

A Jewish Response to the Crusades

*The Dispute over Sacred Places in the Holy Land**

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I.

In the second half of the 13th century, toward the end of Crusader rule in Palestine, Nahmanides, a Spanish-Jewish scholar living in Acre, where he had completed his great commentary on the Torah, made the following comment on Leviticus 26:33:

»Your enemies... shall be appalled by it« – those are good tidings, informing all exiles that our Land does not accept our enemies. This, too, is a great proof and promise to us that nowhere in the civilized world will you find a land that was good and broad, and that was at one time settled, but is now so desolate. For since we left it, it has not accepted any nation or tongue, and all are trying to settle it – but they are unable to do so¹⁾.

Written by Nahmanides shortly after his immigration to Palestine, when the fall of the Crusader Kingdom was already in sight, this passage is a direct reference to the Crusaders²⁾. Most probably, after the Mamluk victory at Ain Jalud, when Baibars' armies had

* I am indebted to my friends and colleagues, Amikam Elad and Yaakov Guggenheim, for their help in the preparation of this article. Special thanks go to Ora Limor, for many years of dialogue on issues pertaining to the interface between Judaism and Christianity.

1) MOSHE B. NACHMAN (NACHMANIDES), *Commentary on the Torah*, ed. C. B. CHAVEL (Hebr.), vol. II, 1960, p. 190.

2) R. Meir of Rothenburg, writing around the same time, alludes to the same homily: »... For it spews out sinners, in keeping with Scripture, »Your enemies ... shall be appalled by it«, for even the gentiles in it cannot succeed, for they are sinners, and therefore the Land of Israel is at present desolate« (R. SAMSON B. ZADOK, *Sefer ha-Tashbez*, 1857, 51a). The homily reappears, but after the fall of the Latin Kingdom, at the beginning of the 14th century, in a text of Nissim b. Moses of Marseilles, see HE-HALUZ 7 (1925), p. 103. Nahmanides' homily is in fact based on a passage in the Sifra: »I will make the land desolate« – that is a good thing, so that Israel should not say: Now that we have been exiled from our land, our enemies will come and settle down there peacefully; as Scripture says, »Your enemies shall be appalled by it« [that is, your enemies], who are settled there; and the enemies who come later will also not find peace there« (Sifra, ed. A.H. WEISS, 1862, 112a). However, Nahmanides' wording refers to the reality of Crusader rule in his time.

already driven the Crusaders from Safed and increased their pressure on other Crusader outposts, Nahmanides was giving his readers the good news that the Land of Israel was rejecting their foes. Here was a »nation and tongue« that had set out to do just what we should have been doing – »trying to settle it« – but in vain.

If this passage is indeed a reaction to the imminent fall of the Crusaders, it is almost the only reaction to the Crusaders in the Hebrew literature of the time – after the Crusaders had been in power for nearly two hundred years. Could it be that only the approaching collapse of the Latin Kingdom prompted some reaction from their Jewish contemporaries? Did the very challenge of the Crusaders have no impact in those areas in which medieval Jews usually reacted to their environment – philosophy, homiletics, midrash or piyyut (liturgical poetry)? I am not referring, of course, to isolated reactions to events accompanying the Crusades, or to reactions to the Crusades themselves. Such reactions produced chronicles and dirges – almost wherever the Crusaders set foot, from France to Palestine³). The occupation of Jerusalem and massacre of its inhabitants also aroused a literary echo⁴).

However, none of these observations answers the basic question: How did Jewish society react to the Crusader challenge? How did the Jews respond to the fact that the Land of Israel was now a focus of world attention, topping the scale of political priorities? What did they feel about the quasi-messianic religious renaissance that came with the Crusades, with the blessing of the Catholic Church – European Jewry's oppressor and opponent, the self-proclaimed legitimate heir to what the Jews considered their own exclusive heritage? Above all, how did contemporary Jewish society react to Christian rule in the Holy Land in general? And this last question was particularly acute in reference to places where

Cf. R. Moses b. Solomon of Salerno, in his book *Ma'amar ha-Emunah* (second half of 13th cent.) »For those kings who wish to come and conquer the Land of Israel and wrest from the Ishmaelites the burial place of the man whom they revere as a god – they are repulsed by a stormy wind. Sometimes their ships are wrecked and many of the people in them drown, with their property, their silver and gold ... when they fall into the hands of the Ishmaelites, who enslave them cruelly« (J. PERLES, in: *MGWJ* 24 [1875], p. 22). I am indebted to my colleague Israel Hazani, who directed my attention to this source.

3) *Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgungen während der Kreuzzüge*, hg. von A. NEUBAUER u. M. STERN, 1892; A. M. HABERMANN, *The Persecutions of Germany and France* (Hebr.), 1940; see also H. SCHIRMANN, *Dirges on the Persecutions in the Land of Israel, Africa, Spain, Germany and France* (Hebr.), *Kobez al Jad, Minora Manuscripta Hebraica*, New Serie, 3 [13] (1940) pp. 23–74, secs. 2, 5, 12; and see below, n. 4.

4) Abraham bar Hiyya, *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, ed. S. POSNANSKI, and J. GUTTMANN, 1924, pp. 99–100; Letter from the Cairo Geniza, *TS Misc.* 35.28, in: J. MANN, *Texts and Studies*, vol. I, 1931, pp. 354–356; Letter of recommendation of R. Barukh b. Isaac of Aleppo, *MS Oxford*, Bodl. Heb. a. 3, fol. 1; N. GOLB, *The Scroll of Obadiah the Proselyte* (Hebr.), in: *Studies in Geniza and Sephardi Heritage Presented to S. D. Goitein*, ed. S. MORAG and I. BEN-AMI, 1981, pp. 103–106. Despite the existence of these texts, it is still rather puzzling that the Crusader occupation of Jerusalem and the attendant events were not more significantly marked in the historical memory of Jewish society in the East.

Christian rule seemed to signify Christianity's victory not over Islam but over Judaism: the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem; the Tombs of the Patriarchs in Hebron; and many other biblical sites to which Judaism and Christianity attached diametrically opposite symbolic meanings. Not only are these questions left largely unanswered in the literature of the time; it seems doubtful whether they were at all asked. Any attempt to find explicit traces of the new reality in the canonical Jewish literature of the time is doomed to failure.

In this paper I would like to reveal the »fingerprints« of that reality in popular behavior and literature of the time, to show that the Crusader question did indeed cause a considerable stir; it forced Jews to formulate their own responses to all the phenomena mentioned above. And their primary response, I believe, was the institution of pilgrimage, in the broadest sense of the term. Before the Crusades, pilgrimage was practically unknown among Jews living in the countries of the Latin Church⁵). As an institution, it made its first, rather hesitant, steps in the 12th century; only in the 13th century, after the Third Crusade, did it take its place in the religious world of the Jews of France and Germany. It was to a very great extent a mirror image of Latin-Christian pilgrimage, imitating the Latin itineraries, religious values, myths and folk culture⁶).

This article is concerned with the ongoing dispute between Judaism and Christianity over the question: »Whose land?« Who was the true heir to the Promised Land, the genuine seed of the biblical genealogy? The dispute, which took place along the paths that the pilgrims walked in the Holy Land, had its impact on the corpus of stories which gave the pilgrims religious and – mainly – mythical information about holy places in particular and pilgrimage in general. True, the pilgrim's itineraries were not created during the Crusader period – certainly not by the new arrivals from Catholic Europe. However, there is no doubt that the tales express the specific spirit of the Crusader period and were presumably written then. Neither is there any doubt that European-Jewish pilgrims had an important

5) On Ashkenazi pilgrimages to the land of Israel before the Crusader period see M. HIRSHMANN, *The Priest's Gate and Elijah ben Menahem's Pilgrimage* (Hebr.), in: *Tarbiz* 55 (1986), pp. 218–227; on the 11th century pilgrim R. Zechariah, who was exiled to Jerusalem to atone for his sins, see E. REINER, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage to Eretz Yisrael (1099–1517)* (Hebr.), Ph. D. dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1988, p. 185.

6) See REINER (*supra*, n. 5), pp. 1–19; E. KANARFOGEL, *The Aliyah of »Three Hundred Rabbis« in 1211: Tosafist Attitudes toward Settling in the Land of Israel*, in: *JQR* 76 (1986), pp. 191–215; I. M. TA-SHMA, *The Attitude to Aliya to Eretz Israel (Palestine) in Medieval German Jewry* (Hebr.), in: *Shalem, Studies in the History of the Jews in Eretz Israel*, vol. VI, 1992, pp. 315–318. I. Yuval has recently directed attention to messianic agitation in France and German in the 13th century, in expectation of the year 1240; see I. J. YUVAL, *In Expectation of 1240: Jewish Hopes, Christian Fears* (Hebr.), in: *XIth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Unit B (Jewish History)*, vol. I, 1994, 113–120. This situation may also have something to do with the increase in pilgrimage to the Land of Israel in the 13th century. Even so, this does not lessen the central role of Crusader rule in reshaping religious attitudes to Palestine in the 12th–13th centuries.

part in its formation. The whole corpus focuses on the question of Christian presence in the Holy Land and the holy places. The Christian claim to Palestine, as expressed *inter alia* in Latin pilgrimage traditions, was rightly interpreted by the Jews as a challenge to the Jewish concept of history, in the Jews were the sole legitimate inheritors of the land⁷).

The central goal of the corpus of tales was to proclaim the real master of the land – the question, dormant as long as Palestine was under Muslim sovereignty, lay at the root of the tension between the Christian Crusaders and the Jews. The tales in the corpus are woven into the Crusader texture of 12th-century Palestine; they are pervaded with polemical tension, revolving around the problem of how to pronounce the Jewish truth in the face of Christian domination. How could one combat the sensation that Christian control of Palestine also expressed the truth of Christianity, its right to the Holy Land?

The language of the pilgrimage traditions was a symbolic one, expressing religious values through sites and itineraries. The pilgrim, by the very act of pilgrimage to a specific holy site, was affirming the religious idea that it embodied. As the pilgrimage tradition took shape, a system of ideas was transplanted from one semantic frame to another; it was translated into a system of symbols – holy sites and their contents⁸).

Whoever owned a holy site and dictated its ritual was addressing a theological argument to the believing pilgrim – and a direct polemical argument against the non-believer. Whoever owned the site was *ipso facto* right. Hence the main thrust of the corpus of tales is to demonstrate the weakness of the Christian ownership of the holy places and, primarily, the falseness of the Christian tradition. Our first story will concern the Tomb of King David on Mount Zion; it is told by Benjamin of Tudela, a Spanish-Jewish traveler who made his pilgrimage to the Holy Land around 1168–1170.

II.

On Mount Zion are the sepulchres of the House of David, and the sepulchres of the kings that ruled after him. The exact place cannot be identified, inasmuch as fifteen years ago a wall of the church [Heb.: *bamab*] of Mount Zion fell in. The Patriarch commanded the overseer to take the stones of the old walls and restore therewith the church. He did so, and hired workmen at fixed wages; and there were twenty men who brought the stones from the base of the wall of Zion. Among these men there were two Jews. On a certain day the one entertained the other; after their meal

7) See R. WILKEN, *The Land Called Holy, Palestine in Christian History and Thought*, 1992, who devotes much attention to the question of the claims to possession of Palestine in the early days of Christianity, up until the Muslim invasion. See also J. E. TAYLOR, *Christians and the Holy Places, The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins*, 1993 (for a review of this book see O. IRSHAI, in: *JRS* 84 [1994], pp. 264–265).

8) See REINER (*supra*, n. 5), pp. 159–161; cf. also below, text at n. 34.

they returned to their work, when the overseer said to them, »Why have you tarried to-day?« They answered, »Why need you complain? When our fellow workmen go to their meal we will do our work.« When the dinner-time arrived, and the other workmen had gone to their meal, they examined the stones, and raised a certain stone which formed the entrance to a cave. Thereupon one said to the other, »Let us go in and see if any money is to be found there.« They entered the cave, and reached a large chamber resting upon pillars of marble overlaid with silver and gold. In front was a table of gold and a sceptre and crown. This was the sepulchre of King David. On the left thereof in like fashion was the sepulchre of King Solomon; then followed the sepulchres of all the kings of Judah that were buried there. Closed coffers were also there, the contents of which no man knows. The two men essayed to enter the chamber, when a fierce wind came forth from the entrance of the cave and smote them, and they fell to the ground like dead men, and there they lay until evening. And there came forth a wind like a man's voice, crying out: »Arise and go forth from this place!« So the men rushed forth in terror, and they came unto the Patriarch, and related these things to him. Thereupon the Patriarch sent for Rabbi Abraham el Constantini, the pious recluse, who was one of the mourners of Jerusalem, and to him he related all these things according to the report of the two men who had come forth. Then Rabbi Abraham replied, »These are the sepulchres of the house of David; they belong to the kings of Judah, and on the morrow let us enter, I and you and these men, and find out what is there«. And on the morrow they sent for the two men, and found each of them lying on his bed in terror, and the men said: »We will not enter there, for the Lord doth not desire to show it to any man.« Then the Patriarch gave orders that the place should be closed up and hidden from the sight of man unto this day. These things were told me by the said Rabbi Abraham⁹⁾.

The enigmatic nature of this story is already obvious in the introductory passage: »On Mount Zion are the sepulchres of the House of David, ... The exact place cannot be identified.« The place is at one and the same time known and unknown: it is known to be on Mount Zion, but the exact spot is unknown, rather like the burial place of Moses on Mount Nebo, »and no one knows his burial place to this day.« But the mystery seems to be even greater than expressed by the paradoxical structure of the passage. For the tombs of the House of David were indeed on Mount Zion, as Benjamin writes; but his assertion that their location was unknown was certainly not true in his time, the 12th century.

The beginnings of the Christian tradition associating King David with the Church of Zion on Mount Zion, and translating that association into ritual terms, go back to the

9) M. N. ADLER, ed., *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, 1907, pp. 24–25. On occasion we will depart from Adler's translation where our reading (or understanding) of the Hebrew text differs from his.

Byzantine times¹⁰). An Armenian festival calendar of the 5th century lists a special service, held on December 25 in the Church of Zion on Mount Zion, in honor of King David and St. James, Jesus' brother¹¹). The first references to the tombs of the House of David on Mount Zion appear in Arab sources from the 10th century¹²). However, the original tradition was surely Christian rather than Muslim – it does not seem likely that there could have been an independent Muslim tradition about a site inside a church.

The first explicit reference to David's tomb on Mount Zion in a Christian source is apparently in a biography of Constantine and Helena which, though not precisely dated, was certainly written no later than the 11th century¹³). It is mentioned again toward the

10) O. LIMOR, King David's Tomb on Mt. Zion: The Origins of a Tradition (Hebr.), in: D. JACOBY, Y. TSAFRIR (eds.), *Jews, Samaritans and Christians in Byzantine Palestine*, 1988, pp. 11–23; O. LIMOR, The Origins of a Tradition: King David's Tomb on Mount Zion, in: *Traditio* 44 (1988), pp. 450–462. For an attempt to explain the tradition of David's tomb on Mount Zion as a development of biblical traditions relating to the last kings of the House of David, see G. BARKAI, The Problem of the Tombs of the Last Kings of the House of David (Hebr.), in: M. BROSHI et al. (eds.), *Between Hermon and Sinai (Memorial to Amnon, Studies in the History, Archaeology and Geography of Eretz Israel)* (Hebr.), 1977, pp. 75–92.

11) A. RENOUX, *Le Codex arménien Jérusalem 121*, in: *Patrologia Orientalis* 35 (1971), fasc. 2, no. 168, pp. 228–231. See also Y. TSAFRIR, *Zion – The South-Western Hill of Jerusalem and Its Place in the Urban Development of the City in the Byzantine Period*, Ph. D. dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1975 (Hebr.), pp. 122–123; LIMOR (supra [Hebr.], n. 10), pp. 16–18.

12) Al-Mas'udi (d. 956) mentions »the Church of Zion, mentioned by David, peace be upon him, as well as the church known as al-Jismaniyya. They [= the Christians] believe that David's tomb is there«, Muruj al-Dhahab, ed. Ch. PELLAT, vol. I, 1966, pp. 64 (= Paris ed., 1861, p. 111). Al-Muqaddasi writes (in 985) that »according to the people of the Book, David's tomb is in Zion«, *Ahsan al-Takasim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim*, ed. M. J. DE GOEJE, 1906, p. 46. However, see A. ELAD, »Sihyawn«, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*², vol. IX, pp. 571–573, who suggests that Al-Muqaddasi may have been referring to the biblical identification of Zion, while the Bible describes David as having been buried not in Zion but in the City of David (1 Kgs 2:11), and only in another context does the Bible refer to »the stronghold of Zion [which] is now the City of David« (2 Sam 5:7). More details are provided by al-Tha'alabi, author of *Tales of the Prophets* (d. 1035): »Mount Zion is at the gate of Jerusalem. I have heard from reliable persons: The tomb of David, may he rest in peace, is situated there, and there stands a church looking out over 'En al-Silwan. I asked one of the monks, and he told me, 'This is Zion and this is the church«, *Kisas al-Anbiya*, 1937, p. 323. Two transmitters of the tradition, as noted by Hirschberg, attribute it to Christian sources. Al-Mutahhar ibn Tahir al-Maqdisii, born in Jerusalem around the mid 10th century, writes, »The Church of Zion, in which David used to worship God« (*Kitab al-Bada' wal-Ta'rikh*, vol. IV, 1907, p. 88). Further information about David's tomb in the Church of Zion is given by Ibn al-Murajja (mid-11th cent.): »And it is said that his [= King David's] tomb is in the Church of Zion, for that was where he lived. I heard a group [of religious scholars] saying that without any argument thereon,« *Fada'il Bayt al-Maqdis wa 'l-Sham wal-Khalil*, ed. O. LIVNEH-KAFRI, 1995, p. 247, Tradition no. 368. For the Muslim traditions of David's tomb on Mount Zion see also H. Z. HIRSCHBERG, *The Tombs of David and Solomon in Muslim Tradition* (Hebr.), in: *Eretz-Israel* 3 (1954), pp. 213–220, and see now ELAD, op. cit. I am indebted to my friend Amikam Elad, who shared his knowledge with me and helped me in the preparation of this note.

13) M. GUIDI, *Un bios di Costantino*, *Tipografia della rendiconti Accademia del Lincei*, 1908, Chap. 51 (= D. BALDI, *Enchiridion Locorum Sanctorum*, 1982², p. 496, no. 756). Although this version of the Life of

end of the 11th century by Raymond d'Aguilers, a chronicler accompanying Raymond de St. Gilles during the Crusader siege of Jerusalem in July 1099. In his account of the siege from the south, Raymond describes the Church of Zion and states that it contained the tombs of the House of David¹⁴).

Thus, by the 10th century, the ritual of David, originally a festival and prayer-service in honor of David, which Ora Limor has shown to be a Christian version of the pagan cult of the founder of the city, had become a medieval saint's ritual, centered on a structure that was identified as David's tomb¹⁵). This is an instance of a process through which a site, originally hallowed for a somewhat abstract reason – »so-and-so's synagogue,« »so-and-so's church« or, as in our case, »a ceremony in so-and-so's honor« – is transformed into a well-defined object, in this case a tomb, with which the believers can communicate by direct ritual means. Such processes generally take place when popular rituals crystallize around the site – mainly when it becomes a pilgrimage destination¹⁶).

Since by Benjamin of Tudela's time the tomb of King David on Mount Zion had become a major station on the itinerary of any Christian pilgrim in Jerusalem, his assertion that »the exact place cannot be identified« cannot be taken at face value. It is clearly not his intention simply to tell his readers that the exact location of the tomb is unknown, that they must make do with the information that the tomb is somewhere on Mount Zion. The very opposite is true: he is proclaiming for all to hear that the site generally known as the »tomb of David« is *not* the real tomb; the place usually shown as such is false – and the falsification is deliberate. The Christians who transmit the tradition of the supposed site of the tomb are aware of the truth, but they deny it. The story is thus designed to refute an existing tradition and is deliberately polemical¹⁷). However, the mere fact that the author of the tale used a story, rather than just deny the Christian claim, suggests that we examine the tale itself more closely.

Constantine has been dated in part to the second half of the 9th century, the part dealing with Helena's visit and the construction of churches in Jerusalem has been dated to the 10th–11th centuries. On the nature of these versions see F. WINKELMANN, Ein Ordnungsversuch der griechischen hagiographischen Konstantiniden und ihrer Überlieferung, in: *Studia Byzantina* II, 1973, p. 268.

14) J. H. and L. L. HILL, *Le »Liber« de Raymond d'Aguilers*, 1969, pp. 138–139.

15) LIMOR (*supra*, n. 10), pp. 18–19.

16) On this point see REINER (*supra*, n. 5), p. 261.

17) This passage has generally been understood as the first reference in Hebrew literature to David's tomb, and in fact some scholars have seen it as the source of the tradition presented in the Church of Zion. This interpretation disregards what, to my mind, is the most important motif in the story: the fact that the Jewish mystic and the Latin Patriarch cooperate in concealing the tomb. See, e.g., A. ARCE, *El sepulcro de David en un texto de Benjamin de Tudela* (1169), in: *Sefarad* 23 (1963), pp. 105–115. Although this article goes farther toward correctly explaining Benjamin's text than Arce's predecessors (some of whom are cited *ibid.*, n. 1), he overlooks the polemical thrust, which is the basis of the interpretation proposed here. See J. WILKINSON, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades*, 1977, *Gazetteer*, p. 171; Wilkinson seems to have been alone in sensing the contentious tone of the Hebrew concealment story, although not in the same way as we have here.

The question of the location of the Church of Zion on the eve of the Crusader period is closely bound up with another question: the location of the southern wall of Jerusalem in the Early Islamic period. At some time – scholars are divided as to just when – the old wall, built in the time of Queen Eudokia in the 5th century, which cut across the southern slope of Mount Zion, south of the church, was replaced by a new wall across the mount, running north of the church and leaving the whole southern part of Mount Zion, including the church, outside the city walls. There is no argument, I believe, that Eudokia's wall could not have been abandoned, and the new wall built, any later than the time of the Persian traveler Nasir i Khusrau, who described it in 1047 in his account of Jerusalem¹⁸). It seems reasonable to suppose that Al-Muqaddasi's description of the southern wall, toward the end of the 10th century, was already concerned with the new situation¹⁹). At any rate, this is the wall that defined the southern limits of Jerusalem during the Crusader siege and later, throughout the Crusader period.

The Byzantine Church of Zion was burned and plundered in May 966, with the encouragement of Muhammad b. Isma'il al-Sanadji, the Ikhshid governor of Jerusalem at the time. It is hard to say whether this event put an end to religious services in the church. Neither do we have adequate information as to whether the church was damaged in the wave of attacks on eastern churches in the first decade of the 11th century, during the reign of the Fatimid khalif al-Hakim; it was in this wave, in 1009, that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was destroyed. Possibly, the destruction of the Church of Zion was completed only shortly before – or perhaps even during – the Crusader siege of Jerusalem²⁰). At any rate, the church buildings were certainly no longer standing in later summer 1099.

In the early years of the 12th century the Crusaders repaired or rebuilt the church, which was known from then on as »The Church of Saint Mary on Mount Zion«²¹). Although the details of the reconstruction process are difficult to determine, services were certainly being held by 1107²²). It should indeed be remembered that resumption of worship at the site does not necessarily tell us much about the state of the repair work; it clearly does not imply that the reconstruction, or some stage of it, had been completed. A document dated 1149 refers to construction work of a definitely Latin character – erection

18) NASIR I KHUSRAU, *Safr Nameh*, ed. C. SCHEFER, 1881, p. 70 (= G. LE STRANGE, *Palestine under the Moslems*, 1890, p. 221); D. BAHAT, *The Physical Infrastructure*, in: J. PRAWER, H. BEN-SHAMMAI (eds.), *The History of Jerusalem – The Early Muslim Period. 638–1099*, 1996, pp. 43–45, 46–49.

19) AL-MUQADDASI (supra, n. 12), p. 167 (= LE STRANGE, pp. 212–213). See Y. TSAFRIR, *Muqaddasi's Gates of Jerusalem: A New Identification Based on Byzantine Sources*, in: *IEJ* 27 (1977), pp. 152–161; see also M. BROSHI, Y. TSAFRIR, *The Excavations at Zion Gate, Jerusalem*, in: *IEJ* 27 (1977), pp. 28–37.

20) H. E. MAYER, *Bistümer, Klöster und Stifte im Königreich Jerusalem*, 1977, pp. 232, 263.

21) On the Church of Mount Zion during the Crusader period see C. ENLART, *Les monuments des croisés*, 1928, vol. II, pp. 243–262; L. H. VINCENT, F. M. ABEL, *Jérusalem*, vol. II: *Jérusalem Nouvelle*, 1922, 459–464.

22) MAYER (supra, n. 20), p. 232.

of a bell tower (the previous one had been destroyed by lightning)²³), and we may assume that when Idrisi, writing before 1154, referred to »a magnificent, fortified church« on Mount Zion, he was referring to a new Latin church, certainly not a ruin; hence the reconstruction work must have been completed by then²⁴). It was presumably at this time that the Latin tradition about the tombs of the House of David on Mount Zion took shape; and this tradition was firmly established and institutionalized by building a chapel specially for the tombs, at the eastern corner of the church's southern aisle²⁵). From then on David's tomb became a regular, though certainly secondary, station on the Latin pilgrims' itinerary in Jerusalem²⁶).

The temporal and geographical frameworks of the story correspond precisely to Crusader Jerusalem in the 12th century. »The church of Mount Zion« is clearly the Church of

23) *Ibid.*, p. 233.

24) J. GILDMEISTER, Beiträge zur Palästinakunde aus arabischen Quellen, in: ZDPV 8 (1885), p. 126; G. LE STRANGE, Idrisi's Description of Jerusalem in 1154, in: PEFQSt 7 (1888) p. 34. On Idrisi's work see J. DRORY, A Muslim Savant describes Frankish Palestine (Hebr.), in: B. Z. KEDAR, The Crusaders in Their Kingdom, 1099–1291 (Hebr.), 1987, pp. 120–131, esp. 128, where the author discusses the date of the information reported by Idrisi. According to Drory, the information was put together »from data taken from books of Muslim geographers who had written some two hundred years before, as well as »fresh«, contemporary information probably obtained from Christians.« Idrisi's information about the church would presumably belong to the second category, as the description does not fit the situation at the time corresponding to the first category.

25) On the chapel of David's tomb see VINCENT/ABEL (*supra*, n. 21), pp. 461–462; see also H. PLOMMER, The Cenacle on Mount Zion, in: J. FOLDA (ed.), Crusader Art in the Twelfth Century, 1982, pp. 139–166, whose study of the Cenacle has important implications for the chapel as well.

26) Only a few existing pilgrim itineraries from the Crusader period mention visits to David's tomb. Thus, for example, Fretellus reports being there somewhere between 1130–1148, see P. C. VAN BOEREN, Rorgo Fretellus de Nazareth, et sa description de la Terre Sainte. Histoire et édition du texte, 1980, pp. 38ff. (= M. DE VOGÜÉ, Les églises de la Terre Sainte, 1860 [repr. 1973], pp. 428ff.). Nevertheless, we should reject the view expressed by VINCENT/ABEL (*supra*, n. 21, p. 461), based on Benjamin of Tudela's story, that the Latin Patriarch indeed concealed the tomb after consulting with the Jewish recluse, this being the reason that we have so few reports of the tomb toward the end of the Crusader period. However, the existence of the chapel of »David, Solomon and the other kings of Judea« in the Crusader church, the few references to the tomb in the 12th century and the recurring references during the Mamluk period, after the Franciscan monks had taken up residence in the precincts of the ruined Crusader monastery (c. 1333) – all these indicate that the tradition of David's tomb persisted throughout the centuries despite the paucity of allusions in the Crusader pilgrim literature. Interestingly, some time in the 13th century a Jewish tradition appeared in Jerusalem, identifying the Chapel of David, which had survived the destruction of the church in the Ayyubid period, as »the Tent of David« or »Temple of David«, where David had brought the Ark of the Covenant (2 Sam 6:17). This tradition presumably developed after the monks had abandoned the mount and the site became accessible to Jews, that is, not before the Ayyubid period. First appearing in a travelogue known as Elleh ha-Massa'ot, written around the middle of the 13th century, the tradition persisted throughout the Mamluk period and fanned the fires of the recurrent clashes between the Franciscans and the Jewish community of Jerusalem.

Saint Mary on Mount Zion, the successor of the Byzantine Church of Hagia Sion. The »old walls« or »wall of Zion« must be the wall that Queen Eudokia built around Mount Zion in the 5th century, which lost its defensive function toward the end of the Early Muslim period, when the city »retreated« to the north. By the 11th and 12th centuries it lay in ruins, its stones available for the reconstruction of nearby buildings. A new wall was then built across the middle of Mount Zion, to become the new southern defensive line of Jerusalem during the Crusader period²⁷.

Moreover, the story refers to the collapse of the *bamah*, a derogatory term used in medieval Hebrew to designate a church, and its renovation at the Patriarch's initiative. This is surely an allusion to the Crusaders' reconstruction of the church on Mount Zion during the 12th century. In fact, the chronological order of events is already hinted at in the text: the collapse had occurred »fifteen years ago«. If we count the years from 1154, the year of Idrisi's account – which, as we have said, is the terminus ad quem for the completion of the church – we reach around 1168–1170, which modern scholarship believes to be the time of Benjamin's visit to the Holy Land²⁸. The dating is most important, as it supports our analysis up to this point: the story is part of a polemic aimed against Latin traditions that had emerged in the wake of the Crusades. Most probably, then, it represents a Jewish reaction to the reconstruction of the church and its implications for the Jews of Palestine. The target is not the tradition of David's tomb in itself, but the renewal of that tradition due to the rebuilding of the church – this was the version of the tradition that was now told to Western pilgrims.

The whole story is inserted artificially into the continuous narrative of Benjamin's travelogue. It fits neither the genre nor the style of the journal; nowhere else in Benjamin's account of his visit to Palestine does he interrupt his continuous description, and there are few similar digressions in other parts of the book. It is quite clear, therefore, that the story was composed and narrated within the contemporary Palestinian Jewish community.

27) Note should be taken of a report by YAHYA B. SA'ID AL-ANTAKI, Ta'rikh, ed. ABD AL-SALAM TADMURI, 1990, p. 439, that stones were taken from the ruined Church of Zion to build the wall in 1033. It is not inconceivable that the story of the stones taken from the wall of Zion to rebuild the church is a mirror image of the report of the stones from the church used in the wall.

28) For the account of Palestine in Benjamin's work, and its dating, see J. PRAWER, The History of the Jews in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1988, pp. 191–206. The phrase »fifteen years ago«, on which the chronology as proposed here is based, need not be Benjamin's own words; it might be part of an opening section in a story formulated at some time between the consecration of the church and Benjamin's visit, which he inserted almost unchanged into his travelogue.

III.

The main polemical thrust is not transmitted to the reader (or listener) through the statement, »The exact place cannot be identified«. The real arena of conflict between the Christian tradition and the Jewish storyteller is the story attached to this statement. Incorporating obvious mythical elements and common polemical motifs, it tells how the real tomb was miraculously discovered. But then, following a series of supernatural events which showed that »the Lord doth not desire to show it to any man«, it was deliberately sealed up by the Patriarch of Jerusalem himself.

At the center of the story stands the Jew as the authoritative transmitter of the authentic tradition – an authority recognized by both Jews and Christians. This figure is essentially an adaptation of the notion of *veritas hebraica*, »Jewish truth« – a principle first formulated by Jerome, in the introduction to his work, *Hebraicae questiones in Genesim* – in a version specially suited to the specific needs of the polemical tale²⁹).

Veritas hebraica in this case means the revelation of the »true tradition« concerning biblical geography: the Jew is the authentic transmitter of knowledge about the location of various events, biblical sites and holy places. The notion of »Jewish truth« is based on the recognition of two specifically Jewish qualities: the Jew's direct access to the Bible and its language; and Jewish possession of traditions handed down from one generation to the next, since biblical times – a quality deriving from the continuity of Jewish presence in the Holy Land³⁰).

29) O. LIMOR, Christian Sacred Space and the Jew, in: J. COHEN (ed.), *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Christians in Medieval Christian Thought*, 1997, pp. 55–77; IDEM, Christian Tradition – Jewish Authority, in: *Cathedra* 80 (1996), pp. 31–62 (expanded Hebrew version of her 1997 article); for further bibliography, see Limor's 1997 article, n. 2. We see fit to quote an important comment from Limor's Hebrew article (p. 31), not to be found in the earlier, English version: »One might argue, therefore, that Jerome was not only speaking of *Hebraica veritas*, ›Hebrew truth‹, but also alluding to *Judaica veritas*, ›Jewish truth‹, a notion which he naturally did not use. What Jerome sought among Jews, in the area of language and text, other Christians, at other times, sought in other spiritual realms. I believe one can speak, generalizing, of an entrenched Christian belief that Jews had knowledge of a special kind that they carried with them from one generation to the next; one might even argue that this Christian belief played a crucial role in shaping the Christian image of the Jews.« The term *Judaica veritas*, apparently coined by Limor herself, reflects the distinction between the authority of the Hebrew language, to which Jerome was referring, and the special position of the »knowing Jew« that Limor was discussing from the Christian standpoint, while we are at present concerned with the Jewish polemical standpoint.

30) This idea occurs repeatedly in Jewish sources in connection with the reliability of traditions transmitted by the Jews of the Holy Land. Cf., e.g., HIDAYAT AL-QARI (mid-11th cent.), arguing for the antiquity of the biblical cantillation signs: »Three things confirm what I have said ... The first is that the nation has never entirely disappeared from the Holy Land ... And the reading that Ezra used to read when he assembled the people was the reading of Eretz Israel today, and it has remained the system handed down by tradition among them from generation to generation and from father to son, till this day«, K. LEVI, *Zur masoretischen Grammatik*, 1936, p. 34 (cited from R. DRORI, *The Emergence of Jewish-Arabic Literary Contacts at*

Essentially, this *veritas hebraica* is little more than a literary device, used mainly to corroborate traditions challenged by the Christians and/or the Muslims. A similar case is the story of the discovery of the Holy Sepulcher in the 4th century, also based on a Jewish tradition, which is actually the story of the Invention (= discovery) of the True Cross, providing the foundation for the tradition of the Crucifixion, the Sepulcher and the Resurrection³¹). It was also Jews who discovered the Stone of Foundation in the 7th century – a story that invites comparison with the story of the Invention of the True Cross³²).

Needless to say, this recognition of the Jew as the authoritative source of such traditions is partial and limited. It is certainly not intended to contradict the Christian versions of the theological significance of events and biblical passages. The Jewish understanding of the notion of *veritas hebraica* in a practically literal sense, as presented in the polemical story of the discovery of David's tomb, is merely a literary device.

In the story, as implied by the basic idea of *veritas hebraica*, the true tomb of David is discovered by Jews. The discovery results from a complex train of events, thanks to which the Jews are left to themselves; one's impression is that otherwise the discovery could not have taken place. Thus the fact that the discoverers were Jews is no accident, but a major motif of the story: that is what makes the discovery reliable. Moreover, the authoritative interpreter of the discovery is also a Jew, namely, »Rabbi Abraham el Constantini, the pious recluse, who was one of the mourners of Jerusalem«.

As presented in Benjamin's text, Jewish bearers of *veritas hebraica* are of two kinds. The first is an ordinary person, who, by virtue of his Jewishness alone, has the task of conveying the true tradition, and sometimes does so out unintentionally and unaware. The other is a Jewish scholar, perhaps even a mystic, endowed with the ability of properly interpreting miraculous events. Both kinds are acceptable to the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who represents in this story the ideal Christian – one who knows the nature of *veritas hebraica* and admits its authority on both levels: first he agrees with the Jewish scholar's

the Beginning of the Tenth Century, 1988 [Hebr.], p. 145. Cf. also the picturesque account of a 13th-century French-Jewish pilgrim explaining why the Palestinian traditions of holy places are so reliable: »Thus I received from the people of the land of Israel as I have written, I, Menahem of Hebron ... For it is revealed and known to Him who spoke and the world came into being that thus have I received from the people of Palestine. And if an observer should question this, saying, »How do the people of Palestine know that the sons of the righteous were buried there three thousand years ago?« – then I, the writer, should reply to them, »From the mouth of the people of Palestine and not from their writing«, for those who live today in the land of Israel have never been exiled from there to this day ... and they have received, each from his father, since the destruction of the Temple, and they know the whole matter ...«. See »Letter from R. Menahem ha-Hevroni« (Hebr.), in: Ha-me'ammer 3 (1920) p. 42; see also LIMOR (supra, n. 29, 1996, p. 43 n. 31). 31) On this story and its elements see LIMOR (supra, n. 29), 1997, pp. 58–63.

32) According to a tradition in a Christian source, Jews also showed the Muslims the mouth of the Cave of Machpelah, see below, n. 53. On early Islamic attitudes to Jewish traditions see M. J. KISTER, Haddithu 'an bani isra'ila a-la haraja – A Study of an Early Tradition, in: IOS 2 (1972), pp. 215–239.

interpretation; then he conceals the cave following the discoverers' declaration – made without any ulterior motive – that »the Lord doth not desire to show it to any man«.

What we have here, then, is the sophisticated exploitation of a literary motif normally used in Muslim and, in particular, Christian traditions. As if the debate is being conducted on the opponents' own ground, the major polemical thrust of the argument is: »You Christians recognize the Jew's authority as transmitter of the true tradition – but at the same time you deny it! You know very well that the true Tomb of David is unknown, because you yourselves – the Patriarch – concealed it; but you nevertheless lie to the pilgrims and show them a false tomb!« The Jewish pilgrim who hears the story in Jerusalem, as Benjamin heard it, receives the following message: not only is the Tomb of David on Mount Zion *not* the real tomb of King David; its presentation as such is no mistake but a deliberate deception. It is just one more lie on the part of the Christians, who know the truth but try to deny it.

This argument is surely a mirror image of the traditional Christian accusation that the Jews refuse to face the truth: »What then? Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, ›God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that should not see and ears that should not hear, down to this very day‹« (Romans 11:7–8). This is precisely the imagery of the Synagoga motif in medieval European sculpture – the maid with covered eyes, symbolizing vanquished Judaism; and the idea is repeated over and over again by Christian authors down the generations³³). Particular sensitivity attached, however, to the question of the truth of Christian traditions about David's tomb.

In the pilgrim's »language«, the fact that a certain site was physically in the precincts of a certain institution justified, or proved, that institution's position on the religious issue in question. Whoever »owned« the Tomb of David as it were held David himself, together with the truth associated with King David; in the Christian pilgrim's symbolic language, this meant holding the key to the messianic line³⁴). In the symbolic language of the pilgrim, this was seen as a victory of the Christian claim to have inherited the messianic dynasty. The Jewish pilgrim's itinerary in Jerusalem could not, therefore, accept the Christian tradition of David's Tomb in accordance with the usual scenario – a holy place, having become sacred to members of one religion, is taken over, together with its traditions, by members of another. In this particular case, the two religions, vying with one another for exclusive ownership of the messianic genealogy, could not possibly share the title; the genuine tomb, like the genuine genealogy, could be held by only one of the claimants. The purpose of this polemical tale was, therefore, to reject all the implications of the institutionalization of David's Tomb inside the Church of Zion.

33) J. COHEN, *The Jews as the Killers of Christ in the Latin Tradition, From Augustine to the Friars*, in: *Traditio* 39 (1983), pp. 1–27.

34) For the symbolic language of the pilgrims see above, text at n. 8.

The argument that the Christian tradition presented to the Christian pilgrim is false extends, in effect, to Christian tradition in general; it recurs again and again in the tradition of the holy sites. This was also the case, as we shall soon see, in connection with the Cave of the Patriarchs at Hebron.

IV.

Another issue with considerable polemical overtones that receives treatment in 12th-century Hebrew literature is that of the Tombs of the Patriarchs at Hebron, the Cave of Machpelah. In this context, too, the polemical motifs involved are very similar to those associated with the Tomb of David. They, too, reflect the attitude of Palestinian Jews to the Latin pilgrimage tradition of the 12th century and reveal the relationship between the Jewish and the Christian traditions.

Unlike the tradition of David's Tomb, the accounts of the Cave of Machpelah do not deny the very essence of the Christian tradition – for the existence of the Tombs of the Patriarchs at Hebron was universally accepted³⁵). Now the barbs of the anti-Christian polemic are aimed at the link created in the 12th century between the Crusaders and the Cave of Machpelah by the establishment of a monastery at the cave and, mainly, the discovery of the Tombs of the Patriarchs in 1119. This event aroused much excitement in the Christian world; a special feast day was proclaimed and pilgrim's itineraries were directed to Hebron as a central site of the Holy Land. As we shall see, the basic elements of the description of the cave in Hebrew works of the 12th century referred directly to the Latin version of the discovery of the patriarchal tombs.

The literary framework of the polemical text that we possess concerning the Cave of Machpelah is not a legend, as in the case of David's Tomb, but the description of a visit to the cave and the pilgrim's interpretation of what he has seen. Twelfth-century literary works describe the cave, its sites and contents in a way that surely reflects how the cave was shown to pilgrims by the local Jews.

We have three such contemporary accounts, written by pilgrims who made their trips in the second half of the 12th century, probably around the 1160s. The first and most complete is that of Benjamin of Tudela who, as we have already noted, visited the country around 1168–1170³⁶). The second is a report by Benjamin's Ashkenazi counterpart, Petahiah of Regensburg, relating to approximately the same years³⁷). The third descrip-

35) On the Cave of Machpelah in the Byzantine and Early Muslim period, see L. H. VINCENT & E. J. H. MACKAY, *Hébron – Le Haram el Khalil*, 1923, pp. 156–162; WILKINSON (*supra*, n. 17), p. 159.

36) ADLER (*supra*, n. 9), pp. 25–26; cf. PRAWER (*supra*, n. 28).

37) L. GRÜNHUT (ed.), *Die Rundreise des R. Petachjah aus Regensburg*, 1904, pp. 33–34. On this work see PRAWER (*supra*, n. 28), pp. 206–215.

tion was written by a French pilgrim named Jacob b. Nathaniel Cohen, whose work may also be dated to the second half of the 12th century, probably in the same decades as the other two³⁸).

Combining all three, one can reconstruct a text made up of the same basic elements, all associated with the same polemical themes encountered in our previous example. Indeed, the polemical element is already hinted at in the warning that Petahiah of Regensburg, arriving in the Holy Land, heard from the Jews of Acre:

And the Jews that were in Acre said, »Beware, for they have placed three corpses at the entrance to the cave and they say, ›These are the Patriarchs‹ – but they are not«³⁹).

The description of the cave as reconstructed from our three travelers' reports is basically parallel to the way the site was presented to Christian pilgrims by contemporary Latin tradition. It is specifically directed against the theological implications of the Christian account. The Jewish attitude to the cave involved tension on several counts: on the one hand, the cave testified to a continuous genealogical line from the Patriarchs to their own time; on the other, Christian control of the cave symbolized the interruption of that line. The legitimate successors to the Patriarchs had to reconcile themselves to the fact that the ancestral tombs were held by usurpers – »the children of the handmaiden«.

The polemical motifs incorporated in the description of the cave of Machpelah are almost entirely the same as in the story of David's Tomb. The basic element is the Jewish tradition identifying the location of the »real cave« or the »real tombs«. These tombs are known to the Jews alone; alternatively, the Jews alone know how to reach them, or they possess special knowledge unknown to others – the Christians. The Christian tradition, in contrast, is held to be false; the tombs it identifies are spurious. Here, too, we find the Jewish claim to possess exclusive knowledge of the true tradition; and here, too, this claim is put into intensive polemical use, exploiting the motifs we have pointed out. Here, first, is Benjamin of Tudela's account – the most detailed of our three 12th-century authors:

Here there is the great church called St. Abram, and this was a Jewish place of worship at the time of the Mohammedan rule, but the Gentiles have erected there six tombs, respectively called those of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah. The custodians tell the pilgrims that these are the tombs of the Patriarchs, for which information the pilgrims give them money. If a Jew comes, however, and gives a special reward, the custodian of the cave opens unto him a gate of iron,

38) *Story of the Travels of R. Jacob b. Nathaniel Cohen*, ed. L. GRÜNHUT, published as an appendix to Grünhut's edition of the travels of Petahiah (previous note), pp. 11–12. On this work see PRAWER (supra, n. 28), pp. 184–191.

39) GRÜNHUT (supra, n. 37), pp. 33–34.

which was constructed by our forefathers, and then he is able to descend below by means of steps, holding a lighted candle in his hand. He then reaches a cave, in which nothing is to be found, and a cave beyond, which is likewise empty, but when he reaches the third cave behold there are six sepulchres, those of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, respectively facing those of Sarah, Rebekah and Leah⁴⁰.

The denial of the Christian tradition is clearly enunciated: »The Gentiles have erected there six tombs, etc.« – The Christians, he is saying, have built six spurious tombs, which they show to pilgrims as the real ones although they were well aware of the deception. Thus the Christians are charged with malice and intent to conceal the truth. The task of revealing the truth is entrusted to the custodian of the cave: »If a Jew comes, however, and gives a special reward, the custodian of the cave opens unto him«. The custodian will reveal the true tombs to Jews – they alone are allowed access. Unlike the Christians, the Jews know the location of the true cave precisely; and they alone – admittedly, through bribery – can reach it.

The Jews' special knowledge is only implied, as we have seen, by Benjamin. Petahiah of Regensburg, however, explicitly quotes the custodian as saying, »Never have I allowed any gentile to enter this gate«⁴¹. The third traveler, Jacob b. Nathaniel Cohen, makes a similar statement, but phrased differently, placing special emphasis on the polemical element. According to him, the cave repels Christians and they are unable to reach it: »For there is a great wall, of strong plaster and sherds, between the new [i. e., spurious] tombs and the gate of the Cave of Machpelah, and they are not permitted to demolish it. For once the priests pierced a small window in it [= the wall] and there came out a wind and slew them all and they sealed that window«⁴². This version is very similar in formulation to part of the story of David's Tomb. In both stories the Christians invent a false tradition, to compensate for their inability to reach the true site, which is closed to them and known only to the Jews.

Jacob b. Nathaniel refers to a wind that issues from the cave and prevents the Christians from reaching the true cave. This wind is also mentioned by Petahiah: »A stormy wind

40) ADLER (*supra*, n. 9), pp. 25–26. For the conclusion of Benjamin's account see below, at n. 51.

41) GRÜNHUT (*supra*, n. 37), p. 34. At first sight, Petahiah seems to be saying that the custodian tried to bar entry to the Jewish traveler, too: »And the custodian of the cave told him, ›They‹ [i.e., these are indeed the genuine tombs], and he gave him another gold piece to admit him to the cave, and he opened and said, ›Never, etc.« His real intention, however, is not to describe the custodian as forbidding entry to the Jewish visitor, but to confirm the aforementioned warning by the Jews of Acre, »And they say, ›These are the Patriarchs‹ – but they are not.« The custodian, then has acted exactly as predicted. But he immediately continues: »And the custodian of the cave told him, ›They‹«, thus functioning as expected in this context – as a Christian entrusted with the truth. A similar figure appears in another part of Petahiah's work, guarding the tomb of the prophet Jonah: »Near there is an orchard with all manner of fruit, and the custodian of the orchard is a gentile. When gentiles come there, he gives them none of the fruit; but when Jews come there, he receives them cordially and tells them, ›Jonah son of Amittai was a Jew, therefore you are worthy of something of his‹, and he entertains the Jews with food«; GRÜNHUT (*op. cit.*), p. 31.

42) GRÜNHUT (*supra*, n. 37), pp. 11–12.

emerges from the gaps between the iron bars, and he could not pass there with candles; he understood that the Patriarchs were there, and prayed there. And when he paused at the mouth of the cave, a stormy wind came out and threw him back«⁴³). In stories of holy places, the wind plays the part of custodian of the site. It is a wind that blocks access by Christians, a wind that tells Petahiah he has indeed reached the true cave, and a wind that limits the time he can remain there. As we remember, it was a fierce wind that ejected the two Jewish workers from the Tomb of David and told R. Abraham el Constantini that the place was indeed the burial cave of the House of David.

V.

However, by laying bare the direct polemical elements in these accounts, which reiterate the argument of Jewish truth and Christian duplicity, we have revealed only a small part of the polemical fabric from which the story of the Cave of Machpelah is woven.

The description of the cave, as rendered by two of the travelers and as hinted at by the third, closely corresponds to a Latin work entitled Tractate on the Invention of the Tombs of the Holy Patriarchs, reacts directly to its message and essentially constitutes a »mirror image« of that text. The Tractate, written in the 12th century, describes the discovery of the tombs of the Patriarchs in the Cave of Machpelah⁴⁴). According to this work, it was the Christians (in this case, the canons of St. Augustine, who took over the precinct of the cave shortly after the Crusader conquest) who discovered the mouth of the cave, which had previously been concealed. Since this concealment had not been fortuitous but effected by a divine force, the rediscovery of the cave by the canons was an expression of divine will. More than a discovery, it was essentially a revelation, the kind of discovery that grants the discoverer the status of »founder«. The divinely assisted act of discovery was equivalent in this case to gaining control of the holy place. In the symbolic language of the pilgrim, it constituted divine proof of the validity of the proprietor's claim⁴⁵). This claim of ownership is reinforced in the story of the cave by the element of discovery.

43) Ibid., p. 34.

44) Canonici Hebronensis Tractatus de inventione sanctorum Patriarcharum, Recueil des historiens des Croisades, Historiens Occidentaux, vol. V, 1895, pp. 302–314. On the cave in the Crusader period see VINCENT/MACKAY (supra, n. 35), pp. 163–188, who also quote sections of the Tractate in Latin and in French translation, *ibid.*, pp. 168–176. For the main part of the Latin account see below, at n. 46.

45) Compare: *Sed quia sunt nonnulli qui nominare speluncam sciunt, sed cujusmodi locus sit penitus ignorant, dignum, prout vidimus, duximus explanandum, ut, dum mirificam difficultatem ipsius audierent, hos patriarchas non sine divino miraculo repertos esse fateantur* (»Tractatus« [supra, n. 44], pp. 303–304). Similarly: *Sciendum quoque est, quod civitas illa Cariatarbe, quae est Ebron, a tempore quo sorte divisa est Terra Repromissionis filiis Israel, sacerdotum fuisse memoratur. Sic enim in libro Josue scriptum est ... dignum quippe erat ut, de quibus summus Sacerdos, id est Christus, nesciturus erat, eos sacerdotes venerarentur et colerent* (*ibid.*, p. 304). Cf. above, at n. 8.

Thus, the *Tractate on the Invention of the Tombs of the Holy Patriarchs* is the foundation story of the Augustinian canons' establishment, perhaps also in general of the Crusader presence in Hebron; while the Hebrew account of the cave in the Crusader period aims to refute that story. Not only, it argues, did the Christians not discover the cave (nor was the cave revealed to them): it is inherently inaccessible to them, for only Jews may approach the Patriarchs' burial place.

The affinity between the Hebrew account and the Latin »invention« legend is not implied merely by the direct rejection of the foundation story. It also follows from the way the Hebrew text uses literary elements borrowed from the Christian legend. The authors of the accounts that were offered the Jewish pilgrim meant to purge those elements of the significance ascribed to them by the Christian authors. In other words, they neutralized the Christian components of the tale, »Judaizing« them, in order to give the Jewish pilgrim the feeling that he was in an exclusively Jewish holy site. They were clearly acquainted with the Latin »invention« legend (or, at least, aware of its existence) and with its principal arguments; their own texts were formulated in order to counter those arguments.

The *Tractate*, telling the story of the discovery in full detail, was written in the circle of the Augustinian canons of Hebron, shortly after the discovery of the cave; it quickly became popular in various versions among Christians, even outside Palestine. Designating July 27, 1119, as the date of the event, it also specifies October 10 as the »Day of Deposition (*depositio*) of the Bodies«, presumably celebrated at least until the Ayyubid conquest of 1187. We may also presume that the circulation of the legend, as well as the proclamation of the Day of Deposition, were intended to stir up Christian interest in the cave and thus to make it a regular pilgrimage site, putting a specifically Crusader imprint on the traditional pilgrimage to the Tombs of the Patriarchs. It is in this sense that the *Tractate* functions, as already stated, as a foundation story, formulated in such a way as to radiate the prestige of the Cave of Machpelah on the canons.

VI.

The beginning of the »invention« is attributed to one of the canons, »a scribe by profession«, who was taking his afternoon rest, one day in June 1119, on the floor of the church above the cave, by the headstone of the Patriarch Isaac:

...ibique, inter duos magnos lapides pavimenti, quoaedem rimula erat, de qua tenuis ventus et suavis, frigidus tamen, per subterraneum meatum egrediebatur. Dum ergo ibi esset, et auram desubter procedentem aperto sinu excipere, coepit perrimulam, illam intus minotos lapidus quasi laudens jacere, quos audiens in profundum cadere, illic cisternam vel antrum aliquod esse arbitratus est; et assumens virgulam quam-

dam, ligavit in summitate ejus filum longum et forte, et in capite fili plumbatam parvem, et intromittens mensus est cubitos undecim in profundum ... Experegefactis a somno fratribus, et hora nona decantata, narravit frater ille quod invenerat; quod illi audientes duplicis speluncae introitum suspicati sunt⁴⁶.

The text goes on to describe how the entrance to the cave was exposed by the canons, working energetically after two or three days of prayer, during which the equipment needed to breach the opening was prepared. First, after strenuous efforts, a corridor was cleared, leading to the way to the cave. As the corridor was very narrow, the monks first lowered down the oldest of their company, to give him the opportunity of being the first to enter. He, however, was unable to locate the continuation of the corridor and was replaced by a canon named Arnulf, who indeed was successful. Arnulf was the first to enter the Patriarchs' tombs, and it was he who told the story to the author of the *Tractate*. The way to the tombs, he related, was rocky and full of obstacles. First he and his companions came up against two walls, which first seemed as if made of a single block of stone. However, a few hammer blows detected a hollow space on the other side. Arnulf removed the stone, revealing a further passage, resembling a water conduit, at whose end there was yet another obstacle. But the hammer again showed Arnulf and his companions the way through. After four further days of work, during which the monks cleared the rubble blocking the passage, they were able to see, through the opening they had made, »a small structure, like a basilica, excellently built and round, that could have contained some thirty men.« Contrary to expectation, however, it did not contain the tombs of the Patriarchs. Arnulf finally noticed, in the basilica, a stone inserted into the natural rock – this was the stone sealing the mouth of the cave. Arnulf, who had worked harder than anyone else to uncover the cave, was asked to be the first to enter. This he did, without hesitation: grasping a burning torch in his hand, he made the sign of the cross and entered, singing »Kyrie Eleison«.

Hebrew sources do not directly mention the story of the Christian discovery⁴⁷. Jacob b. Nathaniel Cohen, the only one of our three travelers who mentions the story, seems to

46) »Tractatus« (supra, n. 44), p. 310. Compare the story, told in the Mishnah, of the discovery of the place where the Holy Ark was hidden in the Temple: »It is told of a certain priest who, while busy at his work, saw that part of the floor was different. He came and told his friend, but was unable to finish his story before he gave up the ghost, and then it was clear that the Ark was concealed there« (Mishnah, Shekalim 6:2).

47) The Arab geographer Al-Harawi reports that, on a visit to Jerusalem in 1174, when it was still under Crusader rule, he was told that the Franks had entered the cave during the reign of King Bardawil (= Baldwin), after a fall of rock. He himself met a Crusader knight who had gone in with his father as a boy of thirteen. He ends his account as follows: »Said the author of this book: If the story that was told me is true, I have spoken with a man who saw Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in reality and not in a dream« (AL-HARAWI, *Guide des lieux de pèlerinage* [ed. J. SOURDEL-THOMINE], 1957, pp. 73–74). Al-Harawi had probably heard the story of the discovery and was referring to it.

allude to it in the passage already quoted: »For once the priests pierced a small window in it (= in the wall between the spurious tombs and the gate descending to the cave of the ›genuine‹ tombs, which the priests ›are not permitted to demolish‹) and there came out a wind and slew them all and they sealed that window«⁴⁸). Jacob undoubtedly knew the story of the »invention« and was at pains to refute it: the »priests« had indeed tried to break through to the cave but had failed, as the cave itself had repulsed them. Clearly, then, he must have known about the attempt to enter the cave⁴⁹). He may have known of another detail in the Latin story, the »gentle breeze, sweet but cool«, which had led the canons to the cave; hence he entrusted a wind with the task of blocking the interlopers⁵⁰).

If we now try to follow the Jewish pilgrim's progress in the sacred precinct, on his way to the tombs of the Patriarchs, we easily realize that this pilgrim, beginning beyond the gate that has been thrown open for him – and for him alone – is more or less tracing the path taken by the Augustinian canon beyond the stone floor, led on by the breeze. Benjamin describes the way as follows:

... [He] is able to descend below by means of steps, holding a lighted candle in his hand. He then reaches a cave, in which nothing is to be found, and a cave beyond, which is likewise empty, but when he reaches the third cave, behold, there are six sepulchres, those of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, respectively facing those of Sarah, Rebekah and Leah. And upon the graves are inscriptions cut in stone; upon the grave of Abraham is engraved »This is the grave of Abraham«; upon that of Isaac, »This is the grave of Isaac, the son of Abraham our Father«; upon that of Jacob, »This is the grave of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham our Father«; and upon the others, ›This is the grave of Sarah«, »This is the grave of Rebekah«, and »This is the grave of Leah«. A lamp burns day and night upon the graves in the cave. One finds there many casks filled with the bones of Israelites, as they were wont to bring their dead there in the days of Israel, each bringing the bones of his fathers, and to deposit them there to this day⁵¹).

48) Supra, n. 42.

49) Compare the description of the fruitless efforts of Emperor Theodosius' emissaries to penetrate the Patriarchs' tombs in the Latin story: *et statuto die ad portam claustrum venerunt, quo cum intrare praesumerent, ita eos Dominus caecitate percussit, ut, apertis oculis, nihil viderunt, nec ullo modo portam contingere valerent. Sed cum etiam murum palpante tentarent et sic ingredi, adhaerebant manus eorum muro nec ulterius proficisci poterant*; »Tractatus« (supra, n. 44), p. 306.

50) Some traces of the *Tractate* are also discernible in the opening section of Petahiah's account. Both accounts make much of the very large stones of the structure and discuss the identity of the builder. Compare Petahiah's words (GRÜNHUT [supra, n. 37], p. 33): »He went to Hebron, and there on the cave stands a great shrine that the Patriarch Abraham built, with large stones, seven-and-twenty or eight-and-twenty to a corner, each measuring some seventy cubits«, with the report of the canon: *ex magnis quadratis atque politis lapidibus miro modo compositus habens intrinsecus decem et octo cubitos altitudinis, quadraginta novem latitudinis ... Hujus tam mirandi operis constructores quidem Esau et Jacob autumant*; »Tractatus« (supra, n. 44), p. 304; VINCENT/MACKAY (supra, n. 35), pp. 168–169.

51) ADLER (supra, n. 9), pp. 25–26.

The wording here resembles that of a guidebook for pilgrims – a style quite uncharacteristic of Benjamin: »If Jew comes... and gives a special reward«, »then he is able to descend«, »he then reaches a cave«, and so on. It is indeed doubtful whether the sentence »he is able to descend ... holding a lighted candle in his hand«, and the parallel statement of fact in Petahiah's report, »And he brought candles and took him inside«, are intended to be practical directives only. They may well be alluding to the story as told in the Latin »invention« legend, in which the monks first enter the cave with elaborate ceremony, holding flares and singing hymns. The detailed description of the way from the gate to the cave as rendered by Benjamin of Tudela is similar in structure to the progress of the canons in the Latin story, which also refers to three hollow spaces, the last of which contains the tombs. An even clearer reference to the Latin text may be detected in Benjamin's concluding words, listing the inscriptions on the gravestones, and mainly his report of »many casks filled with the bones of Israelites«. This element of the story recalls another part of the *Tractate*, which tells of several monks who went down to the cave to pray about one month after its discovery and saw letters engraved in the stone. Subsequently, they found fifteen earthenware jars, perhaps in the niche they had discovered, full of unidentified bones. The author suggests that these might be »the remains of some of the heads of the Children of Israel«. Could Benjamin's tale be an innocuous citation from the Latin text?

Benjamin's quotation, however, is by no means innocuous. He certainly had no intention of quoting the author's suggestion; on the contrary, he was at pains to refute it. The reference to the bones as being of »heads of the Children of Israel« (*Caput filii Israel*) brings the cave, for the reader of the *Tractate*, back to its biblical times. The deliberate use of the term *filius Israel* automatically weakens the association of the cave with contemporary Jews, making a clear distinction between the »Children of Israel«, whose legitimate successors were the Christians, and the present-day Jews, who had forfeited their inheritance. The use of the term, perhaps originally quite innocuous and expressive of the desire to identify the ancient, biblical elements of the holy places, was seen by the Hebrew writers to imply rejection of the continuous historical link between the »Children of Israel« and contemporary Jewry. Hence their efforts to stress the direct link between these places and the Jews. Hence, instead of attributing the bones to the »heads of the Children of Israel«, the Hebrew account prefers the term »Israelites«, that is, Jews; moreover, these secondary burials are said to have taken place »in the days of Israel«, that is, when Jews could do as they pleased in the vicinity of the cave⁵²).

52) Cf. the statement by Solomon b. ha-Yatom, »They were wont to send their dead out of the city, as is done to this day in the entire district of Hebron, for they send their dead to Hebron« (Commentaries to *Tractate Mashkin* by R. Solomon b. ha-Yatom, ed. H.P. CHAJES, 1910, p. 109). However, this statement is probably based not on a direct knowledge of the practice in Hebron in the author's time, but on his interpretation of Benjamin of Tudela's report.

The Jewish authors stubbornly refer to those places considered ancient by the Augustinian canons and insist on their direct ties with the Jews, by the use of such expressions as »And this [= the cave] was a Jewish place of worship at the time of the Mohammedan rule«⁵³). Similarly, Benjamin goes on to speak of the iron gate »which was constructed by our forefathers«, namely, the gate separating the upper, visible and therefore false world, ruled by the Christians, and the lower, hidden but true world, the desired destination of the Jewish pilgrims.

Petahiah's description of the cave differs in a few details from Benjamin's:

And he brought candles and took him inside and he went down the steps; and before the cave, outside, they had come down fifteen steps; and he came into a spacious cave, in the middle of which was an opening in the ground – the ground there is all rock and all the caves are in the midst of the rock. Placed on that opening in the middle are extremely thick pieces of iron, and no man can make such, else with the work of the heavens; and a stormy wind emerges from the gaps between the iron bars, and he could not pass there with candles; he understood that the Patriarchs were there, and prayed there⁵⁴).

In contrast to Benjamin, who reaches the interior of the cave and describes it, together with its tombs, in detail, Petahiah is barred entry by a thick iron grating, so large that it must be »the work of the heavens«, through which he senses a »stormy wind«; he understands that this is evidence of the nearby presence of the Patriarchs. As we now know, he is not the first person to learn from the wind of the true location of the Patriarchs' tombs: a similar tale was told of the anonymous canon, taking his afternoon rest on the church floor, who learned the very same thing from a gentle breeze. In the Latin story, however, this was the beginning of the way to the tombs, while the Hebrew tale makes it the final stage.

VII.

Our analysis of the traditions of David's Tomb and the Cave of the Patriarchs implies that they originated in the 12th century, and that they relate directly to the new reality of the Holy Land – the Crusader kingdom. Although the story as a whole is concerned with a

53) See above, at n. 40. One should, however, note the tradition reported at the beginning of the Tractate, according to which, after the Muslim conquest, the Jews offered their assistance to the Muslims to locate the mouth of the cave; *supervenerunt quidam Judaei qui sub Graecorum ditone, circa regionem illam morati fuerunt, et dixerunt eis: »Reddite nos securos ut similiter inter vos habitemus, concedaturque nobis ante introitum synagogam construere, sic, ubi portam facere debeatis, vobis ostendemus«, sicque factum est; »Tractatus«* (supra, n. 44), p. 309. There is clearly some connection between this passage and Benjamin's opening words.

54) GRÜNHUT (supra, n. 37), p. 34.

seemingly innocent account of a disputed holy site, every element in the narrative reacts to the Christian view of that very site as formulated in Crusader tradition; every element confronts a parallel element in the Christian image of the place. Besides this »translation« of the Christian interpretation of the holy place into the language of the Jewish interpretation, the Jews of the Holy Land adhered faithfully to one principle which paraphrases the Christian polemical principle of *veritas hebraica*: the truth is known to Jews alone, and they alone possess it or, in the language of the pilgrimage traditions, »reach« it. It is the Jews alone who reach the real, hidden, Tomb of David, and it is they alone who reach the real Tombs of the Patriarchs in the Cave of Machpelah at Hebron. Just as the genuine Tomb of David was concealed from the Christians by the Patriarch, their access to the genuine Tombs of the Patriarchs was blocked by the Christian custodian of the cave. Thus it is Christian authority itself that forbids Christians access to the truth and opens its gates wide to the Jews.

The picture of the new Holy Land reality that these traditions try to convey to the Jewish pilgrim is thus two-dimensional. One dimension is visible to all and therefore false: the Christians appear to be the all-powerful rulers of the country. This premise relates mainly to holy sites of symbolic significance, possession of which symbolized – at least, for the Jews – the overt victory of Christianity. The true reality, however, existed on another dimension, symbolized by the »cave« and therefore concealed and unseen; this reality was revealed only to those who knew the secret way to it. Such was the cave of David's Tomb, which was exposed for a moment, only to disappear again; and such was the Cave of Machpelah, accessible only by a long and arduous descent. We thus have a confrontation between the victorious Christian reality, seen as overt and therefore false, and the seemingly defeated Jewish reality, covert and therefore true. This confrontation is the essence of the solution that Jewish Holy Land tradition offered Jewish pilgrims from Europe, who were faced in the Orient, too, with the same Jewish-Christian conflict that they ostensibly felt familiar with in their homeland in the Occident.