Jews or, in Yiddish, *di royte yidelekh*? The term

This article is part of a broader study of the Red Jews in Jewish popular culture from the Middle Ages through modernity. It is partially based on a chapter from my book, *Umstrittene Erlöser: Politik, Ideologie und jüdisch-christlicher Messianismus in Deutschland, 1500–1600* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011). Several postdoctoral fellowships have generously supported my research on the Red Jews: a Dr. Meyer-Struckmann-Fellowship of the German Academic Foundation, a Harry Starr Fellowship in Judaica/Alan M. Stroock Fellowship for Advanced Research in Judaica at Harvard University, a research fellowship from the Heinrich Hertz-Foundation, and a YIVO Dina Abramowicz Emerging Scholar Fellowship. I thank the organizers of and participants in the colloquia and conferences where I have presented this material in various forms as well as the editors and anonymous reviewers of *AJS Review* for their valuable comments and suggestions. I am especially grateful to Jeremy Dauber and Elisheva Carlebach of the Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies at Columbia University, where I was a Visiting Scholar in the fall of 2009, for their generous encouragement to write this article. Sue Oren considerably improved my English. The style employed for Romanization of Yiddish follows YIVO’s transliteration standards. Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Yiddish, Hebrew, German, and Latin are my own. Quotations from the Bible follow the JPS translation, and those from the Babylonian Talmud are according to the Hebrew-English edition of the Soncino Talmud by Isidore Epstein.

1. Sholem Aleichem, “The Red Jews,” in *Radiant Days, Haunted Nights: Great Tales from the Treasury of Yiddish Folk Literature*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2005), 307.

2. Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, *Tales of Mendele the Book Peddler: Fishke the Lame and Benjamin the Third*, ed. Dan Miron and Ken Frieden, trans. Ted Gorelick and Hillel Halkin (New York: Schocken Books, 1996). The main character’s quest for the Ten Lost Tribes emulates the famous twelfth-century traveler Benjamin of Tudela as well as the mid-nineteenth-century Romanian explorer Israel Joseph Benjamin; hence his designation as “the third.”

denotes the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, the ten tribes that in biblical times had composed the Northern Kingdom of Israel until they were exiled by the Assyrians in the eighth century BCE. Over time, the myth of their return emerged, and they were said to live in an uncharted location beyond the mysterious Sambatyon River, where they would remain until the Messiah's arrival at the end of time, when they would rejoin the rest of the Jewish people.³

Why, however, do the Ten Tribes take on this specific color in Yiddish, a unique feature that is not present in any other Jewish language?⁴ This choice of color is by no means random, nor is it merely a humorous stylistic device that originated in nineteenth-century Eastern European Jewish tradition, as the standard dictionaries suggest.⁵ This particular attribute had in fact been part of Yiddish linguistic usage long before it was employed by Mendele and later by Sholem Aleichem for their satirical strategies in the Haskalah spirit. To understand why the Jews beyond the Sambatyon are deemed "red" in Yiddish, we must turn back several centuries—namely to the world of shared, albeit contested Jewish and Christian apocalyptic beliefs in late medieval and early modern Germany.

In recent years, Israel Yuval, Peter Schäfer, Daniel Boyarin, David Biale, and others have shown that Judaism and Christianity, during their formative phases in late antiquity, arose from a shared literary, cultural, and religious setting. Furthermore, these scholars have shed light on a Jewish-Christian discourse and interaction that accounts for the interdependence of central aspects of the two religions and cultures through the Middle Ages and well into modernity.⁶

3. The literature on the Ten Lost Tribes is vast. The classic work is still Adolph Neubauer, "Kibuzim 'al 'inyene aseret ha-shvatim u-vne Moshe," *Kovez 'al Yad* 4 (1888): 9–74; Neubauer, "Where Are the Ten Tribes?" *Jewish Quarterly Review* 1 (1889): 14–28, 95–114, 185–201, 408–23. For a summary of the legend's development with an extensive bibliography, see Dan Ben-Amos and Dov Noy, eds., *Folktales of the Jews*, vol. 1, *Tales from the Sephardic Dispersion* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006), 450–72. The most recent study of the Ten Lost Tribes is Zvi Ben-Dor Benite's *The Ten Lost Tribes: A World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Pamela Barmash, "At the Nexus of History and Memory: The Ten Lost Tribes," *AJS Review* 29, no. 2 (2005): 207–36, discusses the historical fate of the northern tribes.

4. With the exception of a few translations from Yiddish; e.g., Mendele's Hebrew version of *The Brief Travels of Benjamin the Third* (1896) uses the term "Red Jews" (*yehudim 'admonim*).

5. Cf. the standard dictionaries of modern Yiddish, such as Uriel Weinreich, *Modern English-Yiddish Yiddish-English Dictionary* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988); Yitskhok Niborski and Bernard Vaisbrot, *Dictionnaire Yiddish-Français* (Paris: Bibliothèque Medem, 2002). Over a century ago, Simon Menahem Lazar, *Hidot ha-hagadot ha-nifla'ot 'al davar 'aseret ha-shvatim u-pitronan* (Drohobycz: Ha-mizpe, 1908), 79, had already erroneously confined the term to Polish Jewry.

6. Israel Yuval's *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006) is a model of such argumentation. See esp. chap. 5 on the close relationship between Passover and Easter. See also Peter Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

The Red Jews provide an additional example of a common language among Jews and Christians, reflecting the premodern circulation of ideas.⁷

This article explores how the idea of the Red Jews—a vernacular characterization of the Ten Lost Tribes among both Jews and Christians in the German lands—developed in, and adapted to, changing religious, cultural, and political contexts from the time of its origin in the later thirteenth century. This article begins with the evolution of this expression, its etymology, and the legend of the Red Jews in premodern Jewish-Christian polemics. As in many other cases of dialogical formation in Judaism and Christianity, the belief in the Red Jews that was shared by Jews and Christians has an entangled history. While I am primarily applying the concept of *histoire croisée* as developed in France by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann⁸ to this study of the Red Jews, another methodological approach contributes to my understanding of this term and its use among medieval and early modern Jews and Christians: Amos Funkenstein's counterhistory, a polemical strategy defined as "the systematic exploitation of the adversary's most trusted sources against their grain." By adopting the adversary's motifs and giving them a new meaning, it aims to deconstruct his collective narrative and thus negate his identity.⁹ Counterhistory can in fact explain both the

7. The works of Israel Yuval and Ivan Marcus in the mid-1990s mark a turning point in the reading of Jewish history; Yuval, *Two Nations* (originally published in Hebrew in 2000, partially based on older articles from the preceding decade); Ivan Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996). The old notions of Jewish insularity and passive victimhood have been surpassed by a close, dynamic interaction of Jews with neighboring cultures. Scholars in different areas of Jewish history have adopted this new perspective; recent books are: Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Kenneth Stow, *Theater of Acculturation: The Roman Ghetto in the Sixteenth Century* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2001); Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Micha Perry, *Masoret ve-shinui: Mesirat yeda be-kerev yehude ma'arav Eropā bi-yeme ha-benayim* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2010), among others. This new historiographic trend has been discussed by David Berger, "A Generation of Scholarship on Jewish-Christian Interaction in the Medieval World," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 38, no. 2 (2004): 4–14, and Moshe Rosman, *How Jewish Is Jewish History?* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007).

8. Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory* 45 (2006): 30–50. For an application of this method to Jewish history, see Micha Perry, "The Imaginary War between Prester John and Eldad the Danite and Its Real Implications," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 41, no. 1 (2010): 1–23; Rebekka Voß, *Umstrittene Erlöser: Ideologie, Politik und jüdisch-christlicher Messianismus in Deutschland, 1500–1600* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011). A similar approach has been adopted by Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 229–35; David N. Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 162–70. For an overview of the recent debate over the transnational concepts of *histoire croisée*, cultural transfer, and entangled history, see Hartmut Kaelble, "Die Debatte über Vergleich und Transfer und was jetzt?" *H-Soz-u-Kult*, February 8, 2005, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/forum/id=574&type=artikel> (accessed January 27, 2011).

9. Amos Funkenstein, "History, Counterhistory, and Narrative," in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution,"* ed. Saul Friedländer, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 69.

Christian origins of the Red Jews and their subsequent Jewish adoption and adaptation. Following this analysis, I place the discussion into a broader framework, addressing general questions about the interpenetration of Jewish and Christian end-time expectations in Reformation Germany, and conclude with a brief overview of the *Nachleben* of the Red Jews in modernity.

THE ORIGINS OF THE RED JEWS

The term “Red Jews” first crops up in German during the second half of the thirteenth century, and the first text to mention them is the courtly epic *Der Jüngere Titurel* (The Younger Titurel), dated to the 1270s. The author claims to have encountered the Red Jews in Asia, where they are enclosed on one side by high mountains called Gog and Magog, after two peoples, and on another side by a river filled with stones that flows so wildly that any attempt at crossing is futile. If the savage Red Jews were not safely contained, he continues, “swift and wild is their host over the whole world,” threatening “Christians and heathens” with their military power.¹⁰ As Andrew Gow has shown in his seminal study of the Christian legend of the Red Jews that was immensely popular in German literature and theology from the late thirteenth century through the early Reformation period, the Christian construct of the Red Jews is essentially a distorted variant of the Jewish legend of the Ten Lost Tribes.¹¹ The German fable conflates the Jewish story with two other unrelated traditions, one from classical antiquity and one from the Bible. According to the *Alexander Romance*, Alexander the Great locked away the barbarian peoples, the “unclean nations,” behind a legendary barrier in Asia in order to protect the civilized world. This episode was merged with the Jewish-Christian tradition of the apocalyptic enemies, Gog and Magog, going back to various prophetic references, especially Ezekiel 38–39 and Revelation 20.¹² With the Latin translation of the influential Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius at the latest (ca. 700 CE), Western Christendom generally equated Gog and Magog with the very same peoples confined by Alexander.¹³ Finally,

10. Albrecht von Scharfenberg, *Der Jüngere Titurel*, ed. Werner Wolf (Bern: Francke, 1952), st. 6124–27.

11. Andrew Gow, *The Red Jews: Antisemitism in an Apocalyptic Age, 1200–1600* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), esp. chaps. 2–3.

12. The two names Gog and Magog first appear together in the book of Ezekiel, but with Magog as a geographical location (“Gog, of the land of Magog,” Ezekiel 38:2). However, in other noneschatological references in the Bible (Genesis 10:2) and later sources, Magog is referred to as a person, e.g., in the Book of Jubilees and the Dead Sea Scrolls. While the Greek translation of the Septuagint renders Ezekiel 38:2 as “Gog and the land of Magog” (my emphasis), the book of Revelation has arrived at the well-known identity of Gog and Magog as the peoples of the apocalypse, the last enemies of Christ: “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison./And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle” (Revelation 20:7–8). Cf. Sverre Bøe, *Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38–39 as Pre-Text for Revelation 19, 17–21 and 20, 7–10* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

13. Gow, *Red Jews*, 25. In detail, Andrew R. Anderson, *Alexander’s Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Enclosed Nations* (Cambridge: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1932), chap. 2, esp. 49–50. See also George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* (1956; repr. New York: Garland Press, 1987); David

in the late twelfth century, the Parisian scholar Petrus Comestor explicitly associated the trapped peoples, i.e., Gog and Magog, with the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.¹⁴ The gradual fusion of these three tales, Gow concludes, yielded a powerful myth about the Ten Tribes as the “unclean apocalyptic Jewish destroyers of Christianity.” Christians in Germany were terrified of this horrific people, which they later labeled the “Red Jews,” who would go forth during the last days to wreak havoc on believers. As henchmen of Antichrist, Jesus’s archenemy and the personification of evil, however, they would triumph for only a short time before being defeated by Jesus upon his return to earth.

While the vicious role of the Ten Tribes was known throughout late medieval Christian Europe, only in German literature, where the legend was especially powerful and more intensely anti-Jewish than anywhere else, were the Ten Tribes depicted with distinctive coloring. Only here was a specific name given to the imaginary Jewish people of the apocalypse that has no parallel in other European languages.¹⁵ The sixteenth-century French scholar Guillaume Postel was actually puzzled by the term “*Judaei rubri*” (Red Jews). When he came across this legend in a Latin translation of the convert Victor of Carben’s ethnography of Jewish life and ritual (originally published in German in 1508), he asked whether this people was a “*figmentum*,” Victor’s own “invention.” Unable to find corroborating proof-texts, Postel made a note in the margin of his copy of the book, which has been preserved in the National Library of France: “*Ubi est regestum?*”—“Where is this written?”¹⁶ Obviously, Postel was unfamiliar with this name for the Ten Tribes that was employed in Germany.

Victor of Carben, the convert from Judaism to Christianity who naturally could draw on both Jewish and Christian sources indeed seems to reflect Jewish parlance as well, rather than merely using a German-specific term to appeal to a Christian, German-speaking audience. Victor informs his readers that his former coreligionists, “young and old,” believed in the existence of a Jewish kingdom in the Caspian Mountains. To them, “these Jews are the mighty Red Jews.”¹⁷

J. A. Ross, *Alexander Historiatus: A Guide to Medieval Illustrated Alexander Literature*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1988). The standard edition of Pseudo-Methodius is still Ernst Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen: Pseudomethodius, Adso und die tiburtinische Sibylle* (1898; repr. Turin: Bottega d’Erasmus, 1976), 72–75. A more recent critical edition is Willem J. Aerts and George A. A. Kortekaas, eds. *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius: Die ältesten griechischen und lateinischen Übersetzungen*, 2 vols. (Leuven: Peeters, 1998).

14. Gow, *Red Jews*, 43–44. The relevant passage is from Comestor’s *Historia Scholastica*, *ibid.*, app. B, no. 13.

15. See *ibid.*, esp. chap. 4 and app. A, for numerous examples.

16. Victor of Carben, *De vita et moribus Iudaeorum Victoris de Carben, olim Iudaei nunc Christi miseratione christiani, libellus* (Paris, 1511), fol. 78r (BnF, A-2963 [5]); cited according to Jean-Claude Margolin, “Sur quelques ouvrages de la bibliothèque de Postel annotés de sa main,” in *Guillaume Postel 1581–1981: Actes du Colloque International d’Avranches 5–9 septembre 1981* (Paris: Editions Guy Trédaniel, 1985), 128.

17. Victor of Carben, *Hier inne wirt gelesen wie Her Victor von Carben. Welicher eyn Rabi der Juden gewest ist zu Cristlichem glawbn komen: Weiter vindet man dar Jn. eyn Costliche disputatz eynes*

Another convert, Antonius Margaritha from Regensburg, confirms that the Jews in that period called the Ten Lost Tribes “Red Jews.” They had little Hebrew and German (i.e., Yiddish) booklets that told “many lies and fairy-tales” about them and the Sambatyon River beyond which they lived.¹⁸ German Jews, like their Christian contemporaries, obviously were also familiar with the term and the idea of the Red Jews, and by the sixteenth century the expression “Red Jews” had become a vernacular name for the Ten Lost Tribes among Jews in the German lands.

While the earliest extant Yiddish texts that include the term “Red Jews” stem from the last two decades of the sixteenth century, the writings of converts move the earliest textual evidence for its Jewish use to the beginning of the century. Margaritha’s account indicates, however, that by 1530 the term had been widely used among Jews for so long that its etymological origins had fallen into oblivion. Margaritha adds that he is quite curious *why* they used this particular term. The impression we get from the convert sources that “Red Jews” was the common expression for the Ten Tribes among the Jews of Central Europe (that to them the two terms were indeed interchangeable)¹⁹ is corroborated by editors and translators of Yiddish and Hebrew stories about the Red Jews in the sixteenth and

gelerten Cristen. vnd eyns gelerten Juden. dar inne alle Jrthumb der Juden durch yr aygen schriftt aufgelist werden [Köln, 1508], 35: “Fragestu einen Juden er sy iung oder alt.... Antwort der Jude wir haben noch einen konig vff gensyt Babilonien ist den gebirg Kaspion.... die selben iuden sint die Roten iuden vnd starcken.” The book is better known by its 2nd edition title, *Juden Büchlein* (n.p., 1550). In contrast, Gow, *Red Jews*, 136, reads the use of this term in the convert writings merely as a reflection of Christian parlance. While this is plausible, the Yiddish texts presented below indicate that Victor of Carben and others drew the term from specifically Jewish sources and in fact reflect contemporary Jewish thought. For the use of convert sources to accurately illustrate Jewish thought and practice, despite a polemical bias, cf. methodologically, e.g., Elisheva Carlebach, *The Anti-Christian Element in Early Modern Yiddish Culture* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2003), 15; Yaacov Deutsch, “Von der Iuden Ceremonien: Representations of Jews in Sixteenth-Century Germany,” in *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, ed. Dean P. Bell and Stephen G. Burnett (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006), 339; Maria Diemling, “Anthonius Margaritha and His ‘Der Gantz Jüdisch Glaub,’” in Bell and Burnett, *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation*, 327.

18. Antonius Margaritha, *Der ganz Jüdisch glaub mit sampt ainer gründlichen vnd warhafften anzeygung/ Aller Satzungen/ Ceremonien/ Gebetten/ Haymliche vnd öffentliche Gebruch/ deren sich dye Juden halten/ durch das gantz Jar/ Mit schönen vnd gegründten Argumenten wyder jren Glauben* (Augsburg, 1530), fol. 98r: “Zum sechsten trösten sy sich gar vast der zehen geschlecht die der künig Assirios vertribe/...das nimptt mich aber groß wunder/ warumb man dise zehen geschlecht die rotten Juden haist/ vnnd also hoffen sy gar vast/ dise rotten Juden sollen kommen vnd sye erlösen/ sy haben auch klaine Hebreische vnd teutsche büchlin darinnen sy gar vil lügen vnd merlin von disen zehen geschlechten schreiben/ sie schreiben auch von einem bach Sabbathion genant.”

19. Margarita, e.g., uses the two terms side by side, without being aware of any difference in their meaning; *ibid.* Note that in Older Yiddish, the expression “Ten Tribes” was used alongside “Red Jews”; e.g., in the seventeenth-century travelogue by Gershon b. Eliezer ha-Levi Yiddls, *Gliles 'erez Yisroel: 'Im tirgum le-'ivrit ba-shem 'igeret ha-kodesh*, ed. Yitzhak ben Zvi (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1953) and the Yiddish adaption of *Sefer 'Eldad ha-Dani*, first printed in Constantinople, 1668, to name only a few.

seventeenth centuries who refer to older versions of the legend, some of which they claim were found in rare and old Ashkenazi prayer books.²⁰ Certainly these stories had already circulated as oral tales for many years before having been composed as written narratives.²¹ In sum: Although, we don't have firsthand evidence that German Jews were already using the term "Red Jews" in the late Middle Ages, it makes sense that they did. It can also be assumed that the term "Red Jews" became part of Yiddish linguistic usage soon after this name for the Ten Tribes appeared in the German vernacular of the surrounding society in the late thirteenth century. Indeed, it seems to have directly passed from German into Yiddish given that the expression and, most importantly, the tale that developed around it relates directly to Christian tradition, as I will argue.²²

SHARED BELIEFS

The Ten Tribes traditionally assumed a role in Jewish apocalyptic thought that was almost identical to their function in the medieval Christian version of the dramatic events of the Last Days. Already after the destruction of the Second Temple, rabbinical sources attest to the expectation that these mighty warriors, led by Messiah ben Joseph (Ephraim), would finally free Israel from the yoke of Edom, i.e., Rome,²³ which would soon become equated with Christianity. The idea of the Christians' apocalyptic doom is based on the biblical prophecies about the fall of Edom. Before giving birth to the twins Esau/Edom and Jacob/Israel, God announced to their mother, Rebecca: "Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23). The older son is Esau and the younger one Jacob, who eventually takes possession of his brother's birthright as the firstborn, thus becoming the father of the people of Israel. The Bible translates the hatred between the two brothers into the struggle of two ancient peoples, the Israelites and the Edomites, which reaches its resolution in accordance with Genesis 25 when David, king of Israel, subjugates Edom. However, in the first century CE, when the Jewish kingdom lost its political independence to Rome and the Temple was destroyed, the typology had to be interpreted differently: Edom became synonymous with

20. See below on the textual history of the story. Margaritha was probably referring to these prayer books ("gepet vnd gesang büchlin"), which he claimed contained information about the Sambaton; Margaritha, *Gantz Jüdisch glaub*, fol. 98r (note in the margin).

21. Cf. Sara Zfatman, *Nisu'e adam ve-sheda: Gilgulav be-motiv ba-siporet ha-'amamit shel yehude Ashkenaz ba-me'ot ha-16-ha-17* (Jerusalem: Akademon Press, 1987), 24 n. 27.

22. Such a connection was already assumed by Zfatman, "'Igrot be-yidish mi-sof'ha-me'a ha-16 be-'inyan aseret ha-shvatim," *Kovez 'al Yad* n.s. 20 (1982): 249 n. 35.

23. Bereshit Rabba 99:2 (ed. Theodor-Albeck 1274); B. Baba Batra 123b. Cf. Yuval, *Two Nations*, 34–35. On the figure of the first Messiah, see David Berger, "Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism: Messiah Son of Joseph, Rabbinic Calculations, and the Figure of Armilus," *AJS Review* 10, no. 2 (1985): 143–48; Michael Fishbane, "Midrash and Messianism: Some Theologies of Suffering and Salvation," *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Marc Cohen (Leiden, E. J. Brill: 1998), 57–71.

Rome, and the elder's fall was deferred into the messianic future. Israel's redemption was now contingent upon the fall of Edom/Rome. Rome's Christianization in the fourth century CE added a religious layer of interpretation: in addition to being a political entity, an empire, Edom/Rome would henceforth be identified with the Christian church as well.²⁴

The seventeenth-century Protestant theologian Hermann Fabronius includes the Jewish scenario for these apocalyptic wars in his description of *Various Superstitious Ceremonies and Curious Customs Practiced by the Dispersed Jews*: prior to the arrival of Messiah ben David, the powerful Messiah ben Joseph, a descendant from one of the Lost Tribes, will "come from the land beyond the Sambatyon River...together with the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, and some of the children of Gad..., go into battle, attack the King of Edom..., that is, the Roman Empire."²⁵ Messiah ben Joseph will die in battle, but his campaign is a preparation for the reign of the Davidic Messiah. During the Middle Ages and early modern times, a hopeful rumor would occasionally circulate among European Jews that the messianic army made up of their distant brothers was about to end their oppression in the Diaspora.²⁶ In Germany, the Jews knew that "when the exile will come to an end, they [the Red Jews] will also come to our aid then."²⁷ They were sure that "the Red Jews would have come long ago and liberated us,"²⁸ if it weren't for the Sambatyon that isolated them from the rest of the world. According to legend, that river was impossible to cross during the six ordinary days of the week due to its roaring waters and the stones, sand, and rubble that it carried. It rested on the Sabbath only, when the Jews were prohibited from traveling across. Not until the

24. The typology is discussed at length in Yuval, *Two Nations*, chap. 1. See also Gerson D. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," in *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 243–69; Günter Stemberger, "Die Beurteilung Roms in der rabbinischen Literatur," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, ed. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase vol. 19 [2] (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1979), 338–96; Mireille Hadas-Lebel, "Jacob et Esau ou Israel et Rome dans le Talmud et le Midrash," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 201 (1984): 369–92; Solomon Zeitlin, "The Origin of the Term Edom for Rome and the Roman Church," *Jewish Quarterly Review* n.s. 60, no. 3 (1970): 262–63.

25. Hermann Fabronius, *Bekehrung der Juden: Vnd Von Mancherley Abergläubischen Ceremonien/ vnd seltzamen Sitten/so die zerstreuten Juden haben: Vnd wie sie in der Christenheit zu dulden seyn* (Erfurt, 1624), 47–48.

26. Cf. David Kaufmann, "A Rumour about the Ten Tribes in Pope Martin V's Time," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 4 (1892): 503. See also Perry, "Imaginary War," 21. On the hopes that Jews pinned on the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century, identifying the Mongols as the Ten Lost Tribes, see Israel Yuval, "Jewish Messianic Expectations towards 1240 and Christian Reactions," in Schäfer, *Toward the Millennium*, 105–21; Yuval, *Two Nations*, 284–87; Sophia Menache, "Tartars, Jews, Saracens and the Jewish-Mongol 'Plot' of 1241," *History: The Journal of the Historical Association* 81 (1996): 319–24. See also the older work by Harry Breslau, "Juden und Mongolen 1241," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* 1, no. 1 (1887): 99–102.

27. Isaac Rivkind, "The Historical Allegory of Rabbi Meir Shatz" [in Yiddish], *Studies in Philology* 3 (1929): 19. This quote is from one of the oldest extant Yiddish texts mentioning the Red Jews, dating from the late sixteenth century. For the textual transmission, see in detail below.

28. Victor of Carben, *Hier inne wirt gelesen*, 36. Cf. Margaritha, *Gantz Jüdisch glaub*, fol. 98r.

end of time will God stop the wild guardian of the Lost Tribes and allow them to traverse the Sambatyon.²⁹

In sixteenth-century Germany, the Red Jews, as both Jews and Christians called the Ten Lost Tribes there, played an important role in both Jewish and Christian apocalyptic expectations and popular thought. Given that exacting revenge on the Christians was a central feature of Ashkenazi messianism in medieval and early modern Central Europe, as Israel Yuval has shown, the Jews longed for their red brethren as much as eschatological avengers as in the role of messianic saviors. The Red Jews would be instrumental in God's ultimate revenge for Edom's many sins against his people. After all, according to the medieval concept of *translatio imperii*, the Holy Roman Empire succeeded the Roman Empire proper and was the legitimate continuation of the *Imperium Romanum*, so that the Jews in Germany not only lived under Christian dominion but also suffered Edom's immediate rule.³⁰ The menace to the Christian world that emanated from the Red Jewish kingdom is described by Victor of Carben, who offers an interesting variant on the Exodus account:

These Jews are the mighty Red Jews. There are even more of them than there are Christians in all of Christendom, just as you Christians are now more than we are, as you will well realize then [at the end of times]. Because from the twelve tribes of Israel, not more than two, that is, the Tribes of Reuben and of Gad [!], have come out [of Egypt], and all these lands [of exile] are full of them. Numbers 32. From this, you can tell how immense the host of the Ten Tribes who remain enclosed there must be, [they] who can still help us and who will free us from our imprisonment.³¹

29. See the literature on the Ten Tribes above in note 3. The ninth-century account of the traveler Eldad ha-Dani, who claimed to be from the lost tribe of Dan, was instrumental for the consolidation of the heroic image of the Ten Tribes in the Middle Ages; Joseph Dan, *Ha-sipur ha-'ivri bi-yeme ha-benayim: 'iyunim be-toldotav* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), 54–55. The Hebrew text has been edited by Abraham Epstein, "Eldad ha-Dani: Seine Berichte über die zehn Stämme und deren Ritus in verschiedenen Versionen nach Handschriften und alten Drucken mit Einleitung und Anmerkungen nebst einem Excursus über die Falascha und deren Gebräuche," in *Kitve Avraham Epstein*, ed. Abraham M. Habermann, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1965), 1:1–211. English translation by Elkan N. Adler, *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages: 19 Firsthand Accounts* (1930; repr., New York: Dover, 1987), 4–21.

30. On the concept of "vengeful redemption," see Yuval, *Two Nations*, chap. 3, esp. 93–109. Yuval contrasts it with the idea of a "proselytizing redemption" in the Sephardi world, which seems to have stressed the possibility of Gentiles acknowledging the God of Israel to avoid being annihilated at the end of time; *ibid.*, 109–15. Both events, however, are inherent parts of traditional Jewish apocalypticism and are therefore found in the eschatology of both communities, albeit with differing emphases. Cf. Abraham Grossman, "'Ha-ge'ula ha-megayeret' be-mishnatam shel hakhme Ashkenaz ha-rishonim," *Zion* 59 (1994): 325–42. For an example of the concept of apocalyptic vengeance outside the German-speaking lands, see Perry, "Imaginary War," 21–22. On the concept of *translatio imperii*, see Heinz Thomas, "Translatio Imperii," *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, ed. Norbert Angermann (Munich: Artemis & Winkler, 1997), 8:944–46.

31. Victor of Carben, *Hier inne wirt gelesen*, 35.

For both premodern Jews and Christians, the Red Jews did not merely belong to the realm of legend, but were real entities. Through the Reformation, their existence somewhere in the unknown vastness of the world was a virtually undisputed fact. The Red Jews were considered a political-military entity like any other nation. Until well into the sixteenth century, they could be found on numerous world maps, usually located in the far northeastern reaches of Asia. They disappeared from cartography only when geographical knowledge of distant regions of the world became more detailed and accurate during the age of exploration. On the vernacular *mappa mundi* by Hans Rüst from Augsburg, which was published as a pamphlet in three different editions in 1480, contains this Jewish people even twice in two different places and under two different names (fig. 1). As the German inscription in the East (i.e. the top of the map) explains with reference to the Alexander legend, Gog and Magog are contained behind the Caspian mountain range, where a figure wearing a Jewish hat represents their empire.³² Hence their Latin cartographic name: “enclosed Jews” (*iudei clausi*).³³ Hebrew and Yiddish texts from the Middle Ages and the early modern period likewise refer to the Ten Tribes as “enclosed” or “hidden” (*genuzim*)—perhaps by the Sambatyon?³⁴—and the Jewish Alexander legend also links their dwelling place to the “mountains of darkness.”³⁵ In the south, an island in midst of the red colored Red Sea is explicitly

32. “Berg caspij verschlossen gog magog.”

33. Andrew Gow, “Gog and Magog on Mappaemundi and Early Printed World Maps: Orienta-lizing Ethnography in the Apocalyptic Tradition,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 2, no. 1 (1998): 68. See also Gow, “Kartenrand, Gesellschaftsrand, Geschichtsrund: Die legendären iudei clausi/inclusi auf mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Weltkarten,” in *Fördern und Bewahren: Studien zur euro-päischen Kulturgeschichte der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 137–55.

34. In Spain, Meshullam de Piera composed the poem “On the Rumors of Our Enclosed Brothers” during the Mongol invasion; Hayim Shirman, ed., *Ha-shira ha-ivrit bi-Sefarad u-vi-Provans*, vol. 2, *Mi-Josef Kimchi ‘ad Sa’adja ibn Danan (1150–1492)* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1956), 317 n. 350; Jacob N. Epstein, “*La-tenu’a ha-meshihit be-Sikiliya*,” *Tarbiz* 11 (1940): 218. A letter in the Cairo Genizah (probably early fifteenth-century Sicily) also articulates hope for rescue by “the enclosed ones;” Jacob Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature* (1931–35; repr., New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1972), 1:43; also printed in Aaron Z. Aescoly, *Ha-tenu’ot ha-meshihiyot be-Yisra’el: Ozar ha-mekorot veba-te’udot le-toldot ha-meshihiyut be-Yisra’el*, vol. 1, *Mi-mered Bar-Kokhva ve-‘ad gerush Sefarad* (1956; repr., Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1987), 308–11. On the controversial dating of the text, see *ibid.*, 264; Aescoly, “‘Al ha-tenu’a ha-meshihit be-Sikiliya,” *Tarbiz* 11 (1940): 207–17; and recently Nadia Zeldes, “Ma’ase mufla be-Siziliya: Hosafot u-birurim le-‘inyan ha-tenu’a ha-meshihit be-Siziliya,” *Zion* 58, no. 3 (1993): 347–63; Yuval, *Two Nations*, 286–87. On the expression “enclosed Jews,” cf. also Abraham Farissol, cited in André Neher, *Jewish Thought and the Scientific Revolution of the Sixteenth Century: David Gans (1541–1613) and His Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 132.

35. The Ten Tribes have entered the Hebrew Alexander legend through later versions of *Sefer Yosipon* that contain *Ma’ase Aleksandros*; edited in David Flusser, ed., *Sefer Yosipon* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1980–1981), 1:461–91. On this text see Flusser, “‘Ma’ase Aleksandros’ le-fi ketav-yad Parma,” *Tarbiz* 26 (1956): 165–84. For a general discussion of the Hebrew Alexander legend, see also Wout J. van Bekkum, “Medieval Hebrew Versions of the Alexander Romance,” in *Mediaeval Antiquity*, ed. Andries Welkenhuysen, Herman Braet, and Werner Verbeke (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), 293–302. It is the story of Alexander’s journey to the “land of darkness” that here becomes “mountains of darkness;” cf. the 1480 Mantua print of *Sefer Yosipon*. This change was probably influenced by



Figure 1.

Hans Rüst, *Mappa mundi* (Augsburg, ca. 1480).
(Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, PML 19921)

labeled as the dwelling place of the Red Jews.³⁶ At regular intervals, travelers set out for the Sambatyon and the imagined Jewish tribes on its other shore, bringing back fantastic accounts of their distant kingdom and its inhabitants that were greatly popular among European readers, Jewish and Christian alike.³⁷ The age of exploration with its groundbreaking discoveries, as well as a flood of wondrous news about unknown lands and exotic peoples, further intensified interest in the Lost Tribes in early modern times.³⁸

In 1523, a year of heightened apocalyptic expectations, “news of the saviors from beyond the Sambatyon River spread throughout all lands.”³⁹ Several German pamphlets reported that the Red Jews had finally taken action and were marching toward the land of Israel. One of them bears the title, *Concerning a great multitude and host of Jews, long enclosed and hidden by uninhabitable deserts, who have now broken out and appeared, encamped thirty days’ journey from*

rabbinic views of Alexander connecting him with the mountains of darkness, like, e.g., Bereshit Rabba 33:1 (ed. Theodor-Albeck 301); Ronit Nikolsky, “The Rechabites in Ma’aseh Alexandros and in the Medieval Ben Sira,” *Zutot* (2004): 38. In fact, already Bamidbar Rabba 16:25 (71b) places the Ten Tribes behind the mountains of darkness. For the early modern times, see Zfatman, “*Igrot*,” 236; Victor of Carben, *Hier inne wirt gelesen*, 36; Christian Gerson, *Der Jüden Thalmud Fürnembster innhalt/ vnd Widerlegung/ In Zwey Bücher verfasst. Im Ersten Wird die gantze Jüdische Religion/ vnd falsche Gottesdienste beschrieben. Im Andern Werden dieselbe/ beydes durch die schrift des Alten Testaments/ vnd des Thalmuds selbst/ gründlich widerlegt vnd vmbgestossen* (Goslar, 1607), 390, 404.

36. “Das rot mer da die rotten iuden in.” By association with the color red, various German and Yiddish sources in fact link the Red Jews with the Red Sea. Cf. Victor of Carben (above n. 31) and Peter Schwarz (below n. 142). I will discuss this variant elsewhere in detail.

37. Besides *Sefer 'Eldad ha-Dani*, e.g., the twelfth-century Hebrew travelogues of Benjamin of Tudela and Pethahiah of Regensburg are well known. All of them appeared in print in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Benjamin’s account is edited, including an English translation in Marcus N. Adler, ed., *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela: Critical Text, Translation and Commentary* (London: H. Frowde, 1907; repr., [New York: P. Feldheim, 1966]). For the Hebrew text of Pethahiah, see Lazar Grünhut, ed., *Die Rundreise des Rabbi Petachjah aus Regensburg* (1904/05; repr., Jerusalem: n.p., n.d.); for an English translation, see Adler, *Jewish Travellers*, 64–91.

38. Aescoly, *Ha-tenu’ot ha-meshihiyot*, 336–50; Avraham Gross, “The Expulsion and the Search for the Ten Tribes,” *Judaism* 41, no. 2 (1992): 130–47; Gross, “Aseret ha-shvatim u-malkhut Prester John: Shemu’ot ve-hipusim lifne gerush Sefarad ve-aharav,” *Pe’amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* 48 (1991): 5–41. For various places and peoples that have been identified with the Ten Lost Tribes and their land, see David B. Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew: The Life and Thought of Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1981), chap. 11; Neher, *Jewish Thought*, 119–48; Gershon Greenberg, “American Indians, Ten Lost Tribes and Christian Eschatology,” in *Religion in the Age of Exploration: The Case of Spain and New Spain*, ed. Bryan F. LeBeau (Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 1996), 127–48; David S. Katz, *Philosemitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), chap. 4; Michael Pollak, “The Revelation of a Jewish Presence in Seventeenth-Century China: Its Impact on Western Messianic Thought,” in *The Jews of China*, vol. 1, *Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Jonathan Goldstein (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1999), 50–70. For similar discussions among Christians, cf. also Francis M. Rogers, *The Quest for Eastern Christians: Travels and Rumor in the Age of Discovery* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 185–93.

39. Abraham David, ed., *A Hebrew Chronicle from Prague, c. 1615* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 27 n. 19.

Jerusalem.⁴⁰ Its frontispiece has an illustration of the Red Jews as a powerful army, heavily armed with armor and lances (fig. 2). Emerging from beyond a mountain range, they are about to cross the Sambatyon, which flows calmly before them. Again, the pointed Jewish hat, which also adorns their flag, characterizes them as Jews.

German Jews and Christians discussed the sensational news of the Red Jews' return from time to time. After all, the developments beyond the Sambatyon were of concern to both religious communities. For one group, a new political situation whose outcome seemed predictable on the basis of deep-rooted apocalyptic ideas was a reason to rejoice; for the other, to be terrified.⁴¹ Interreligious discourse naturally bore polemical overtones. The Jewish adaptation of the Christian expression "Red Jews" itself conducts a polemic with the term's rival Christian usage and the idea behind it. While the Red Jews had originally been created as characters in a Christian anti-Jewish counterhistory to the Jewish hope for the return of the Ten Tribes, Yiddish prose responded to the challenge of the Christian interpretation with its own anti-Christian counterhistory, or rather a "counter-counter-story."

POLEMICAL (DE-) CONSTRUCTION

The key to the polemical construction of the Red Jews is the term's implication, associating Jews with the color red. Various explanations have been advanced about why Jewish and Christian fantasies conjured an image of the Ten Tribes as being red. Older theories derive this attribute from the historical ethnic groups that have been identified with the Ten Tribes in some way: an Arab tribe known as *Himir* (whose word root means "red" in Arabic), red-skinned people in China, Native Americans, the Mongols who invaded Europe in the thirteenth century wearing red garments and headdresses,⁴² or the Khazars with their purportedly "slight Mongolian pigmentation."⁴³ However, the sources do not support any of these speculations.

40. Included in Hans-Joachim Köhler, ed., *Flugschriften des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts (1501–1530)* (Zug/Leiden: IDC Publishers, 1978–87), text-fiche, no. 2636 (online available through Brill's database TEMPO: The Early Modern Pamphlets Online). The explicit term "Red Jews" is found on fol. 2r. Other versions may be found in the appendix to Gow, *Red Jews*, 266–69; Otto Clemen, *Flugschriften aus den ersten Jahren der Reformation* (1906–11; repr., Nieuwkoop: Graaf, 1967), 1:342–44 (correct 442–44); Alexander Scheiber and Louis Tardy, "L'écho de la première manifestation de David Reubeni dans les brochures de colportage allemande de l'époque," *Revue des Études Juives* 32 (1973): 599–601. On the various editions, see Gow, *Red Jews*, 148 n. 58; 266 n. 56; Thomas Kaufmann, "Das Judentum in der frühreformatorischen Flugschriftenpublizistik," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 95 (1998): 442 n. 81.

41. The Jewish convert Gerson indicates that Christian interest in the Red Jews added to the Jewish messianic hope "that the Messiah could in fact still be born from the tribe of Judah [!], among the Red Jews." Gerson, *Jüden Thalmud*, 391. For Jewish-Christian discourse on the Red Jews and additional beliefs about them in detail, see Voß, *Umstrittene Erlöser*, chap. 3, 1–2.

42. Listed in Lazar, *Hidot*, 79–80.

43. Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews: High Middle Ages, 500–1200*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 3:44. Similarly Alfred H. Posselt, *Geschichte des chazarisch-jüdischen Staates* (Vienna: Verlag des Vereins zur Förderung und Pflege des Reformjudentums, 1982), 44. Cf. Kevin A. Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria* (1999; repr., Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 11–12, 212.

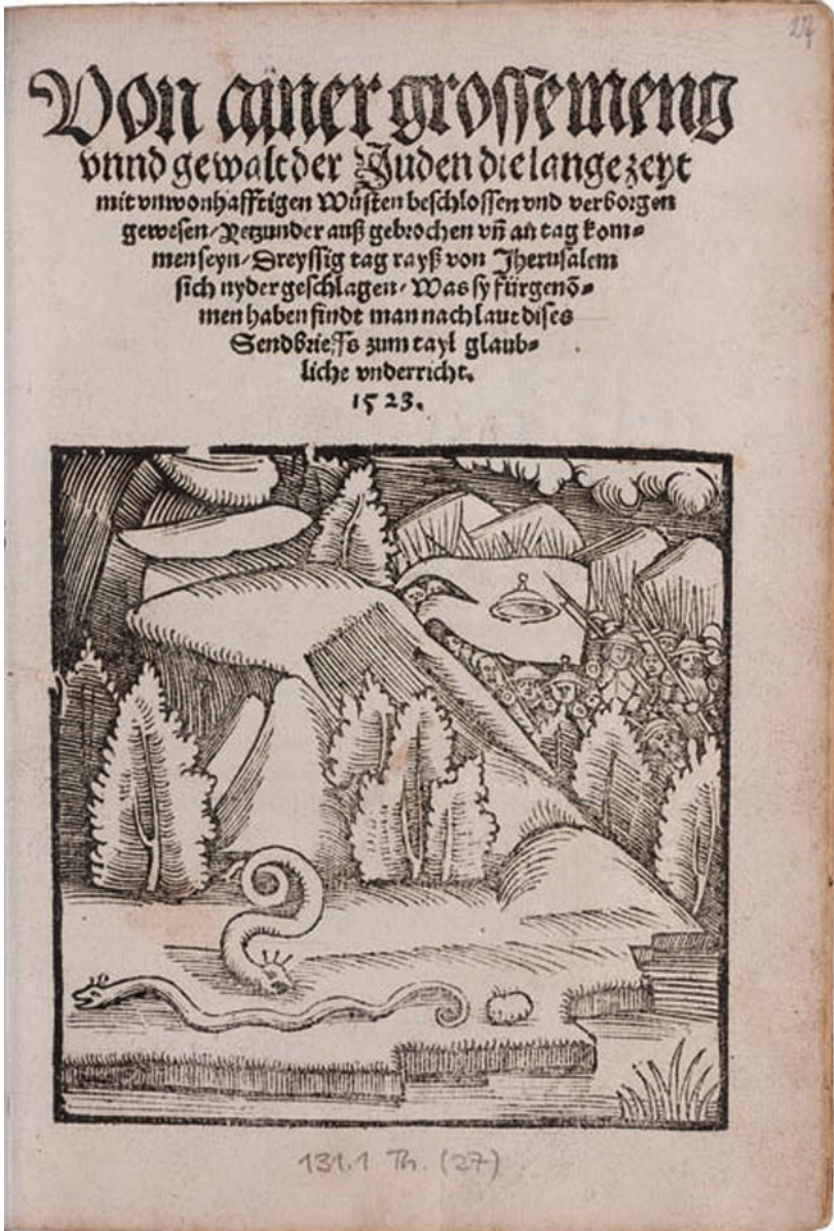


Figure 2.

Von ainer grosse meng vnnnd gewalt der Juden, (Augsburg) 1523.
(Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, A 131.1 Theol. [27])

According to David Biale's expansion of Funkenstein's concept of counter-history, this genre is not limited to the reversal of pejorative motifs. Alternative folkloristic traditions may also be incorporated to manipulate the rival's *topoi*.⁴⁴ In this sense, the Christian coloring of the Jews beyond the Sambatyon fit medieval color symbolism, as Gow has noted.⁴⁵ While the logic behind the moral definition of colors is both ambiguous and subjective, red—already a color that signified warning in ancient Egypt and other societies during antiquity—often held strong negative connotations in medieval and early modern Europe. Red was equated with maliciousness and deceitfulness, dangerousness and ferocity, among other things. Therefore, red was often used to stigmatize the enemies of Christ, including Jews (other flashy colors, like yellow, were similarly used to single out certain characteristics). Red hair, which has always been a minority feature across all ethnic groups and societies, was presumed to be an outward sign of a vicious and false character because it differed from the norm and was therefore suspicious. Accordingly, Christian religious art portrayed the enemies of Christ in general and the traitor Judas Iscariot in particular with red hair and a red beard, and sometimes even with a red complexion, as a stigma of his betrayal. The sinister symbolism of the color red was even ingrained in speech: in Middle High German, red acquired the secondary meaning of “false” and “cunning.”⁴⁶

The Red Jews epitomized the notion of the negative definition of the color red. Did they not personify the ultimate Jewish evildoers, the last and worst antagonists of Jesus who were in league with his archenemy, the Antichrist? It is not at all surprising, then, that the Ten Tribes were imagined as Red Jews, with red hair and red beards, as shown in this example from a fifteenth-century illustrated historical Bible (fig. 3): the drawing presents Alexander closing off the Red Jews, who have red hair and beards; in contrast, Alexander has blond or light-brown hair. Similarly, the late fourteenth-century Antichrist window in St. Mary's Church in Frankfurt (Oder), which renders the biography of the Antichrist in a splendid work of stained glass, depicts the Red Jews in red clothing and with red faces to emphasize their hostility and aggression (fig. 4).⁴⁷ Characterized as Jews by their pointed Jewish hats, they wait beyond the Sambatyon River

44. David Biale, “Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity: The *Sefer toldot yeshu* and the *Sefer zerubavel*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 1 (1999): 130–45.

45. Gow, *Red Jews*, 66–69.

46. Ruth Mellinkoff, “Judas's Red Hair and the Jews,” *Journal of Jewish Art* 9 (1982): 31–46; Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), chap. 2 and 7.1. Cf. also Wolfgang Pfeifer, *Ety-mologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1989), 3:1442, s.v. “rot”; Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1854–1971; repr., Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), 14:1296. Especially instructive for the theory of colors, including further references to this extensive literature, are two articles by John Gage, “Color in Western Art: An Issue?” *Art Bulletin* 72 (1990): 518–41; Gage, “Colour in History: Relative and Absolute,” *Art History* 1 (1978): 104–30.

47. Cf. Mellinkoff, “Judas's Red Hair,” 32, on the fear of redheads as being dangerous and militant.



Figure 3.

Historical Bible, fifteenth century.

(Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SBB-PK), Ms. germ. fol. 565, fol. 531v)



Figure 4.

Antichrist window of St. Mary's Church, Frankfurt (Oder), ca. 1360.
(Brandenburgisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologisches Landesmuseum, Photo Archives, no. s II 4b)

for the Antichrist, whom they will aid in his apocalyptic destruction of Christianity.⁴⁸

48. On this monumental artifact, see Ulrich Knefelkamp and Frank Martin, eds., *Der Antichrist: Die Glasmalereien in der Marienkirche in Frankfurt (Oder)* (Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, 2008); and the

While the negative implications of the color red undoubtedly fit the distorted myth of the Ten Tribes in German apocalyptic lore and a mutual influence of image and text can be taken for granted, it is unlikely that this entirely explains the etymology of the name of the imagined people of the apocalypse. Additional traditions must be taken into consideration. Annette Weber recently suggested an alternative source for attributing this color to the Ten Tribes. She points out that in the ninth century, Eldad ha-Dani had already described the beautiful red linen robes of the Sons of Moses who, he claims, were living near his own tribe, the tribe of Dan, separated from each other only by the Sambatyon. The Sons of Moses are the Levites who are believed to have been carried off on a cloud following the destruction of the First Temple. According to Eldad, their descendants dyed their robes scarlet red with the help of cochineal, reminiscent of the historical garment worn by the biblical high priest.⁴⁹ When the term “Red Jews” was coined in Germany, Eldad’s story was indeed known among Christians, at least partially, as its adaptation by the popular Prester John tradition proves. Prester John was the fabled king of a distant utopian empire in Christian lore. Parallel to the Jewish belief in saviors behind the Sambatyon, during the Crusades Christians pinned their hopes for a potential ally against the infidels on Prester John, who was believed to dwell beyond the Arab lands. In the letter that he supposedly sent to the twelfth-century Byzantine emperor Manuel I Komnenos, Prester John lists the Ten Lost Tribes among his multitude of vassals, drawing on the Jewish Eldad ha-Dani tradition.⁵⁰

edition by Frank Mangelsdorf, ed., *Der gläserne Schatz: Die Bilderbibel der St. Marienkirche in Frankfurt (Oder)*, 2nd rev. and enlarged ed. (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2007).

49. Annette Weber, “Das Antichristfenster der Marienkirche in Frankfurt (Oder) im kulturhistorischen Kontext,” in Kniefelkamp and Martin, *Antichrist*, 87. On the legendary Sons of Moses, see Louis Ginzberg, ed., *The Legends of the Jews* (1909–55; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2000), 4:316–18; Simon Menahem Lazar, “‘Aseret ha-shvatim;” *Ha-shilo’ah* 9 (1902): 46–56, 205–21, 352–63, 431–47, 520–28; 10 (1902): 42–56, 156–64, 226–35; Lazar, *Hidot*, 13–16, 74–77; Uri Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur’an: The Children of Israel and Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1999), 26–30, 46–48, 50–52. Cf. Amos and Noy, *Folktales*, 455–56.

50. The Latin and German versions of Prester John’s famous letter are edited in Friedrich Zarncke, *Der Priester Johannes*, 2 vols. (1876–79; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1980); Bettina Wagner, *Die “Epistola presbiteri Johannis” lateinisch und deutsch: Überlieferung, Textgeschichte, Rezeption und Übertragungen im Mittelalter. Mit bisher unedierte Texten* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000). For the translations into Hebrew, see Edward Ullendorf and Charles F. Beckingham, *The Hebrew Letters of Prester John* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). Among the extensive literature on Prester John, see esp. Manuel J. Ramos, *Essays in Christian Mythology: The Metamorphosis of Prester John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006); Istvan Bejczy, *La lettre du Prêtre Jean: Une utopie médiévale* (Paris: Imago, 2001); Charles F. Beckingham and Bernard Hamilton, eds., *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996); Ulrich Kniefel-kamp, “Der Priesterkönig Johannes und sein Reich: Legende oder Realität,” *Journal of Medieval History* 14 (1988): 337–55. Perry, “Imaginary War,” discusses the textual relationship between the Eldad and the Prester John traditions. In contrast, David Wasserstein argues against the dependence of the Christian legend on the Jewish one; David J. Wasserstein, “Eldad ha-Dani and Prester John,” in Beckingham and Hamilton, *Prester John*, 213–36.

Early Reformation theologians advanced a different explanation of the Red Jews' etymology altogether. In 1529, Justus Jonas, Martin Luther's translator, speculated: "It seems to me, however, this term 'Red Jews' indicates that they are Edom, since Edom means red."⁵¹ While it cannot be determined if this really played into the term's genesis in the late Middle Ages, at least by the sixteenth century the polemical motif of the Red Jews was linked to the respective Jewish and Christian typological interpretations of the Biblical pair, Esau/Edom and Jacob/Israel. The Christian interpretation of Genesis 25:23 inverted the Jewish understanding of the verse that self-identifies with Jacob/Israel and equates the Christian other with Esau/Edom, identifying Christianity as Jacob/Israel and the Jews as Esau/Edom. The Christians claimed that the church had superseded the people of Israel as God's chosen one, thus becoming the new, true Israel (*verus Israel*). Based on Paul's distinction between carnal Israel, i.e., the Jews, being rejected by God, and the election of spiritual Israel, i.e., the Christians, the church fathers transformed the implied equation of Esau as the Jews and Jacob as the church from the *Epistle to the Romans* into doctrine (Romans 9:6–13).⁵² Thus, each side claimed the victorious identity of Israel, the people of God, and attributed the role of Edom, the servant, to the other.

Edom in the Bible is derived from the color red, *'adom* in Hebrew, which has the same trilateral root. Accordingly, Edom is "the red one,"⁵³ meaning that, in the figurative sense, the loser in the drama of *Heilsgeschichte* (Salvation History) is red. Esau, in fact, is described as being red from birth: "And the first came forth ruddy (*'admoni*), all over like a hairy mantle; and they called his name Esau" (Genesis 25:25). Both Jews and Christians drew on this biblical etymology when marking the other as Edom. On the one hand, a late addition to the medieval Ashkenazi *Piyyut Ma'oz zur* (Stronghold of Rock), which is first documented in the early modern era, refers to Christianity as "the red one in the shadow of the cross."⁵⁴ On the other hand, Melito of Sardis explains that the Jews were called Edom because they were red with the blood of Christ clinging to their hands.⁵⁵

51. Justus Jonas, *Das siebend Capitel Danielis von des Türcken Gotteslesterung vnd schrecklich morderey* (Wittenberg, 1529), fol. 15r. For the author, see Walter Delius, *Lehre und Leben: Justus Jonas 1493–1555* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1952).

52. For a discussion of Christian exegesis, see Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (AD 135–425)*, trans. Henry McKeating (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). See also Cohen, "Esau as Symbol," 251–55.

53. Genesis 25:30: "And Esau said to Jacob: 'Let me swallow, I pray thee, some of this red, red pottage; for I am faint.' Therefore was his name called Edom."

54. Cf. Ismar Schorsch, "A Meditation on *Ma'oz Zur*," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 37, no. 4 (1988): 462. *Midrash ha-gadol*, a late medieval midrashic collection, paraphrases Esau's ruddiness as "bloody" because "he hates the blood of circumcision;" MHG Ber 25:25 (ed. Margulies, 439). A different association for Christians and the color red is found in *Sefer Nizzahon yashan*, which originated in Germany around the same time as the Christian idea of the Red Jews. It identifies the Christians with red, as the color of the menstruation, i.e., impurity; David Berger, ed., *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979), no. 238. I owe this reference to Yaacov Deutsch.

55. Cf. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol," 264 n. 43.

Both Jews and Christians were painfully aware of the other's designation of their own group as Edom and took efforts to deny it, each vindicating their own interpretation.⁵⁶ When sixteenth-century German literature described the Ten Tribes as Red Jews, it was drawing on the long-established formula that equated Jews with Edom, as Jonas suggests. Another source, several decades later, supports this interpretation of the German term "Rote Juden." The text speculates that they

...are called the Red Jews, perhaps from Edom or their bloodthirst.⁵⁷ Therefore, the European Jews secretly favor them and hope they will free them to return to their land. They rejoice when the Turk arises against Christendom, and they hope the scepter shall then be taken from the Christians because all their scribes say that they cannot regain their kingship while the Edomites are holding the scepter. By such name they call us, the Christians.⁵⁸

The author, Georg Nigrinus (Schwarz), a pastor in Gießen in Hesse, also explains the term "Red Jews" according to the Christian version of the biblical typology of Edom. At the same time, however, he uses a polemical device that typifies the genre of counterhistory: the German term "Red Jews" not only supports the Christian typology that equates Edom with the Jews, but also inverts the Jewish scenario that casts Edom, i.e., the Christians, as condemned to perish. The Christian narrative of the Red Jews takes the role of the red underdogs from the Christians and transfers it to the Ten Tribes—who, in the rival Jewish view, are Edom's expected destroyers.⁵⁹

The Jewish reworking of the Christian legend in Older Yiddish uses the etymology of the expression "Red Jews" and the association of Jews with the color red as its starting point. In the Yiddish counterstory, the redness of the Jews beyond the Sambatyon acquires new meaning, since it is not derived from Edom, but King David. Besides Esau/Edom, the Bible also describes David as "red," using the same Hebrew word "*'admoni*," ruddy. When David was brought before Samuel, it is said, "he was ruddy (*'admoni*)."⁶⁰ With this clever device, Older Yiddish literature created a polemical satire that negated the Christian significance of the Red Jews. The key here is the second passage in the book of Samuel, which once more ascribes the attribute of ruddiness to David at the opening of his famous fight with the Philistine giant Goliath from which, as is

56. *Ibid.*, 255.

57. Also in Johannes Brenz, *Türcken Büchlein: Wie sich Prediger vnd Leien halten sollen/ so der Türk das Deudsche Land vberfallen würde. Christliche vnd nottürfftige vnterrichtung* (Wittenberg, 1531), fol. 10r: "Red Jews, that is, bloodhounds and murderers."

58. Georg Nigrinus, *Jüden Feind: Von den Edlen Früchten der Thalmudischen Jüden/ so jetziger zeit in Teutschelände wonen/ ein ernste/ wol gegründte Schrifft* (Straßburg, 1570), 88–89.

59. See above, note 23. Cf. Yuval, *Two Nations*, 275, with this implicitly counterhistorical explanation of the term "Red Jews."

60. 1 Samuel 16:12. The meaning of the Hebrew word *'admoni*, which is in fact used only three times in the Bible, referring to either Esau or David (Genesis 25:25, 1 Samuel 16:12, 1 Samuel 17:42), is not entirely clear. With regard to David, see below.

well known, David comes off as the winner.⁶¹ The Yiddish tale reinvents the myth of the Red Jews in the pattern of “David versus Goliath” and restores its protagonists’ victorious standing.

There are several early modern Yiddish versions of the Jewish Red Jews’ tale that have been preserved in manuscripts and in print. The oldest known and most popular one, which modern scholarship calls *Ma’ase ’Akdamut* (The Story of *’Akdamut*),⁶² is found in a small cycle of hagiographic stories about Meir Shatz of Worms. Meir Shatz, an eleventh-century composer of liturgical poetry from the German Rhineland, is most widely known as the author of *’Akdamut milin* (The Introduction to the Words), the Aramaic *piyyut* that pictures Israel’s splendid salvation in messianic times and, according to the Ashkenazi rite, is recited before the Torah reading on the first day of Shavuot.⁶³ *Ma’ase ’Akdamut*, the legend about the composition of this *piyyut* (the only Yiddish story in an otherwise Hebrew narrative cycle) centers around the myth of the Red Jews.

While its date of composition is unclear, the tantalizing story about Rabbi Meir and the Red Jews was immensely popular in the sixteenth century due to its connection with a favorite *piyyut*.⁶⁴ The censor’s lists that recorded all books owned by the Jews of Mantua in 1595 attest to the story’s popularity; they note eight copies of its first freestanding printing, which appeared under the title *Megiles Reb Meyer* in Cremona circa 1560 (now lost).⁶⁵ The earliest written records of the tale (which have all been lost as well), however, were not composed in the vernacular, but in Hebrew. Most likely they originated in liturgical commentaries on *piyyutim* and were included in early Ashkenazi *maḥzorim*. Accordingly, a

61. 1 Samuel 17:42.

62. First in Isaac Rivkind, “Megilat R. Me’ir Shaz (He’arot le-Ma’ase ’Akdamut),” *Ha-do’ar* 9, no. 30 (1930): 207–9. Accordingly, in Joseph Dan, “An Early Hebrew Source of the Yiddish ‘Aqdamoth’ Story,” *Hebrew University Studies in Literature* 1 (1973): 39–46; Dan, “Toldotav shel ‘Ma’ase ’Akdamut’ ba-sifrut ha-‘ivrit,” *Criticism and Interpretation* 9/10 (1976): 197–213.

63. Israel Davidson, *Thesaurus of Mediaeval Hebrew Poetry* (1924–33; repr., [New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1970]), 1:332, no. 7314; Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 258. Text with English translation in Avrohom Yaakov Salamon, ed. and trans., *Akdamus Millin: With a New Translation and Commentary Anthologized from the Traditional Rabbinic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1996). On Meir Shatz, see Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, 257–58; Avraham Grossman, *Ḥakhme Ashkenaz ha-rishonim: Korotahem, darkam be-hanhagat ha-zibur, yeziratam ha-ruḥanit me-reshit yishuvam ve-ad le-gezerot 1096*, 2nd rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988), 292–96; Leopold Zunz, *Literaturgeschichte der synagogalen Poesie* (1865; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966), 145–52. Lucia Raspe, “Vom Rhein nach Galiläa: Rabbi Meir Schatz von Worms als Held hagiographischer Überlieferung,” *Aschkenas* 17, no. 2 (2007): 431–55, studies Meir Shatz as hagiographic hero.

64. Raspe, *Jüdische Hagiographie im mittelalterlichen Aschkenas* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 192, 195, shows that linking a story to a *piyyut* granted it greater legitimacy and thus a stronger motive for telling it. Cf. Raspe, “Vom Rhein nach Galiläa,” 437–38.

65. Shifra Baruchson, *Sefarim ve-kor’im: Tarbut ha-kri’a shel yehude Italya be-shilhe ha-Renesans* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993), 156. On the lists, see Shlomo Simonsohn, “Sefarim ve-sifriyot shel yehude Mantova, 1595,” *Kiryat Sefer* 37, no. 1 (1961): 103–22.

northern Italian editor explains the need for his new Hebrew translation of the story, dating from 1630, since at that time the text was only extant in Yiddish—except for the Hebrew versions found in a few old prayer books.⁶⁶ The first known Yiddish printing from 1560 Cremona, as recorded in the Mantua inventory in 1595, on the contrary, was a translation from the Hebrew.⁶⁷ Thus the earliest extant text of *Ma'ase 'Akdmut*—and of a Yiddish version of the story of the Red Jews in general—dates from the late sixteenth century. It is included in a Yiddish manuscript of edifying historical and narrative texts (c. 1580–1600), which, besides *Ma'ase 'Akdmut*, also features another version of the tale of the Red Jews as included in a 1579 letter from Safed.⁶⁸ Under various titles, both stories were printed in the early modern period and even later. *Ma'ase 'Akdmut* saw at least four more Yiddish editions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from publishing houses in Fürth and Amsterdam,⁶⁹ while the letter from Safed only appeared in print once, together with a miracle tale about Isaac Luria, in the 1660s in Prague.⁷⁰

The Yiddish story of the Red Jews depicts a Jewish community that is being threatened by a Christian enemy (in *Ma'ase 'Akdmut*, the historical Jewish community of Worms is specified). A vicious Christian sorcerer, who is a master of the dark magical arts and a notorious Jew hater, uses magic to kill thousands of Jews. When the Jews turn to the authorities for protection, the sorcerer declares that he

66. The manuscript that contains the story has been edited by Eli Yassif, “Tirgum kadmon ve-nusah 'ivri shel 'Ma'ase 'Akdmut,” *Criticism and Interpretation* 9/10 (1976): 218. A transmission in three steps is typical for legends of saints, like *Ma'ase 'Akdmut*: oral traditions made their way into written form in liturgical commentaries before being circulated independently; Raspe, *Jüdische Hagiographie*, 192–96. On Ashkenazi piyyut commentary, see Elisabeth Hollender, *Piyyut Commentary in Medieval Ashkenaz* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008).

67. Cf. Sara Zfatman, *Ha-siporet be-yidish me-reshitah 'ad "Shiv'he ha-Besht" (1504–1814): Bibliografiya mu'eret* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1985), 30, no. 9; Agnes Romer-Segal, “Sifrut yidish ve-kahal kor'eha ba-me'a ha-17: Yezivot be-yidish be-reshimot ha-'zikuk' mi-Mantova, 1595,” *Kiryat Sefer* 53, no. 4 (1978): 783, 788 n. 25.

68. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Opp. 714 (= Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jerusalem, F 20496); cf. Zfatman, *Ha-siporet be-yidish*, 19, no. 8.2. *Ma'ase 'Akdmut* is edited synoptically with a later printing from 1694 Fürth (see following note) in Rivkind, “Historical Allegory,” 11–33. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are according to Rivkind's edition of the manuscript version. An incorrect date is mentioned in Israel Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, vol. 7, *Old Yiddish Literature from Its Origins to the Haskalah Period* (Cleveland, OH: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1975), 177 n. 16.

69. *Ayn sheyn vunderlikh mayse...fun ayn glik rad* (Fürth, 1694). *Mayse dos da heyst Megiles Rebe Meyer* (Amsterdam, 1660), apparently a reprint of the Cremona *editio princeps*, also lost; cf. Zfatman, *Ha-siporet be-yidish*, 44–45, no. 23; Rivkind, *Megilat*, 508. *Ayn sheyn mayse dos iz dos geshikhtnis fun Rebe Meyer Shats un fun den rotn yudlayn un fun den shvarzen minkh* (Amsterdam, 1704). *Di geshikhtnis fun den rotn yudlayn un fun den shvarzen minkh* (Amsterdam, n.d.). All these editions are listed in Zfatman, *Ha-siporet be-yidish*, s.v. “*Megiles Reb Meyer*.” Cf. also Rivkind, “Historical Allegory,” 9.

70. Printed synoptically with Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Opp. 714 (= Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jerusalem, F 20496) in Zfatman, “‘Igrut,” 228–47.

will do the Jews no more harm providing that one condition is met: within one year, the Jews must present to the sorcerer someone who can match his magical skills. Should the Jews fail, the sorcerer will destroy them all. The Jews have no alternative but to agree, and they desperately begin to seek a miracle worker who is able to compete with the dreadful magician. The search extends far and wide, even beyond the Sambatyon, where a messenger (Meir Shatz in *Ma'ase 'Akdamut*) is sent to the Red Jews, who agree to dispatch one of their own to help those in distress. At the climax of the story, this Red Jew duels with the Christian magician in a sorcery contest. The end, of course, is a happy one: the Red Jew is victorious over the evil Christian sorcerer and thereby saves his brothers from doom. *Ma'ase 'Akdamut* adds: since the contest would take place on the eve of Shavuot, Meir Shatz composed a *piyyut* for the festival in honor of the events, *'Akdamut milin*, signing his work in the form of a name acrostic. Since he would be staying in the land of the Red Jews to avoid violating the Sabbath again—he had had to wait for the calm Sabbath waters in order to cross the Sambatyon the first time—Meir Shatz asked the Red Jew, when he was departing for Worms, to bring that *piyyut* to Germany for inclusion in his hometown's Shavuot liturgy as a remembrance of him.⁷¹

On the level of typological identification, the analogous motifs that these Yiddish narratives of the Red Jews share with the biblical story about David and Goliath are unambiguous. The Christian oppressor plays the role of Goliath. His adversary, the Red Jew, represents David. From this it becomes clear why the story in Older Yiddish only defines this one Red Jew, the savior from beyond the Sambatyon, as a “little Red Jew” (*rot yudlayn*).⁷² Collectively, the “trans-Sambatyoniks” are always called “Red Jews” without a diminutive form (*rote yudn* and not *royte yidelekh*, as in modern Yiddish).⁷³ Described as “old,” “limping,” and “lame,” the little Red Jew is introduced to the reader as a weak character from the narrative's beginning.⁷⁴ The Yiddish story's frail hero is by no means a prototype of the mighty and terrifying muscular Red Jews of German lore. Neither is he the proud hero and brave warrior depicted in Eldad ha-Dani's image of the Ten Tribes. He is another David, who stands up against an enemy whose supernatural powers seem superior in every respect, a boy who does not seem to have a chance in this competition of unequal combatants. In one version of the story, the saviors from afar are two seven-year-old children, a boy and a girl.⁷⁵

It is exactly David's redness that displays his supposed weakness. When David confronts Goliath, the Philistine can hardly believe his eyes when he sees whom King Saul has sent into battle. “He disdained him; for he was but a

71. For a detailed summary of the plot, see Zinberg, *Jewish Literature*, 178–80.

72. Rivkind, “Historical Allegory,” 21 and 25.

73. *Ibid.*, 19.

74. *Ibid.*, 21 and 24 (the latter according to the edition Amsterdam 1694). Cf. Jeremiah 31:7, where “the blind and the lame” are explicitly counted among the remnant of Israel who will be gathered from the ends of the earth.

75. Zfatman, “Igro,” 240.

youth, and ruddy (*'admoni*), and withal of a fair countenance.”⁷⁶ The construction of this sentence seems to indicate that whatever “*'admoni*” described was probably meant to be a positive attribute that complemented David’s good looks. In this sense, the medieval Jewish commentator David Kimḥi has interpreted David’s ruddy appearance as “rosy,” meaning young, sensitive, and handsome.⁷⁷ Two passages in Rashi also take a red complexion to indicate health and physical beauty.⁷⁸ One certainly would not ascribe any of those attributes to the dangerous, vicious, and barbaric people conjured by the Christian apocalyptic imagination. Thus, that earlier Christian definition of the Red Jews is derided by their last triumph in the Yiddish story: they prevail through the skills of one of their own who, measured by his physical strength is weak and by character innocent, like a child.

The biblical paradigm can be traced throughout the Yiddish tale of the Red Jews. There, Goliath challenges the Israelites to conclude the war in a duel between one representative from each side. Here, the magician demands a sorcery contest.⁷⁹ His words are similar to those that Goliath calls out to the people of Israel: “Choose a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and kill me, then will we be your servants; but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us.”⁸⁰ The sorcerer in *Ma’ase ’Akdmut* promises: provided “that they send me somebody within one year who will be able to engage in a sorcery competition with me, I won’t harm them. However, if in one year they have not sent me anyone, I will slay them all.”⁸¹ A late translation of the Red Jews’ story into Hebrew explicitly compares the wickedness of the Christian villain with Goliath.⁸² Just as King Saul initially hesitates to send the young shepherd David into battle, the Jews in the Yiddish legend doubt that the outwardly weak little Red Jew could triumph against the mighty Christian who is in league with the devil: “How can such a limping little manikin possibly stand up to the monk? What has R. Meir done to us?”⁸³ As expected, when the little Red Jew steps forward to take on the

76. 1 Samuel 17:42. Cf. 1 Samuel 16:12: “Now he was ruddy, and withal of beautiful eyes, and goodly to look upon.”

77. David Kimḥi on 1 Samuel 17:42. In the nineteenth century, Meir Loeb (Malbim) explains David’s redness explicitly as “non militant.”

78. Rashi’s commentary on Song of Solomon 5:10 and Lamentations 4:7–8. I am grateful to Bernard Septimus for pointing this out to me.

79. A sorcery competition between an enemy of the Jews and a Jew who then saves a Jewish community from calamity and disaster is a popular theme in Hebrew literature, known in many variations. Joseph Dan has shown that the motif first occurs in Judah he-Ḥasid; Joseph Dan, “Sipurim demologiyim mi-kitve R. Yehuda he-Ḥasid,” *Tarbiz* 30 (1960/61): 288–89, no. 29. Karl E. Grözinger, “Jüdische Wundermänner in Deutschland,” in *Judentum im deutschen Sprachraum* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 202–3, lists sixteen versions within six hundred years. Cf. also Dan, “Hebrew Source”; Dan, “Toldotav shel ‘Ma’ase ’Akdmut’.”

80. 1 Samuel 17:8–9.

81. Rivkind, “Historical Allegory,” 15.

82. Louis Ginzberg, “Haggadot ketu’ot,” *Ha-goren: Me’assef le-ḥokhmat Yisra’el* 9 (1922): 44.

83. Rivkind, “Historical Allegory,” 21, 23. Cf. 1 Samuel 17:33.

challenge, the black magician mocks his apparently mismatched contender: “How the Jews make fun of me! Why do they give me a little, trembling manikin for the magical contest?”⁸⁴ These words echo Goliath’s surprise and annoyance when he first sees David: “Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field.”⁸⁵ Here, the 1630 Hebrew translation of *Ma’ase ’Akdmut* directly quotes the book of Samuel and borrows freely from the biblical text in formulating the brave little Red Jew’s response to the sorcerer: “This day won’t pass before the Lord has presented your beaten carcass to the eyes of this assembled people.”⁸⁶ In the end, the little Red Jew indeed succeeds in the seemingly impossible task, emulating David who beat the gigantic, heavily armed warrior Goliath simply with a stone and his slingshot. He overcomes the sorcerer’s black magic with the use of divine names and kills him.⁸⁷ Even the happy ending of *Ma’ase ’Akdmut* finds its model in the biblical narrative: Saul had promised his daughter as a wife to the man who would defeat the Philistine.⁸⁸ In *Ma’ase ’Akdmut*, the little Red Jew marries Meir Shatz’s daughter and Meir Shatz himself marries the daughter of the little Red Jew, becoming both his son-in-law and his father-in-law.⁸⁹

The Yiddish story switches the ultimate allocation of good and evil in the German drama of the Red Jews. When, on the one hand, the original Christian concept of the sinister Red Jews derived from Edom is replaced in favor of a Davidic lineage, the Red Jews come to represent the heroes in the Yiddish version of the tale. This is in accordance with aggadic sources that discuss the different meanings of redness with respect to Esau and David: when Samuel caught sight of David, he was frightened because he thought the future king of Israel a second Esau, interpreting David’s redness as a physical sign of his determination to shed blood. God, however, put Samuel at ease. Unlike Esau, David would only kill those who would forfeit their lives through sinful deeds.⁹⁰ On the other hand, the evil Christian becomes a metaphor for Edom, whose

84. Rivkind, “Historical Allegory,” 23.

85. 1 Samuel 17:44.

86. Yassif, “Tirgum kadmon,” 223. Cf. 1 Samuel 17:46.

87. Rivkind, “Historical Allegory,” 31. Cf. 1 Samuel 17:50. For the magical contest in detail, see Rivkind, “Historical Allegory,” 23–31. The supernatural powers of the saviors across the Sambaton is a popular motif; cf. Shlomo Yaniv, “Ha-moshi’a me-erez aseret ha-shvatim,” *Ale-siah* 7/8 (1980): 128. A prototype may be found in the biblical Exodus narrative: according to Shemot Rabba 1:29 (7b), Moses kills an Egyptian with the help of the name of God.

88. 1 Samuel 17:25.

89. Another motif that the Yiddish legend seems to borrow from the biblical story is the scholar’s dream in Worms, which redirects the search for a suitable candidate in the magical contest toward the Red Jews. His metaphoric dream tells about a deep darkness bringing much misery into the world. One day, however, a bright star penetrates the darkness, and a big bear, symbolizing the black magician, appears together with a little goat—the little Red Jew. The two animals fight against each other, leaving the bear dead in the end; Rivkind, “Historical Allegory,” 15, 17. The choice of a bear and a goat might be grounded in 1 Samuel 17:34–36, where it is written that David killed Goliath as he had previously fended off a bear that had gone after sheep in his flock.

90. References in Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 6:247 n. 13.

wickedness is portrayed in both Jewish and Christian traditions and whom King David had subjugated in the guise of the ancient Edomites.⁹¹

Yet another level of meaning lies in the Red Jews' epithet: "Sons of Saviors" (*Bne Moshi'im*). For support, the prophet Obadiah is quoted: "and saviors shall come up on Mount Zion."⁹² The early modern reader of Yiddish would have been familiar with the context of this verse from the daily morning service. Following the recitation of the *Song of the Sea*, the liturgy points to the destruction of Esau/Edom and the elevation of Israel: "And saviors shall come up on Mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's."⁹³ The midrash knows that the avenger in the struggle with Edom—the red one—will also be red, namely "clad in red."⁹⁴ *Lekah tov*, toward the end of the commentary on *parashat Va-yishlah*, reveals the one who will exact messianic vengeance, referring explicitly to David's redness: it will be accomplished "by Messiah ben David who is called 'ruddy, and withal of beautiful eyes.'"⁹⁵

The Yiddish story of the Red Jews can be read as an allegory of the Jewish hope for redemption. David's biography as "The Red Jew" in fact serves as a typological model for Israel's salvation from captivity and dispersion by the advent of the King Messiah from the house of David. An aggadic midrash included in the late medieval *Yalkut ha-Makhiri* explains that David's brothers wanted to kill their mother and David because they saw his redness as proof that he had been conceived in adultery. Jesse, however, asserted that henceforth his youngest son would be considered as a slave instead, and David came to herd his father's flock for many years—until he was anointed as king over Israel.⁹⁶ And it is here that the Bible first introduces David as "red." When David is brought before Samuel, it is observed "and he was ruddy.... And the Lord said: 'Arise, anoint him; for this is he.'"⁹⁷ The double wedding at the close of

91. 2 Samuel 8:14.

92. Rivkind, "Historical Allegory," 19, citing Obadiah 1:21. For this expression for the Red Jews, cf. David, *Chronicle*, 27 no. 19.

93. In *Shirat ha-Yam* (Exodus 15:1–18), Moses and the Israelites praise God after they have successfully crossed the Red Sea. The hymn describes the destruction of the Egyptian pursuers at length. Referring to the deep fear that befell Edom and the other peoples upon hearing of the great power of the God of Israel, it foretells apocalyptic revenge against the Christians in the future messianic context. The song concludes with the confidence that the people of Israel will return to its land and build the Temple. See Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, s.v. "Song of the Sea."

94. Bereshit Rabba 75:4 (ed. Theodor/Albeck 882). Lazar, *Hidot*, 80, has also offered this midrash as a source for the Yiddish expression "Red Jews." He is not familiar with the rival Christian interpretation of the term, however. Lazar identifies the red avenger with the Ten Tribes because B. Baba Batra 123b equates them with the fire: "that Esau's seed would be delivered only into the hands of Joseph's seed for it is said, 'And the house of Jacob shall be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, etc.'" Cf. Bereshit Rabba 73:7 (ed. Theodor/Albeck 851).

95. Leqah Tov 36:21–22 (ed. Buber 185) with a quote from 1 Samuel 16:12.

96. Yalkut Mekhiri on Psalm 118:24 (ed. Buber 214). See Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 6:247 n. 13.

97. 1 Samuel 16:12.

Ma'ase 'Akdmut serves as an emblem of messianic redemption. It symbolically anticipates the ingathering of the Jewish people at the end of time, when the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel will be reunited with their brothers and sisters of the Diaspora.

The multilayered counterhistorical construction of the Yiddish story that gives new meaning to symbols and elements in the Christian original also gives the little Red Jew in *Ma'ase 'Akdmut* a name that is fraught with symbolism: he is called Dan.⁹⁸ In Jewish tradition the tribe of Dan is central to redemption: not only is it anticipated as the maternal line of the Messiah,⁹⁹ but among the Ten Tribes Dan is the bravest and most experienced in warfare.¹⁰⁰ Yet again, the story undermines the rival Christian interpretation of Dan as the tribe from which the Antichrist will spring.¹⁰¹ Rather, here the role of the savior's last enemy, who is doomed to fail in the end, is allocated to the wicked sorcerer who, like the Antichrist, is a master of the dark magical arts.¹⁰² It is not incidental that the polemical medieval Jewish version of the life of Jesus, *Toldot Yeshu*, confers many characteristics of the Antichrist on Jesus, as a false Messiah and as a magician. He too, according to *Toldot Yeshu*, is involved in a magical contest, namely with Judas Iscariot who, like the little Red Jew, invokes the divine name. Perhaps this antigospel, which was very popular among Jews in the German lands in the Middle Ages and early modern times, inspired the Yiddish Red Jews story with its culmination in a magical contest between the forces of good and evil.¹⁰³

Furthermore, for early modern Yiddish speakers, the redness of the Ten Lost Tribes unambiguously refuted the Christian interpretation of Genesis 49:10: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." According to the classic Christological understanding of Shiloh as Messiah, this ostensibly proved Jesus as the Messiah, because Israel had lost its political sovereignty

98. Rivkind, "Historical Allegory," 21.

99. Bereshit Rabba 97 (*shita hadasha*) (ed. Theodor/Albeck 1218).

100. Cf. Dan, *Ha-sipur ha-ivri*, 55–57. See also Micha J. Bin-Gorion, *Der Born Judas: Legenden, Märchen und Erzählungen* (1919–21; repr., Frankfurt: Jüdischer Verlag, 1993), 5:29–31.

101. Charles E. Hill, "Antichrist from the Tribe of Dan," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 46, no. 1 (1995): 99–117. See also Wilhelm Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend: A Chapter in Jewish and Christian Folklore* (London: Hutchinson, 1896), 26, 171–74; Richard K. Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art and Literature* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1981), 79–80; Gregory C. Jenks, *The Origins and Early Development of the Anti-christ Myth* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991), 77–79, 83–86, 183–84.

102. Cf. Bousset, *Antichrist Legend*, 175–83.

103. Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (1902; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1977), 54–55. Cf. *ibid.*, 223–24. Both tales even employ the motif of a millstone used by both Jesus and the black sorcerer, respectively, in their tricks; *ibid.*, 54; and Rivkind, "Historical Allegory," 25, 27. For the reception of *Toldot Yeshu* in Ashkenaz, see Carlebach, *Anti-Christian Element*, 13; as an example of a classic counterhistory, Biale, "Counter-History."

around the time of Jesus and had been in exile ever since.¹⁰⁴ While the Jewish belief in the continued existence of an independent Jewish kingdom beyond the Sambatyon River countered Christian exegesis, the Red Jews demonstrated this in vivid color. After all, crimson was the color of dominion. “Therefore, the Jews of that country [beyond the Sambatyon] are called the Red Jews,” claimed Paul Joseph, who served as a rabbi in Posen prior to his conversion to Christianity in 1611.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, a little booklet written in the mid-eighteenth century explains this unique expression for the Ten Tribes among the Jews in Germany on the basis of their red clothing. Friedrich Albrecht Augusti of Eschenberga (near Gotha), another convert to Christianity, declares that among his former coreligionists, the name Red Jews “is highly esteemed and glorious,”

both on account of the red and lively color of their faces and the exquisite purple clothes, which they wear as a free people in order to distinguish themselves from all other [Jews] living in misery. [A footnote explains:] The European and Asian Jews are not allowed to wear any red clothes because they are still in mourning over the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. The color red is a sign of freedom and of the greatest joy among Jews. Royal children were privileged [to wear red], a color that distinguished them from others. The Red Jews, however, so they say, have experienced no *galut*, no *ḥorban*, i.e., no captivity and no destruction. These Jews wear the most beautiful purple; no one can forbid them [from doing so].¹⁰⁶

JEWISH-CHRISTIAN MESSIANISM

The Christian origin and the Jewish adaptation of the image of the Red Jews lie within the unique framework of Jewish-Christian apocalypticism in premodern Germany. As Elisheva Carlebach and Israel Yuval were the first to suggest, Jewish yearning for redemption was firmly embedded in the environment of the surrounding Christian society.¹⁰⁷ While Christian attitudes regarding the Jews’

104. On Jewish-Christian debate about the interpretation of Genesis 49:10, see Adolf Posenanski, *Schiloh: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Messiaslehre*, vol. 1, *Die Auslegung von Genesis 49,10 im Altertume bis zu Ende des Mittelalters* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1904).

105. Paul Joseph, *Gründlicher beweiß/ auß dem alten Testament/ vnd zum theil auß dem Jüdischen Talmud/ Wie daß Christus Jesus der Jungfrau Marie Son/ sey der wahre verheissene Messias vnd Heyland der Welt/ vnd die ander Person inn der heiligen Dreyfaltigkeit* (Altdorf, 1612), fol. 21v.

106. Friedrich Albrecht Augusti, *Geheimnisse der Jüden von dem Wunder-Fluß Sambathjon, wie auch von denen rothen Juden, in einem Brief-Wechsel mit denen heutigen Jüden, zur Erläuterung 2 Reg. 17,6 abgehandelt, und dem Druck überlassen* (Erfurt, 1748), 27–29. I am indebted to Andrew Gow for providing me with his reproduction of the only extant copy of this book, from the Duchess Anna Amalia Library in Weimar. The original volume in Weimar was damaged in the great fire of 2004.

107. Elisheva Carlebach, “Between History and Hope: Jewish Messianism between Ashkenaz and Sepharad” (Annual Lecture of the Selmanowitz Chair of Jewish History, Touro College, New York, NY, May 17, 1998); Carlebach, “The Sabbatian Posture of German Jewry,” in *Ha-ḥalom ve-shivro: Ha-tenu’a ha-Shabta’it u-shluḥoteha: Meshiḥiyut, Shabta’ut u-Frankism*, ed. Rachel Elior (Jerusalem:

continued anticipation of a Messiah other than Jesus were negative by default, a particularly hostile and uniquely distorted notion of Jewish messianism became deeply entrenched in medieval German culture. Here, Christian polemics against Jewish messianic belief were especially diverse and dynamic. Vernacular texts, public plays, and pictorial representations display numerous variants that were either completely unknown in the other European languages or less potently anti-Jewish than the German version—as in the case of the Red Jews.¹⁰⁸ The themes and motifs that had been popular in the Middle Ages were no less influential in the sixteenth century, across Christian denominations.¹⁰⁹ The early modern period, however, also brought changes that affected Christian perceptions of Jewish messianism. Besides the invention of the printing press that—with the newly printed books in the vernacular, illustrated texts, and pamphlets in particular—enabled an increasingly wide audience to participate in public discourse,¹¹⁰ a new literary genre was born in sixteenth-century Germany: polemical ethnographies of Jews and Judaism. The theoretical study of biblical texts for the most part, and abstract discussions of Jewish doctrine, made room for a critique of the practices of contemporary Jewry. The Christian study of Judaism was

Hebrew University, Institute of Jewish Studies, 2001), 2:1–30; Yuval, *Two Nations*, 275. This approach underlies my book about the interpenetration of Jewish messianism and Christian apocalypticism in sixteenth-century Germany; Voß, *Umstrittene Erlöser*.

108. Elisheva Carlebach, “Jews, Christians and the Endtime in Early Modern Germany,” *Jewish History* 14, no. 3 (2000): 339. See also Carlebach, “The Last Deception: Failed Messiahs and Jewish Conversion in Early Modern German Lands,” 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: Kluwer Academic, 2001), 125–38; Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500–1750* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), chap. 4. For the German *Adversus Judaeos* literature of the fourteenth century, cf. Manuela Niesner, “Wer mit juden well disputiren”: Deutschsprachige Adversus-Judaeos-Literatur des 14. Jahrhunderts (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2005).

109. Cf. Edith Wenzel, “The Representation of Jews and Judaism in Sixteenth-Century German Literature,” in Bell and Burnett, *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation*, 395, 399–400.

110. On the beginnings of printing and its resulting impact, cf. Rudolf Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading 1450–1550*, 2nd ed. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1974); Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450–1800*, trans. David Gerard, Verso edition (London: Verso, 2010). For the German pamphlets as medium, see Hans-Joachim Köhler, *Flugschriften als Massenmedium der Reformationszeit: Beiträge zum Tübinger Symposium 1980* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), esp. the article by Richard G. Cole, “The Reformation Pamphlet and Communication Processes,” 139–61. See also Steven Ozment, “Pamphlet Literature of the German Reformation,” in *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research* (St. Louis, MO: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), 85–106. Mark U. Edwards Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), e.g., shows how the printing press and especially pamphlets turned the Reformation into a mass movement. On the visual propaganda of the Reformation, see Robert W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). Roger Chartier, “Reading Matter and ‘Popular’ Reading: From the Renaissance to the Seventeenth Century,” in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999), 269–83, allows a glimpse into the reading culture of the masses.

augmented by observations of how Jews really lived and behaved. The ethnographies, first authored by converts from Judaism, claim to provide realistic portrayals of Jewish life, religion, and ritual. This very popular genre was written almost exclusively in German, and it had a decisive role in shaping early modern perceptions of Jews and Judaism among German Christians. In contrast to the Middle Ages, when knowledge of the Jews and their religion was primarily based on literary stereotypes, Christians now had access to firsthand, if biased, insights.¹¹¹

Christian views of Jewish messianic yearnings were largely derived from Christianity's own apocalyptic concepts. This becomes most conspicuous with regard to the idea of the Jewish Antichrist. This notion envisioned the Antichrist as the savior whom the Jews longed for, with the Jews as his first and most faithful allies.¹¹² During the late fifteenth century the entire Jewish people, awaiting the Messiah and consequent redemption, was increasingly viewed as a willing party to an evil scheme: while the Jews feigned loyalty to their Christian overlords, and the Christian world ridiculed and pitied them for being deceived by their false messianic hopes, Jewish messianism was exposed as being a malicious plot against much-hated Christianity, for the long-expected Jewish Messiah would be none other than the dreaded Antichrist.¹¹³ By equating the Jewish Messiah with the Antichrist, the Christian mind inextricably intertwined Jewish

111. This ethnographic genre has been studied by Maria Diemling and Yaacov Deutsch. See esp. Yaacov Deutsch, "'A View of the Jewish Religion': Conceptions of Jewish Practice and Ritual in Early Modern Europe," in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 3 (2001): 273–95; Deutsch, "Polemical Ethnographies: Descriptions of Yom Kippur in the Writings of Christian Hebraists and Jewish Converts to Christianity in Early Modern Europe," in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 202–33; Deutsch, "Von der Juden Ceremonien," 335–56; Diemling, "Anthonius Margaritha."

112. During antiquity, Christian theologians had already identified the Antichrist as the Jewish Messiah. See Andrew C. Gow, "The Jewish Antichrist in Medieval and Early Modern Germany," in *Medieval Encounters* 2, no. 3 (1996): 249–85; also Jeremy Cohen, "Be-'ikvot ha-Anti-Kristos u-kesharav ha-yehudiyim," in *Rishonim ve-aḥaronim: Mehkarim be-toldot Yisra'el mugashim le-Avraham Grossman*, ed. Joseph R. Hacker, Yosef Kaplan, and Benjamin Z. Kedar (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2010), 29–45. A brief overview also in Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism*, 2nd paperback ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 32–43. Klaus Aichele, *Das Antichrist-drama des Mittelalters, der Reformation und Gegenreformation* (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1974), discusses the Jews' role in plays that depict the Antichrist. For references from the vast literature pertaining to the Antichrist, cf. note 100 above. See also Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

113. Carlebach, "Endtime," 333–35. On the generally increasing anti-Judaism in fifteenth-century folklore, cf. Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); Christopher Ocker, "Contempt for Friars and Contempt for Jews in Late Medieval Germany," in *Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Stephen J. McMichael and Susan E. Myers (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), 133–39; Dean P. Bell, *Sacred Communities: Jewish and Christian Identities in Fifteenth-Century Germany* (Boston: E. J. Brill, 2001), 99–113.

messianism with the wish to annihilate Christendom. Fears and aggressions originally associated with the Antichrist and his apocalyptic reign of terror were now projected onto the Jewish (pseudo-)messiah and his Jewish followers.¹¹⁴ Although misconceptions and polemical interpretations were typical in Christian thought, vengeance as a response to centuries of Christian oppression was indeed a vital element of premodern Ashkenazi messianism.¹¹⁵ The ethnographic publications of converts like Victor of Carben, Johannes Pfefferkorn, and Anthonius Margaritha—including detailed explications of revenge and anti-Christian violence in Jewish apocalyptic thought—suggest that Christians in early modern Germany had access to information that explicitly linked Jewish redemption to their own downfall.¹¹⁶ It is hardly a wonder that Jewish messianic aspirations, as combined with the Christian distortions applied to it via anti-Jewish eschatology, were perceived as a real danger to Christian society, with concomitant harsh political and social consequences for the Jews in the Holy Roman Empire.¹¹⁷ Jews in Germany were painfully aware of the negative assessment of their hopes for redemption in the surrounding Christian society and culture. Their reactions to such hostile Christian views were manifold—the Yiddish fable of the Red Jews is just one example.¹¹⁸

Their cognizance of German attitudes toward Jewish messianism had an impact on the ways that Ashkenazi Jews in Germany conveyed their longing for the coming of the Messiah. Deeply fearful of sparking Christian reactions, they became extremely cautious in their manner of expressing messianic hopes in public. Moreover, the Talmud itself, understanding the morally and socially destructive force of failed messianic promises, dismisses apocalyptic calculations and revolutionary attempts to hasten the end.¹¹⁹ Given the hostile Christian view of Jewish messianism, it seemed most logical for Jews in medieval and early

114. Cf. Carlebach, “Endtime,” 337.

115. Yuval, *Two Nations*, chap. 3. Cf. above, note 30.

116. E.g., Johannes Pfefferkorn, *Handt Spiegel. Johannis Pfefferkorn/ wider und gegen die Jüden/ vnd Judischen Thalmudischen schrifttenn So/ sie vber das Cristenlich Regiment/ singen vnd lesen. ... Solliche artickel zu widerlegen Dargegen ich antwurd vnd mit bescheidene reden vffgelöst hab* (Mainz, 1511), fol. 4r. For additional references, see Voß, *Umstrittene Erlöser*, 32–39.

117. Cf. Yuval, *Two Nations*, esp. chap. 6. Yuval (*ibid.*, chap. 4) argues that the impression of the Jewish concept of “vengeful redemption” had a great impact on Christian public opinion and influenced the emergence of the accusation of blood libel in the twelfth century. See also Carlebach, “Sabbatian Posture,” 21.

118. For additional cases, see Rebekka Voß, “Propter seditionis hebraicae: Judenfeindliche Apokalyptik und ihre Auswirkungen auf den jüdischen Messianismus,” in *Antichrist: Konstruktionen von Feindbildern*, ed. Wolfram Brandes and Felicitas Schmieder (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010), 197–217.

119. Cf., e.g., B. Sanhedrin 97b; B. Ketubbot 110a. See Peter Schäfer, “Die messianischen Hoffnungen des rabbinischen Judentums zwischen Naherwartung und religiösem Pragmatismus,” in *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie des rabbinischen Judentums* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 225, 228, 230, 234.

modern Germany to follow this traditional stance.¹²⁰ Carlebach has argued convincingly that, particularly in this geographic area, a genuine need for caution triggered Jewish self-censorship with regard to apocalyptic matters.

This does not mean, however, that Jews in Ashkenaz refrained from participating in the messianic fervor that seized all of Reformation Europe, Jews and Christians alike.¹²¹ In light of their precarious position in Christian society, the Jews took care when presenting themselves before Christian observers. Thus, Jewish historiography seems to have attempted to disguise Jewish messianism by retroactively downplaying or concealing the reality and nature of failed messianic movements.¹²² Furthermore, Jews in Germany vigilantly warned members of their community against overly visible messianic activities and attempted to restrict apocalyptic speculation to esoteric circles. Ideas about the last days that could be offensive to Christians were circulated secretly and, it seems, were mostly transmitted orally.¹²³ The apocalyptic dimension of a wonder tale from

120. Similar considerations were not alien to Jewish leaders elsewhere in Europe and the Muslim world. Cf., e.g., Moses Maimonides' *Letter to Yemen* (1172). Maimonides warns the Yemenite Jewish community of anger from the Gentiles if they learned of the messianic pretender who had appeared in Yemen; Abraham Halkin and David Hartman, eds., *Epistles of Maimonides: Crisis and Leadership* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), 126–30. For the Sabbatean movement, cf. Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 496–98, 763.

121. This is the thesis of Gerson Cohen, which remains greatly influential today. To Cohen, the indirect transmission of messianic calculations in Ashkenaz seemed to establish proof for his grand typology of alleged Ashkenazi messianic passivity and Sephardi messianic activism, which he advanced in an article that has been reprinted many times since its first appearance in 1967; Gerson Cohen, "Messianic Postures of Ashkenazim and Sephardim," in *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History*, ed. Marc Saperstein (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 209. Cohen's view has been criticized, most severely by Carlebach (cf. the reference above in note 106). On the controversy between Cohen and Carlebach, see the critical assessment by David Berger, "Ha-meshiḥiyut ha-sefaradit v'ha-meshiḥiut ha-'ashkenazit bi-yeme ha-benayim: Beḥinat ha-maḥloket ha-historiografit," in Hacker, Kaplan, and Kedar, *Rishonim ve-aḥaronim*, 11–28.

122. Carlebach mainly bases her argument on a comparison of various Jewish and Christian accounts, from Germany vs. other countries, of the sixteenth-century messianic movements of Asher Lemlein and David Reubeni and Shlomo Molkho, respectively; Carlebach, *Between History and Hope*; Carlebach, "Sabbatian Posture," 9–20. Where Carlebach emphasizes Christian polemics as the driving factor for a restrained public expression of Jewish messianic hopes, Yuval factors the danger of persecution into his studies on the Middle Ages; Yuval, *Two Nations*, chap. 6, esp. 275. Scholem already indicated Jewish self-censorship with regard to negative Christian attitudes toward Sabbateanism; cf. above, note 119.

123. Generally for the Jewish self-censorship of anti-Christian material, see William Popper, *The Censorship of Hebrew Books* (1899; repr., New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1969), s.v. "self-censorship"; Meir Benayahu, *Haskama u-reshut bi-defuse Venezi'a: Ha-sefer ha-ivri me-et hava'ato li-defus ve-'ad zeto le-'or* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1971), 81, 195. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text: The Catholic Church and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon in the Sixteenth Century*, trans. Jackie Feldman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), has recently discussed how internal and external censors worked together in creating the modern Jewish canon. For the (self-)censorship of newly printed Hebrew books in sixteenth-century Germany in particular, see Stephen G. Burnett, "German Jewish Printing in the Reformation Era (1530–1633)," in Bell and Burnett, *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation*, 518, 526–27; Burnett, "The Regulation of Hebrew

Worms, for instance, is known only from the German ethnographical work of a convert. A small late-fifteenth-century collection of Hebrew stories in a manuscript from the Italian Senigallia includes this tale. During the Black Plague of 1349, the burghers of Worms persecuted the Jews of their city. Suddenly, a marble column appeared in the Jewish cemetery. Reaching into the sky, it grew even taller than the cathedral, and it leaned menacingly toward town. The intimidated Christian tormentors retreated, and the Jews were saved. The column remained as a warning symbol for a few days and only sank back into the ground when quiet had returned. To this very day, the writer claims, the stele stands in the Jewish cemetery in Worms, about two cubits high.¹²⁴ In the early sixteenth century, Pfefferkorn revealed a juicy detail to the Christians: the legendary column was reputed to measure the time that remained until the coming of the Messiah. Each day, it would sink into the earth a little more, until it would be swallowed up completely on the day of redemption, signifying everlasting liberation from Christian violence.¹²⁵ Although the stele in this tale passively threatened the Christian persecutors in the mid-fourteenth century, they knew that the end of times would have bloody vengeance in store.

The mechanics of censorship were at work in case of the Red Jews, too. In a Hebrew manuscript from northern Italy, the passage that retells the legend of the Red Jews has been crossed out, either by the author Abraham Jagel himself or a later hand, and is barely legible.¹²⁶ Probably for the same reason, the beadle,

Printing in Germany, 1555–1630: Confessional Politics and the Limits of Jewish Toleration,” in *Infinite Boundaries: Order, Disorder, and Reorder in Early Modern German Culture*, ed. Max Reinhart (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1998), 329–48; Hans-Jörg Künast, “Hebräisch-jüdischer Buchdruck in Schwaben in der ersten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts,” in *Landjudentum im deutschen Südwesten während der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Rolf Kießling and Sabine Ullmann (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1999), 286, 289.

124. Printed in Abraham David, “Sipure ma’asiyot ‘al ha-gezerot be-Germaniya bi-yeme ha-benayim,” in *Shai le-Heman: Mehkarim ba-sifrut ha-‘ivrit shel yeme ha-benayim mugashim le-A. M. Haberman (Heman ha-Yerushalmi) bi-mele’ot lo shiv ‘im ve-ḥamesh shana*, ed. Zvi Malachi (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1977), 81. In fact, the pogroms harmed the Worms community too; Fritz Reuter, “Warmaisa—das jüdische Worms: Von den Anfängen bis zum jüdischen Museum des Isidor Kiefer,” in *Geschichte der Stadt Worms*, ed. Gerold Bönnen (Stuttgart: Theiss, 2005), 670.

125. Johannes Pfefferkorn, *In Lob und eer dem Allerdurchleuchtigsten Großmechtigsten Fursten und herren hern Maximilian...Romschen kayser* (Cologne, 1509), fol. 12r–v. Pfefferkorn claims that Jews from Germany and throughout Europe made pilgrimages to the Worms cemetery because of the messianic stele. They probably prayed there—both for deliverance from the acute afflictions in daily life and for future messianic redemption. On Jewish processions in the Middle Ages and early modern times, see Lucia Raspe, “Sacred Space, Local History, and Diasporic Identity: The Graves of the Righteous in Medieval and Early Modern Ashkenaz,” in *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition*, ed. Ra‘anan Boustan, Oren Kosansky and Marina Rustow (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 147–63. See also Elliott Horowitz, “Speaking to the Dead: Cemetery Prayer in Medieval and Early Modern Jewry,” *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 8 (1999): 303–17.

126. Abraham Jagel, *Be’er sheva*, chap. 22, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Reggio 11 (= Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jerusalem, F 22120). Published by Neubauer, “Kibuzim,” 37–44, with the wrong title. Cf. Neubauer, “Where Are the Ten Tribes?” 411.

Juspa Shammes of Worms, did not include *Ma'ase 'Akdamut* in his famous collection of stories from his hometown, *Mayse nisim*, that he recorded in the mid-seventeenth century. The Yiddish version of *Mayse nisim* that his son, Eliezer Lieberman, brought to print in Amsterdam in 1696 (after his father's death) indeed refers to a printed version of *Ma'ase 'Akdamut*, but the tale itself is not included in this rich corpus of Jewish lore.¹²⁷ Notwithstanding its absence, Juspa, along with every other Jew of his generation in Worms, was undoubtedly familiar with this important legend about one of their local heroes.

Similarly, Jewish children learned the *piyyut 'Akdamut milin* in school,¹²⁸ but in Juspa's lifetime this liturgical poem—which, as aforementioned, was ascribed to Meir Shatz, a native son who was one of the most prolific poets of Ashkenaz—was not recited in the synagogue in Worms, although it had become part of Ashkenazi liturgy everywhere else. The Jews of seventeenth-century Worms were aware of their exceptional position in abstaining from reciting *'Akdamut* on the first day of Shavuot, the festival that was linked to the legendary rescue of their community by the little Red Jew. Judah Loew Kirchheim, in the book of customs that he compiled circa 1625, felt obligated to give a reason for the omission of this famous *piyyut* from the city's rite. According to Kirchheim, there had been a certain cantor in Worms who once sang the *'Akdamut* with such a beautiful voice and great fervor that when he concluded, God immediately swept him up to heaven. Afterward, *'Akdamut* was no longer recited in Worms. This explanation is so flimsy that even Kirchheim himself is hardly convinced. He adds that the real reason has likely been forgotten.¹²⁹ The date when *'Akdamut* was abolished in its hometown is unclear. The famous *Worms Mahzor* of 1272, which did not originate in the city but apparently came into the possession of the Worms Jewish community one generation later, includes the *piyyut*. While the *mahzor* is full of marginal notes, there is no comment about *'Akdamut* indicating that it would no longer be recited in Worms.¹³⁰ It

127. Juspa Shammes, *Seyfer Mayse nisim* (Amsterdam, 1696), fol. 31r: "A story of *'Akdamut* that is recited on Shavuot has been printed." Cf. the Hebrew edition, including an English translation by Shlomo Eidelberg, *R. Juzpa Shamash di-kehilat Warmaisa: Olam yehudeha ba-me'a ha-17* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991), 86 [Hebrew page number], no. 22. The passage is omitted in Eidelberg's English translation; *ibid.*, 89, no. 22.

128. Juspa Shammes, *Minhagim de-k"k Warmaisa le-Rabbi Yuspa Shamash z"l*, ed. Benjamin S. Hamburger and Eric Zimmer (Jerusalem: Machon Yerushalayim, 1988–92), 2:174.

129. Judah Loew Kirchheim, *Minhagot Warmaisa*, ed. Israel M. Peles (Jerusalem: Machon Yerushalayim, 1987), 258 n. 8. Juspa Shammes, in his *minhag* book, does not give a reason; Juspa Shammes, *Minhagim*, 1:112. Cf. Eidelberg, *Juzpa Shamash*, 25–26.

130. Raspe, "Vom Rhein nach Galiläa," 447. Cf. Ezra Fleischer, "Prayer and Piyyut in the Worms Mahzor," in *The Worms Mahzor: The Jewish National and University Library, MS Heb. 4^o 781/1*, introductory vol., ed. Malachi Beit-Arié (Vaduz: Cylar Establishment, 1985), 75; Jonah Fraenkel, ed., *Mahzor shavu'ot le-fi minhage bne Ashkenaz le-khol anfehem* (Jerusalem: Koren, 2000), 28 n. 167; Leopold Zunz, *Die Ritus des synagogalen Gottesdienstes, geschichtlich entwickelt*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Louis Lamm, 1919), 69. On the Worms Mahzor generally, see Malachi Beit-Arié, "The Worms Mahzor: Its History and Its Palaeographic and Codicological Characteristics," in *Worms Mahzor*, introductory vol., 13–35; Beit-Arié, "The Worms Mahzor: MS Jerusalem, Jewish National and University Library

seems that with an eye to their Christian neighbors, Worms Jewry took pains to avoid associating themselves officially with the hymn and the legendary reason why the city's famous cantor Meir Shatz had composed *'Akdmut milin*. After all, one could not deny that *Ma'ase 'Akdmut* was directed against the Christian authorities. It both celebrated and conjured the victory of the Red Jews over Edom.¹³¹

The Yiddish tales of the Red Jews are part of a hidden layer of Jewish popular culture in early modern Central Europe expressing an anti-Christian sensibility. The material known from this period, particularly in Yiddish, represented a vital strategy of theological, social, and cultural persistence within a hostile, powerful, and seemingly invincible Christian society.¹³² The belief in the Red Jews—like the Ten Tribes in general—served an important psychological function. It shielded the community against any doubts about God's assurance that oppression and suffering, which had marked Jewish history for centuries, must inevitably be lifted. The Red Jews reminded the Jews of Ashkenaz that, even if sometimes it did not seem so, the God of Israel would never abandon his people. The day would come when the weak would finally triumph over the mighty.

The term "Red Jews" encountered in Yiddish literature emerged from familiarity with its German counterpart, itself a counterstory to the Jewish narrative about the Ten Tribes. What we witness here, however, is not just a disentangling from Christian distortions applied to the Jewish original. The Yiddish myth of the Red Jews in fact served two complementary ends. First, it subverted the German apocalyptic myth by following its logic, but substituting an alternative narrative, thus rendering explicit the anti-Christian twist in the Hebrew Ten Tribes' legend. The Red Jews are both messianic saviors and, as in the German nightmare, destroyers of Christendom who avenge the age-old oppression of the Jews. At the same time, the Yiddish story of the Red Jews confirmed the Jewish messianic belief that Edom's fall would be carried out by the Ten Tribes.

Messianic resistance against Christianity as personified by the Red Jews was deep seated in German-Jewish culture by way of its vernacular language and literature and was anchored in its liturgy. It seems that among Ashkenazi Jews, an immediate sense of apocalyptic efficacy was attached to the recitation of the *piyyut* itself. In the eighteenth century, Isaac Wetzlar, a learned and well-traveled Jewish businessman from Celle in Lower Saxony, noticed that in the synagogues of Europe, *'Akdmut* was indeed said for the coming of the Messiah. But he lamented that this alone would be of no avail if another mystical

Heb. 4° 781/1: Würzburg? (Germany), 1272," in *The Makings of the Medieval Hebrew Book: Studies in Palaeography and Codicology* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993), 152–80. Facsimile edition, *Worms Mahzor*.

131. In contrast, Lucia Raspe attributes the absence of the *'Akdmut* in Worms to the overall abolition of Aramaic *piyyutim*. Without its liturgical premise, *Ma'ase 'Akdmut*, too, lost its legitimacy; Raspe, "Vom Rhein nach Galiläa," 448; cf. Fleischer, "Prayer and Piyyut," 75.

132. See Carlebach, *Anti-Christian Element*. For the Middle Ages, cf. Kenneth Stow, "Medieval Jews on Christianity," *Rivista di storia del Cristianesimo* 4, no. 1 (2007): 73–100.

hymn, *Shir ha-yihud*, was neglected in many places and no longer recited daily as prescribed.¹³³ In addition to the place of *'Akdmut milin* in the communal service, among Ashkenazim it remained customary to recite *Ma'ase 'Akdmut* each year on the festival of Shavuot as well. Abraham Jagel reports that some communities possessed a special scroll for this purpose, which he had witnessed in Mantua. During his visit, Jagel probably saw a copy of the lost first print of *Megiles Reb Meyer*.¹³⁴ It was not unusual to incorporate a “Second Purim” into the festival cycle of the year to commemorate the local community’s deliverance from persecution, modeled after the Purim festival that celebrates how Queen Esther had saved the Persian Jews. Normally, a special megillah was composed for this local or regional holiday, relating the events in the style of the Scroll of Esther.¹³⁵ The Jews of Frankfurt, for example, commemorated their return to the city after their temporary expulsion during the Fettmilch uprising in 1614 to 1616 in *Megilat Vinz*. A Hebrew version was recited in synagogue, like *Megilat Esther* on Purim, while an additional Yiddish version was read privately at home.¹³⁶ Accordingly, the Yiddish *Megiles Reb Meyer* may also have

133. Wetzlar complained that most scholars refused to recite *Shir ha-Yihud* and in some communities it had been abolished entirely; Isaak Wetzlar, *The Libes Briv of Isaac Wetzlar*, ed. and trans. Morris M. Faienstein (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996), 64–65 (Yiddish), 111–13 (English). While this Hymn of Unity had concluded the daily service in many communities that followed the German-Polish rite, in the mid-sixteenth century, following an earlier controversy over its placement in the liturgy, diverse local practices emerged, restricting *Shir ha-Yihud* to Sabbaths and festivals or even to Yom Kippur only. See Abraham Berliner, *Der Einheitsgesang: Eine literar-historische Studie* (Berlin: Itzkowski, 1910), 14–16; Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, 72; Davidson, *Thesaurus*, 3:485, no. 1676. On Wetzlar and his critique of society in Yiddish, see Morris M. Faienstein, “The ‘Liebes Brief’: A Critique of Jewish Society in Germany (1749),” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 27 (1982): 219–42; Stefan Rohrbacher, “Isaak Wetzlar in Celle: Ein jüdischer Reformator vor der Aufklärung,” in *Juden in Celle: Biographische Skizzen aus drei Jahrhunderten* (Celle: Stadtarchiv, 1996), 33–66.

134. Quoted in Neubauer, “Kibuzim,” 39. Cf. above, note 125. The copy that Jagel refers to was owned by Gershon b. Abraham of Porto. The Mantuan censor’s records in fact list several copies of the Cremona imprint of *Megiles Reb Meyer* in the possession of members of the family Port (Katz); Romer-Segal, “Sifrut yidish,” 788 no. 25. David Ruderman, in his biography of Jagel, dates Jagel’s contact with the family of Gershon to around 1576; David B. Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 13. Cf. on the megillah, “welche man in Deutschland am Pfingsten recitire,” Moritz Steinschneider, *Die Geschichtsliteratur der Juden in Druckwerken und Handschriften* (1905; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1980), 80, no. 91a.

135. Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 46–48.

136. Chava Turniansky, “The Events in Frankfurt am Main (1612–1616) in Megillas Vints and in an Unknown Yiddish ‘Historical’ Song,” in *Schöpferische Momente des europäischen Judentums in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Michael Graetz (Heidelberg: Winter, 2000), 126. This text has been edited and translated into English by Rivka Ulmer, *Turmoil, Trauma and Triumph: The Fettmilch Uprising in Frankfurt am Main (1612–1616) according to Megillas Vintz. A Critical Edition of the Yiddish and Hebrew Text Including an English Translation* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2001). For the place of Yiddish in domestic liturgy, see Jean Baumgarten, *Introduction to Old Yiddish Literature*, trans. Jerold C. Frakes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), chap. 9. Max Weinreich, “Internal Bilingualism in Ashkenaz up to the Enlightenment Period” [in Yiddish], *Di goldene keyt* 35 (1959): 80–88, deals

been read on Shavuot in a private setting. In contrast to other megillot, *Megiles Reb Meyer* does not merely refer to an (alleged) historical event.¹³⁷ Rather, it is future oriented, foretelling the apocalyptic destruction of Edom that is inscribed in the annual Jewish liturgy through the constructed remembrance of a miraculous salvation. Incidentally, just before Shavuot the Jewish communities of the Rhineland commemorated the anti-Jewish pogroms of the First Crusade. Yuval argues that local fast days in remembrance of the martyrs of 1096 were also intended to evoke God's wrath and spur God to finally destroy Edom and send the Messiah. When celebrating the Red Jew's triumph as apocalyptic avenger on Shavuot, it was typologically anticipated that God would answer his people's prayers.¹³⁸

The Red Jews demonstrate how expressions of Jewish messianism and Christian apocalypticism in the century of the Reformation informed one another: how Jews and Christians mutually perceived, reacted to, and influenced each other's messianic claims and apocalyptic beliefs. The eschatological discourse of the two faith communities in Germany is remarkable for the seeming paradox of a relationship that is alternatively constricting and fertile. It oscillated between two poles, since Jewish and Christian end times are incompatible by definition. While the hopes and fears of one inhibited the expression of the other, particularly in the case of the Jews articulating their own yearnings, their simultaneous desires for the end of time strengthened the competing religions' expectations. I suggest that the uniquely hostile Christian perception of Jewish messianism that was conveyed in the anti-Jewish thread of Christian apocalypticism provided a foundation for the close interpenetration between Jewish and Christian apocalyptic lore in early modern German lands. Indeed, knowledge of the other's rival interpretation of the same events and scriptural sources affected, formed, and renewed both Jewish and Christian conceptions of the last days. Jews

with the reluctance to introduce Yiddish liturgy into synagogue prayer services. See also David E. Fishman, "To Pray in Yiddish: A Couple of Methodological Remarks and Some New Sources" [in Yiddish], in *YIVO Bleter*, n.s. 1 (1991): 69–92.

137. Against this Rivkind, "Historical Allegory."

138. For Yuval's thesis on remembrance as a form of active messianism, see Yuval, *Two Nations*, 135–59. Yuval argues that the blood of martyrs served as evidence of Christian guilt that must atoned for when the messiah of revenge arrives. On the Rhenish fast days, see Eric Zimmer, "Gezerot 1096 be-sifre ha-minhagim bi-yeme ha-benayim u-va'et ha-ḥadasha: Yeḥira ve-hitpashtut shel tikse ha-avelut," in *Yehudim mul ha-zelav: Gezerot 1096 ba-historiya uva-historiografiya*, ed. Yom Tov Assis et al. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2000), 157–70. The question of how the liturgical recitation of *Ma'ase 'Akdmut* related to local fast days in the Rhineland was first raised by Lucia Raspe; Raspe, "Vom Rhein nach Galiläa," 440–41; Raspe, *Jüdische Hagiographie*, 196 n. 226. Recently, Jeffrey Hoffman, "Akdmut: History, Folklore, and Meaning," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99, no. 2 (2009): 171–73, has also put the history of 'Akdmut *milin* in the context of the crusade massacres. Hoffman correctly points out that the importance of commemorating the events of 1096 accounts for the long life of this *piyyut* in the Ashkenazi rite, because the catastrophe of the First Crusade added new meaning and thus strengthened the poem's comforting effect on later generations, especially in light of its mythic origin.

and Christians sought to manipulate and integrate one another's expectations in order to undermine their interlocutor's competing eschatological ideology and thereby serve their own apocalyptic-messianic agenda. As a result, Jews adopted Christian apocalyptic beliefs while giving them an anti-Christian twist, and vice versa. After all, communicating a position that distinguishes oneself from the other requires a common language.

Ultimately, the premodern circulation of the Red Jews' story is an expression of the ancient Jewish-Christian quarrel about the identity of Edom. Each side passes the eschatological loser Edom to the other, while identifying itself with his victorious brother Israel. The Yiddish story not only undermines the Christian apocalyptic construction of a fictitious people known as the Red Jews, but it overturns the self-perception of the Church as the true Israel that superseded the people of Israel as God's chosen people and became the bearer of eschatological victory and truth. The result is a mutual deconstruction of the explaining narrative of the other's identity and an affirmation of its own self-understanding as a partner in an uninterrupted covenant.

Naturally, subversive opinions such as those linked to the Red Jews are hard to find in public discourse. Resistance was rather offered in "hidden transcripts," as James C. Scott has aptly called the covert traditions of repressed groups that reflect a very different evaluation of their situation than their public posture might suggest.¹³⁹ In Ashkenaz, this stance was expressed in various cultural contexts: besides explicit anti-Christian polemics like *Toldot Yeshu* and Hebrew prayers that contained anti-Christian passages and curses, certain core beliefs such as the future role of the Ten Tribes or the Red Jews were essentially directed against Christianity, and invectives like the practice of referring to Jesus as "the hanged one" blasphemed Christianity *expressis verbis* through various pejorative phrases and terms of mockery.¹⁴⁰ Much of this seems to have taken place in a less-restrained way in Yiddish culture, both orally and in writing. The vernacular Yiddish text as a medium was less prone to Christian scrutiny in search of anti-Christian statements than the canonical works of Judaism that were written in Hebrew and Aramaic. Not until the sixteenth century did ethnographies written by converts offer the Christian readership a closer glimpse into Jewish tradition beyond the Talmud and siddur. At first, Christian Hebraists who studied Yiddish in that era were mainly interested in its linguistic and paleographic aspects as part of their humanistic quest to better understand the Hebrew Scriptures. Yiddish literature did not gain importance for their polemical and missionary work until the late seventeenth and particularly the eighteenth century.¹⁴¹ Significantly, in 1477 the Dominican preacher and member of the

139. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

140. On curses, see Yuval, *Two Nations*, 115–30; and recently, on invectives, Yaacov Deutsch, "Jewish Anti-Christian Invectives and Christian Awareness: An Unstudied Form of Interaction in the Early Modern Period," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 55 (2010): 41–61.

141. Cf. Carlebach, *Anti-Christian Element*, 18–19. For the Hebraist study of Yiddish in early modern Germany, see Jerold C. Frakes, *The Cultural Study of Yiddish in Early Modern Europe*

faculty at the University of Ingolstadt, Peter Schwarz (Petrus Nigri) knew nothing of the Yiddish tradition of the Red Jews and its anti-Christian design. He was familiar with the Jews “beyond the Red Sea” merely as misguided warrantors of the false Jewish belief in the continued existence of a sovereign Jewish kingdom.¹⁴²

THE RED JEWS IN JEWISH MODERNITY

The Red Jews vanished from Christian belief circa 1600,¹⁴³ but meanwhile, in the Yiddish-speaking world, the idea was proving to be increasingly persistent and versatile. The Red Jews enjoyed long-lasting popularity in Central European Jewish culture at least through the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁴⁴ After that time, while Yiddish gradually diminished as a medium of cultural creativity in modern Western Europe, the legend was kept alive among Yiddish speakers in Eastern Europe who later brought it to Israel and America. The print history of *Ma'ase 'Akdmut* symbolizes the eastward migration of the Red Jews. The story appeared in Yiddish at least six times between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries in West-Central Europe, ending with its 1805 printing in Amsterdam, as far as can be established. From that same year through 1916, *Ma'ase 'Akdmut* was published in at least four different editions in Lemberg (Lvov).¹⁴⁵

(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Aya Elyada, “Protestant Scholars and Yiddish Studies in Early Modern Europe,” *Past and Present* 203, no. 1 (2009): 69–98.

142. Peter Schwarz, *Stern des Meschiah* (Esslingen, 1477), fol. 48v. On the author, see Christopher Ocker, “German Theologians and the Jews in the Fifteenth Century,” in Bell and Burnett, *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation*, 46–59; Bernhard Walde, *Christliche Hebraisten Deutschlands am Ausgang des Mittelalters* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1916), chap. 4.

143. This was mainly due to the fact that the Christian image of the Red Jews changed over the course of the sixteenth century, such that they were stripped of their long-standing role and with it their relevance for Christian apocalyptic imagery. Variable concepts of Jewish participation in the drama of the last days emerged instead, allowing for a changing historical situation. With the emergence of the Turkish threat, the Ten Tribes, originally the archenemies of Christendom, proved to be more and more successful to the extent that they could be perceived as allies against the infidel; see Voß, *Umstrittene Erlöser*, chap. 3.2. For another case of the reassessment of a people in relation to the apocalypse, namely the Mongols, see Felicitas Schmieder, “Christians, Jews, Muslims—and Mongols: Fitting a Foreign People into the Western Christian Apocalyptic Scenario,” in *Medieval Encounters* 12, no. 1 (2006): 274–95. Cf. also Gow, *Red Jews*, chap. 6.5. As a further explanation, Gow suggests that the biblical criticism of the Reformers may have contributed to the diminishing currency of the myth of the Red Jews.

144. At that time, the legend of the Red Jews still seems to have been a vital part of Jewish popular culture in Germany, as the work of Augusti suggests; cf. above, note 105.

145. Cf. Zfatman, *Ha-siporet be-yidish*, 166, no. 173 and 174; Rivkind, “Historical Allegory,” 9–10, and above, note 68. The edition Lemberg (1839) seems to have been reprinted in the 1850s; Jewish National and University Library, SO = 23V14384. Two additional editions from Lemberg—neither having been listed by Zfatman nor Rivkind—date from 1902 and 1916; *Ayn sheyne und vinderlikhe geshikhte fun die royte yudilekh* (Lemberg, 1902), JNUL, RO = 2003A5634; *Seyfer mayse gvures hashem* (Lemberg, [1916]), JNUL, R 4 = 51 A 693. Lemberg also issued at least one Hebrew edition; *Sefer ma'ase gvurot ha-shelem* (Lemberg, [1916]), YIVO, 3/15637, that appeared in concise form as

Among Hasidic groups, it continues to be printed today, in both Yiddish and Hebrew.¹⁴⁶

While the Red Jews were originally found only in the vernacular, namely Yiddish and German, the myth spread beyond the Yiddish-speaking world to add yet another variant to the rich Jewish legendary tradition about the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. Hebrew and Arabic stories from Italian, Sephardi, North African, and Oriental Jewries, having been transmitted both written and orally from the seventeenth century to the present, speak of a savior from beyond the Sambatyon and his miraculous rescue of an imperiled Jewish community. They are essentially variations on the tale of the Red Jews that originated in Older Yiddish. The term “Red Jews,” however, remains almost exclusive to Yiddish.¹⁴⁷ Not even the Sephardi scholar Menasseh ben Israel of Amsterdam, who gathered a wealth of material on the Ten Tribes in the mid-seventeenth century, mentions them by name.¹⁴⁸ As in the 1630 Hebrew translation of *Ma’ase Akdamut* (cited above), “Red Jews” is usually rendered neutrally as “Ten Tribes,” “Sons of Moses (*Bne Moshe*),” or simply “Jews beyond the Sambatyon,” and the like.¹⁴⁹

The relocation of the Red Jews motif was not merely a geographic change. Its removal from constant polemical confrontations with Christian rivals led to a shedding of its anti-Christian barb. The Red Jews’ image shifted away from being a key instrument in the Jewish-Christian dispute about the identity of *verus Israel*, and their role as saviors came to the fore. They personified hope for salvation in its broadest sense—from exilic existence and the problems of life as a minority. Thus, the Hebrew variants may replace the evil Christian sorcerer with a king, an imam, a Jewish convert to Islam, or the Muslim population in general. Based on the Western Yiddish original, where the weak triumph over the strong, these later stories are often designed as an exegesis of Deuteronomy

Sefer Akdamut (Warschau, 1902); cf. Rivkind, *Megilat*, 508. The title of the 1839 edition suggests that it is based on a lost Hebrew print.

146. Cf. also Hoffman, “Akdamut,” 169 n. 18. The Israel Folktales Archives in Haifa records two different versions of *Ma’ase Akdamut* that Efraim Tzoref, who immigrated to Israel from Poland, recalled in 1958 and 1960; IFA 286 and 2208. I plan to publish my findings on the modern versions of *Ma’ase Akdamut* elsewhere.

147. In a few cases, this phrase is translated literally as *yehudim admonim*, e.g., in the Hebrew rendering of *Ma’ase Akdamut*, Lemberg (1916). Cf. also above, note 4. For the few exceptions in Latin translations, cf. Gow, *Red Jews*, 69–70.

148. Menasseh ben Israel, *The Hope of Israel: The English Translation by Moses Wall, 1652*, ed. Henry Méchoulan and Gérard Nahon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

149. Cf. Yassif, “Tirgum kadmon.” See also, e.g., the versions in a collection of exempla from the seventeenth century that are written in Sephardi script, printed in Moses Gaster, *The Exempla of the Rabbis: Being a Collection of Exempla, Apologies and Tales Culled from Hebrew Manuscripts and Rare Hebrew Books* (1924; repr., New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1968), no. 369; an Oriental manuscript from the eighteenth century, *ibid.*, no. 445; a collection from Italy dating from 1775, printed in Ginzberg, “Haggadot ketu’ot,” 43–45, no. 4. I thank Elisheva Schönfeld for directing me to this Gaster reference.

32:30: “How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight?” Likewise, the savior from the Ten Tribes embodies physical inferiority: taking the form of a small boy or girl, or someone with a physical limitation, such as being blind in one eye or having one arm.¹⁵⁰

While the Red Jews left the frame of Jewish-Christian polemics long ago, their ideological roots in modern Yiddish are still clearly visible. Mendele Moykher Sforim, in his *Travels of Benjamin the Third*, consciously plays on these historical tropes. His main character, Benjamin, intends to speak with the Red Jews in their native language, which he claims is the language of the *piyyut* *'Akdamut milin*, as composed by Eldad ha-Dani, who after all came from the Red Jews.¹⁵¹ *'Akdamut*, however, is not mentioned in the Eldad tradition, to the best of my knowledge. Mendele here draws on *Ma'ase 'Akdamut*, freely combining it with the famous story about the ninth-century traveler. In nineteenth- and twentieth-century Eastern Yiddish, the collective diminutive *royte yidelekh*, little Red Jews—in contrast to *rote yudn*, Red Jews, in Western Yiddish—still serves to remind us of this expression’s etymological origins.

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150. Cf., e.g., the Hebrew version from the Israel Folktale Archives, recounted by Moshe Attias in 1943 (IFA 10103); published under the title “The Miracle of Tu b’Shevat” in Ben-Amos and Noy, *Folktales*, 446–49.

151. S. Y. Abramovitsh, *Tales of Mendele the Book Peddler: Fishke the Lame and Benjamin the Third*, ed. Dan Miron and Ken Frieden (New York: Schocken Books, 1996), 333.