

Dispersion and the Longing for Zion, 1240-1840

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It has become increasingly accepted in recent years that Zionism is a strictly modern nationalist movement, born just over a century ago, with the revolutionary aim of restoring Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel. And indeed, Zionism was revolutionary in many ways: It rebelled against a tradition that in large part accepted the exile, and it attempted to bring to the Jewish people some of the nationalist ideas that were animating European civilization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But Zionist leaders always stressed that their movement had deep historical roots, and that it drew its vitality from forces that had shaped the Jewish consciousness over thousands of years. One such force was the Jewish faith in a national redemption—the belief that the Jews would ultimately return to the homeland from which they had been uprooted.

This tension, between the modern and the traditional aspects of Zionism, has given rise to a contentious debate among scholars in Israel and elsewhere over the question of how the Zionist movement should be described. Was it basically a modern phenomenon, an imitation of the

other nationalist movements of nineteenth-century Europe? If so, then its continuous reference to the traditional roots of Jewish nationalism was in reality a kind of facade, a bid to create an “imaginary community” by selling a revisionist collective memory as if it had been part of the Jewish historical consciousness all along. Or is it possible to accept the claim of the early Zionists, that at the heart of their movement stood far more ancient hopes—and that what ultimately drove the most remarkable national revival of modernity was an age-old messianic dream?

For many years, it was the latter belief that prevailed among historians of Zionism. Its leading proponent was Benzion Dinur, a central figure in what became known as the Jerusalem school of Jewish history. Dinur, a historian at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who was also Israel’s minister of education from 1951 to 1955, understood the relationship between the Jewish people and the land of Israel to be a basic element of Jewish consciousness, and believed that messianic longing had played a decisive role in *aliyot*, or waves of Jewish immigration to the land of Israel, throughout history. For Dinur, the driving force behind the *aliyot* of the medieval and early modern periods was the “messianic ferment” that cropped up in Jewish communities from time to time, precipitating widespread efforts to predict the exact date the messianic era would begin; the appearance of charismatic leaders in various Jewish communities, who were seen as heralding the end of days; and, most notably, efforts to organize groups of Jews who would go to live in the land of Israel in order to hasten the redemption. “These two phenomena,” wrote Dinur, “messianic ferment and movements of immigration to the land of Israel, are among the basic phenomena of Jewish history throughout the generations....”¹

Animated by this perspective, Dinur and his colleagues succeeded in uncovering much of the lineage of Jewish nationalism. Against the commonly held belief that Zionist activism was a rejoinder to the “passivity” of traditional Judaism, scholars of the Jerusalem school stressed the dynamic and activist quality of the messianic impulse in Jewish history. In

every generation, it was shown, there were a great many Jews, including communal and spiritual leaders, who were not content with passively hoping for divine intervention, and who instead took action aimed at bringing it about. Of the means at their disposal, *aliya* was often seen as the most potent way to bring the redemption: For centuries, despite the danger and hardship involved in making the trip to Palestine, Jews from all over the diaspora continuously attempted to reestablish the presence and even sovereignty of the Jews in the land of Israel—efforts that stemmed from a longing for Zion that had suffused the prayers and practices of Jews around the world. In Dinur's view, the Zionist awakening was not motivated primarily by modern European ideas, but by this same longing, which flowed from the deep springs of Jewish historical consciousness.

In recent years, however, this view of Jewish history has been subjected to relentless criticism. Dinur and his colleagues have been accused of allowing their Zionist ideology to inflate the importance they attributed to the land of Israel as a part of the Jewish consciousness, and as a goal for practical action. One of the most prominent critics of Dinur's approach is Jacob Barnai of Haifa University. In his study on nationalism and the land of Israel, *Historiography and Nationalism* (1995), Barnai argues that Dinur's belief in the centrality of *aliya* cannot be reconciled with the fact that Jews did not succeed in establishing an uninterrupted presence in Palestine. Moreover, those who did come were hardly the elites of the Jewish people whom Dinur had depicted—and therefore could not be said to reflect anything essential regarding the Jewish experience in exile. "The definition of the *yishuv* as the elite of the Jewish people... was not subject to a clear analysis and definition in [Dinur's] thought, and contradicts what we know about the land of Israel at different times as the place where precisely the 'lower' elements of Jewish society were concentrated."²

The historian Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin has made a wider claim in his critique of Dinur and his colleagues, arguing that Zionist historiography

erred in offering a portrayal of Jewish attitudes towards the land of Israel as being consistent and uniform. According to Raz-Krakotzkin, a distinction should be drawn between positive and even fervent Jewish attitudes towards redemption, on the one hand, and the minimal effect these attitudes had in encouraging a return to the land of Israel, on the other.³ In building his case, he relies on Elhanan Reiner's study of *aliyot* in the Middle Ages, which depicted Jewish immigration to Palestine as having been inspired far more by Christian pilgrimages than by any Jewish messianic belief.⁴ Raz-Krakotzkin argues that the time has come to "reappropriate" the discussion of the Jewish relationship to the land of Israel and to remove it from its Zionist "framing narrative"; he sees Reiner's study as setting a new course for historians, who will no longer be constrained by what he calls the "principle of return" that characterizes the classic Zionist narrative.⁵ According to this view, the Jewish conception of redemption related to the land of Israel only in abstract terms, as a spiritualized goal to be reached in a far-off time, whereas the classic Zionist assertion that Jews consistently and actively sought out the physical Palestine is simply wishful thinking.

Of course, this debate among scholars is of far more than academic interest. Scholars such as Raz-Krakotzkin, as well as the sociologists Uri Ram and David Myers, have placed the criticism of the Jerusalem school at the center of a broader critique of the Zionist movement itself.⁶ These scholars take it as self-evident that Zionism rewrote Jewish historical memory, exaggerating the importance of the land of Israel in order to give its adherents the "false consciousness" needed to realize its colonialist goals. This critique of the Jerusalem school has been central to a larger effort in recent years to assail the foundations of the Zionist movement, and it is on the basis of these criticisms that some Israelis have in recent times come to question Zionism's founding beliefs, including the very justice of the enterprise. If it turns out that their criticisms are firmly based in the historical record, the implications may be far-reaching indeed.

Today, however, the evidence exists to resolve this historical debate—evidence that was available in only limited measure to Dinur and his colleagues, and that has largely been ignored by recent critics of the traditional Zionist historiography. Indeed, with the opening of archives in the former Soviet Union, and in the wake of archival discoveries in Western and Central Europe and in Israel, much that was a matter of speculation can now be addressed on the basis of well-documented sources.

On the basis of this evidence, it seems that Dinur was largely correct in his understanding of the centrality of the land of Israel and *aliyot* in the centuries preceding Zionism, while his critics erred. The work of scholars such as Joseph Hacker, Yisrael Yuval, Binyamin Ze'ev Kedar, David Tamar, Elhanan Reiner, and Avraham David, as well as my own research, indicates clearly that the land of Israel served as a focus not only of spiritual longing for the Jews in the exile, but also of continual organized *aliyot* from all over the diaspora. These efforts brought thousands of Jews, including many important scholars and leaders, to settle in Palestine throughout the six centuries that preceded the appearance of Zionism.

Indeed, from the time of the Crusades until the nineteenth century, Jewish life was infused with a sense of messianic anticipation, which found expression, among other things, in *aliya*. This messianic anticipation was focused on specific dates, which were endowed with mystical significance. Starting with the year 5000 on the Jewish calendar (1240 C.E.), the beginning of each new century signaled for many the possibility of redemption, leading large groups of Jews to make the journey to Palestine as a necessary step in bringing it about. Some of these *aliyot* were unknown to us until recently; in other cases, recent research has added substantial detail to the historical record. The picture which emerges is one of a clear, recurrent trend of immigration to the land of Israel, which was by no means limited to the “lower” elements of society but took with it Jews from all walks of life. Indeed, in many cases, some of the outstanding Jewish figures of their day led the way. Although the number of Jews who succeeded in making the voyage and settling in

Palestine never constituted more than a small portion of world Jewry, these messianic *aliyot* were of enduring significance, partly because of the renown of those who took part, partly because of their regular appearance over the centuries, and partly because of the variety of diaspora communities which participated. The messianic impulse which spawned these waves of immigration, and the belief in the centrality of the land of Israel upon which they depended, were in no way marginal to the Jewish tradition, but in fact became an axis of Jewish spiritual life. Indeed, the story of *aliya* from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries illustrates the depth and force of the Jewish people's connection to its ancestral homeland, a connection that was carried into the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when modern Zionism found a new way of giving it voice.

II

The key to understanding the recurrence of pre-Zionist *aliyot* is to be found in the intense messianic ferment that began to grip the Jewish people in the first half of the thirteenth century. This was expressed not only in spiritual revivals in many communities, but also, on a deeper level, in changes in the theological and mystical doctrines upon which Jewish messianism was based. These were to have a decisive influence on messianic awakenings throughout the sixth millennium of the Jewish calendar (beginning in 1240 C.E.), charging this period with hopes of imminent redemption, and prompting regular movements of immigration aimed at bringing it about.

These powerful drives were largely a product of the traditional Jewish view of human history, which is based on an analogy from the story of creation as presented in the book of Genesis. In this view, each "day" of creation is seen as corresponding to one thousand years of human history,

a parallel which the rabbis of the Talmud derived from a verse in Psalms: “For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past.”⁷ Since God created the world in six days, they concluded, human history will span six thousand years. This period was divided into three ages, each lasting two thousand years.⁸ During the first two thousand years, described in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, man had no knowledge of God, and corruption and licentiousness reigned. During the second period, the “age of Tora” that is likewise described in the Bible, the Israelites received the divine revelation and took upon themselves the belief in God and the yoke of his laws. This period came to an end when the chosen people, who had not been true to their faith and had not carried out God’s commandments, suffered the destruction of their Temple and were exiled from their land.⁹

Since shortly after the beginning of the exile, human history has been in its third age, whose characteristics are discussed extensively in the Talmud, midrash, and kabalistic literature. According to this tradition, this is the “age of the Messiah,” during which all that was damaged during the second age will be “repaired” in preparation for the final redemption of the world. It is during this period that God will fulfill his promise of ending the exile, allowing the Jewish people to return to the land of their fathers and rebuild the independent Jewish kingdom “as in days of old.”¹⁰

However, at the time when this “third age” was actually dawning (it formally began in the year 240 C.E.),¹¹ it was difficult to identify the signs of the “age of the Messiah” in the real world—a difficulty that did not go unnoticed by the talmudic sages. They were also well aware of the vagueness of the date when redemption was supposed to take place, as the Bible had provided only hints. The rabbis’ difficulty with these problems was exemplified in their effort to interpret the prophet Isaiah’s ambiguous statement regarding the time of redemption: “I am the Eternal; in its time I will hasten it.”¹² In considering this verse, the rabbis asked whether the redemption would come at a fixed time, or would depend on the

repentance of the Jewish people.¹³ “R. Alexander, son of R. Yehoshua ben Levi, said: It is written, ‘in its time,’ but it is also written, ‘I will hasten it.’ [How so?] If they are worthy, ‘I will hasten it.’ If not, [the redemption will come] ‘in its time.’” According to this interpretation, the date of the redemption is fixed and predetermined; yet if Israel repents, God will hasten its realization.¹⁴ In other words, even in the third age, the Messiah would not come automatically; rather, the time of his coming would depend on the behavior of the Jewish people. The same talmudic discussion quotes the opinion of R. Dosa, that the delay may extend well into the sixth millennium, up to four hundred years before the end of history (that is, until the year 1840).¹⁵ R. Eliezer’s view is even more pessimistic, suggesting that it may last until forty years before the end (2200).¹⁶

With the passage of centuries, the idea of a two-thousand-year-long “age of the Messiah” disappeared from the Jewish sources. Instead, the medieval rabbis tended to divide the third age into two smaller periods: A thousand years of “exile” in the fifth millennium (240-1240) and a thousand years of “redemption” in the sixth millennium (1240-2240).¹⁷ As the fifth millennium drew to a close, expectations grew throughout the Jewish world, sharpened by the difficulties of exile in the medieval period. The longing for redemption became a powerful motivating force—overcoming, for example, the belief in the talmudic parable stating that God had imposed “three oaths,” of which one was a commitment not to retake the land of Israel by force.¹⁸ One of the first thinkers who rejected the strictures of the “three oaths” was R. Judah Halevi (1075-1141), who asserted that mass immigration to the land of Israel was the necessary first step towards redemption. This attitude is found both in his poems of exile and redemption and in his major philosophical treatise, the *Kuzari*. In the latter, for example, he offers his interpretation of a passage from Psalms: “You will surely arise and take pity on Zion, for it is time to be gracious to her; the appointed time has come. Your servants take delight in its stones, and cherish its dust.”¹⁹ According to Halevi, the first verse relates to the ultimate goal, while the second adds a precondition: “This means

that Jerusalem can only be rebuilt when Israel yearns for it to such an extent that they embrace her stones and dust.”²⁰ Halevi’s words present a kind of messianic activism, one which resurfaced in Jewish thought throughout the sixth millennium, according to which Jews must be prepared to take action to rebuild Zion. Passive yearning for redemption must give way to action, and in particular *aliya*.

The sense that the coming sixth millennium would bring with it the messianic era prompted many kabalists to intensify their efforts at “calculating the end.” The mystical literature composed during this period is filled with eschatological calculations of one sort or another, many of which are based on astrology, the alphanumerical system of *gematria*, or acrostic interpretations of apocalyptic verses in the Bible such as those in the book of Daniel.²¹ Even a rationalist like Maimonides, whose approach towards the redemption was largely naturalistic, took part in these efforts. In his *Epistle to Yemen*, written in 1169, he cites approvingly what was probably his own messianic calculation with regard to the end of the fifth millennium, which, in his opinion, would witness the return of prophecy to Israel: “But I have a wondrous tradition...,” he wrote, “that prophecy will return to Israel in the year 4972 [1212]. And there is no doubt that the restoration of prophecy in Israel is one of the signs of the Messiah... and this is the truest of the ‘ends’ that have been told to us.”²²

Such “certified” predictions seemed to legitimize abrogation of the “three oaths,” and to give sanction to practices aimed at bringing the Messiah, which were collectively referred to as “forcing the end.” While these efforts became a constant feature of Jewish life, dramatic events such as wars, revolutions, expulsions, religious persecutions, and natural disasters intensified them. Jews tended to view such upheavals through an eschatological lens, as manifestations of divine providence that would bring about the cosmic “repair,” a change in the nature of the world, and ultimately the redemption of Israel.

Most of these apocalyptic speculations had little impact on Jewish history, and their memory is preserved only in recondite manuscripts.

However, those calculations which pointed to the turn of each century of the sixth millennium had a more lasting effect.²³ The *Zohar*, a book that was widely believed to have been written with divine inspiration, mentions several of these dates explicitly. Six dates in particular receive the most widespread attention in the mystical and homiletic literature of the medieval period—and it was these dates which resulted in intense messianic activity as they approached, including waves of *aliya*: (i) The year 1240 (5000 on the Hebrew calendar); (ii) the period leading up to 1440 (5200); (iii) the period between 1540 and 1575 (5300-5335); (iv) the period leading up to 1640 (5400); (v) the period between 1740 and 1781 (5500-5541); and (vi) the years before and after 1840 (5600), which the *Zohar* fixes as the final date of the redemption. The political, social, and economic conditions in and around Palestine had an important role in determining the scope and success of each *aliya*; however, in almost every century its occurrence correlates directly with a messianic awakening. In these movements, as we shall see in the coming sections, the central motivation was both spiritual and nationalistic in nature: The longing of the Jewish people to return to the land of their fathers, and in so doing to hasten the coming of the Messiah.

III

The messianic *aliya* that preceded the year 1240 took place in the wake of the collapse of the Crusader kingdom in Palestine and the subsequent improvement of the situation of the Jews there. In 1187 the Muslims reconquered Jerusalem, and the new rulers not only allowed Jews to settle in Jerusalem, which had been forbidden during the Crusader period, but even encouraged them to do so. In 1216, fewer than thirty years before the beginning of the sixth millennium on the Hebrew

calendar, the poet Judah al-Harizi visited Jerusalem, and described the change in the status of the Jews:

God is zealous for his name and has had mercy for his people.... In the year 4950 of the creation [1190], God awakened the spirit of the king of Ishmael, and he and all of his army went up from Egypt and laid siege to Jerusalem, and God delivered it into his hands.... And he bid a proclamation be made throughout the city... saying: Speak unto the heart of Jerusalem, that whoever from the seed of Ephraim wishes may go unto it...²⁴

The Jews understood the Crusader defeat as a fulfillment of the divine promise that the land of Israel would not tolerate foreign conquerors, and that the struggle for the land between Christians and Muslims would ultimately pave the way for the Jews' "return to Zion." The new Muslim rulers were seen to be playing their part in the process.

Against this background we can understand a prediction dating from that time, which appeared in a letter sent to the Jews of Egypt, which was discovered among the findings of the Cairo Geniza in the nineteenth century. The letter cites a new "prophecy" according to which a series of messianic events—including the ingathering of the exiles, the coming of the Messiah, and the establishment of the kingdom of Israel—would begin some fourteen years before the end of the fifth millennium: "Letters have come from France... [saying] that there has arisen among them a prophet... who has said that in the year 4986 [1226] the great ingathering will begin, and our master Elijah, of blessed memory, will come.... And in the year 4993 [1233] the Messiah, son of David, will come... and kingship will return to the house of Jerusalem." On the basis of this prophecy, the author decided to move to Palestine and take an active part in the ingathering.²⁵

The belief that the redemption would begin at this time prompted Jews from many lands to move to Palestine.²⁶ By 1211, groups of immigrants were already arriving, including a large number of the leading Tora

scholars of France, England, North Africa, and Egypt. This movement, which historians refer to as the “*aliya* of the three hundred rabbis,” was unusual in both size and composition. It included several key figures of the French school of the Tosafists, such as R. Samson of Schantz, one of the leading scholars in France, whose talmudic commentaries are studied in yeshivot to this day; and R. Jonathan Hacohen of Lunel, one of the outstanding scholars in Provence and a follower of Maimonides.

The messianic impulse behind this movement comes through clearly in an anonymous pamphlet written at the time, which was uncovered by the historian Yisrael Yuval. According to its author, the time for the coming of the Messiah had already arrived, “for the fifth millennium will not end until the King Messiah has come.” The author calls upon the Jews of the diaspora to go to the land of Israel, in order to prepare the Jewish settlement that would greet the Messiah.

Let no one say that the King Messiah will be revealed in an impure land... and let no one make the mistake of saying that he will be revealed in the land of Israel among the gentiles. Rather, the matter is clear: In the land of Israel there will be Tora scholars and pious men of good deeds from the four corners of the earth, a handful from every city and every family, and then the King Messiah will be revealed among them.²⁷

The author insists that the messianic era will come as the result of a critical mass of *aliya* and the creation of an infrastructure of Jewish settlements in the land of Israel. The next stage in the redemption will involve a great awakening, including a mass immigration to the Holy Land—a mighty host of Jews which, under the leadership of the messianic king, will smite the resident gentiles and expel them from the land. By Yuval’s estimate, preparations for this multi-staged messianic movement were meant to begin about thirty years before the end of the fifth millennium, or around 1210—at just about the time of the “*aliya* of the three

hundred rabbis.” As he describes it, this messianic idea was a product of growing messianic expectations, which were amplified in the wake of the Crusades.²⁸ The efforts of Christians to wrest the Holy Land from the Muslims appear to have raised hopes in certain Jewish communities that they might follow in the footsteps of the Crusaders and organize their own sort of crusade, laying the groundwork for the establishment of the messianic kingdom.²⁹ Over time, this led to other daring ideas: In 1256, some Jewish writers were still meditating on radical measures, such as offering sacrifices on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, to help bring about the redemption. The traveler R. Estori Hafarhi described this in the early fourteenth century, relating that R. Yehiel of Paris, one of the central figures among the French sages of the previous century, “said that one should go up to Jerusalem—and this was during the seventeenth year of the sixth millennium—and that one should offer sacrifices at this time.”³⁰

We know little about the fate of the three hundred rabbis and the community they established. Some settled in Jerusalem, but when the city again fell into the hands of the Crusaders in 1229, the majority of the immigrants and their families apparently were forced to move to the city of Acre. The bloody battles that took place in the area, and the shifts from Muslim rule to Crusader rule and back again, wore down the Jewish communities of Palestine and were, apparently, a major factor in preventing them from taking root in the country. Jerusalem’s Jewish population withered and was not to flourish again for many years. Finally, after Acre fell into Muslim hands in 1291, the large Jewish community of that city, where the yeshiva of R. Yehiel of Paris had been established, was destroyed.

Evidently, the failure of the “*aliya* of the three hundred rabbis” and their descendants’ return to Europe left their mark on the Jewish people, who did not make another similar effort for some time.³¹ Nevertheless, this movement stood as a model for future messianic *aliyot*: Unlike the

pilgrimage of isolated individuals that had preceded it, this was an organized effort, spearheaded by a large group of communal leaders and Tora scholars from all over the diaspora. As we will see, this activist model marked the beginning of a new age in the history of the land of Israel, beginning a trend that was to repeat itself with increasing intensity in later centuries.

IV

Though we know nothing of messianic efforts to move Jews to the land of Israel around the date 1340 (5100 on the Jewish calendar), there is ample evidence that in the years leading up to the start of the next century, in 1440 (5200), intense messianic ferment culminated in a mass movement of *aliya* that lasted for decades, involving Jews from North Africa, Spain, France, Italy, and the German lands. As in similar cases where radical changes in the status of the Jews prompted messianic activity, the awakening that took place around 1440 followed a severe crisis in Jewish-Christian relations throughout Europe. Spain, a country in which the Jews had hoped to prosper, became the scene of waves of violent persecution for nearly fourteen years, beginning in 1391. A similar fate befell the Jews of Central Europe during this period: In 1389 the Jews of Prague suffered a pogrom; in 1391 the Jews were driven out of France; and in 1421 Austria expelled its Jews. During the years 1415-1431, a bloody war took place between a reformist religious group, the Hussites, and the Catholic Church in Bohemia. The Jews found themselves caught in the middle, suffering the depredations of the Catholic armies while the latter were pursuing their “crusade” against the Hussite heretics.

These grim events nourished hopes for redemption, and messianic calculations of various sorts flourished in the literature of the period.³²

One of the most prominent devotees of calculations of this sort was R. Yom-Tov Lipmann Mulhausen, a leading rabbi in Central Europe and the *dayan* (chief rabbinic judge) of Prague, who was not only a leading halachic authority but also a respected theologian and mystic. His calculations fixed the date of the redemption for the year 1410 (5170), and again, later on, for the year 1430 (5190).³³ Indications of messianic ferment at the time can also be found in the writings of R. Hasdai Crescas, one of the eminent Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages. He recounts a prophetic revelation that took place in 1393, according to which the redemption would take place in the year 1396 (5156, the numerical value of the Hebrew word “Zion”). Crescas goes on to cite a testimony from Jerusalem, also of a prophetic character, which tells of a divine command directing the Muslims to transfer their rule over Jerusalem to the Jews. According to this testimony, a voice emerged from the site of the Temple and addressed the Muslims, calling to them, “Leave my house, and let my sons enter!” and the Muslims were filled with fear. Another story from Jerusalem told of three elders who appeared before one of the Muslim leaders of the city and said to him: “We are of the children of Israel. Now, go and tell the Ishmaelites to leave this place, for the time of their end has come.”³⁴

Testimonies of this type, like the widespread messianic calculations of that period, reflect a strong messianic sentiment. Alongside the reports of miraculous events, they also contain a clear political element: While some testimonies portrayed Muslim rule as the essential obstacle to the redemption, others cited it as the factor that would permit the Jews to return to their own soil, and even to rebuild the Temple under the aegis of the Mameluke regimes. Crescas himself, for instance, raised this possibility as early as 1406: “In the final analysis... perhaps the king of Egypt who now rules in the land of Israel would allow the Jews in the extremities of his kingdom to go up and build the Temple, on condition that they dwell under his rule...”³⁵ In light of this expectation, it is not surprising that Jews of the time portrayed the Ottomans’ capture of Constantinople, the

capital of eastern Christianity, which took place in 1453, as heralding the redemption. This change in the world order—Christianity’s defeat at the hands of Islam—gave the Jews reason to hope for the victory of the true religion, Judaism, over these two leading competitors.

At about the same time, persistent rumors that the ten lost Israelite tribes had been discovered—an event that tradition considered a clear sign of the redemption—added fuel to the messianic fire. These rumors, which spread in 1404 and again in 1430, were precipitated by the new geographical discoveries that resulted from the voyages of explorers to China and India. Various interpretations of these discoveries captured the Jews’ imagination. For example, rumors that the lost kingdom of the ten tribes had been discovered somewhere in distant Asia, on the Indian subcontinent, in a place where the nations of the world did not rule, made a powerful impression, and led to speculation about the possibility of reuniting all the world’s Jews.³⁶

But the most explicit expression of messianic awakening during this period was a mass movement of *aliya* embracing thousands of Jews from Spain, Italy, North Africa, and Egypt. We find evidence of this movement in a contemporary edition of an anonymous historical text that had first appeared two centuries earlier, in 1240, and was recopied in Rome in 1429, discussing the “*aliya* of the three hundred rabbis.”³⁷ After quoting the original text, the copyist added an aside concerning the events of his day: “And now many people have awakened, and have decided to go to the land of Israel, and many think that we are close to the coming of the redeemer, seeing that the nations of the world weigh heavily upon Israel.”³⁸

In this movement, the Jews of Spain, among whom messianic visions and calculations were particularly widespread, played a central role.³⁹ The historian Binyamin Ze’ev Kedar has discovered an account of a Jewish voyage from Spain to the port of Jaffa in the early fifteenth century: “Old and young, women and youths and infants, they went up to Jerusalem and there built [houses]....” Kedar goes on to quote a contemporary

witness, the learned Christian Thomas Gascoigne: “The Jews who are gathered there from various lands believe that they shall in the future be victorious over the Saracens, the pagans, and the Christians. And after the golden Jerusalem and the Temple of the Lord are built, they say that their messiah, that is, the Antichrist, will come to Jerusalem to his holy sanctuary.”⁴⁰

We can also judge the scope of the Spanish movement of Jews to Palestine from the opposition that it elicited within some Spanish Jewish communities, whose leaders occasionally took exception to what was viewed as a violation of the “three oaths.” Such opposition appears, for example, in a letter that the Jews of Saragossa wrote to the community of Castile, in which they complain about the exodus of a large number of Jews from Spain to Palestine: “For God has created a new thing in the land: People of little quality and large numbers have set out, their children and families with them, infants and women, saying: Let us go to the land, unto its length and breadth, until we come to the mountain of the house of the Eternal, to the house of the God of Jacob...”⁴¹ The authors call for bringing the movement to an immediate end, out of a fear that all of Jewry will suffer because of it: “We have come to beseech you, distinguished Tora scholars, that you take all possible measures to turn back all those who are going in this way, and let each man return to his tent in peace, and let them not hasten the end.”⁴² It is important to note in this regard that the Saragossans’ denigration of the quality of the *olim* did not at all correspond to the reality. Joseph Hacker, who has studied the immigration from Spain, has demonstrated that it included not only “people of little quality” but also serious scholars who engaged in halachic discussion about *aliya*, and wrote passionate letters on the subject. Several of them went on to become leaders of the Jewish community of Jerusalem.⁴³

Another large diaspora community, that of Italy, also experienced a messianic awakening at the time, as we learn from the case of R. Elijah of Ferrara, a leading rabbi who arrived in Palestine in 1435 and left an account of his journey. R. Elijah appears to have taken this trip in order

to verify rumors that had reached Italy in 1419 about the discovery of the ten lost tribes.⁴⁴ His journey prompted many other Jews from the Italian communities to leave for Palestine to take part in the imminent redemption. The movement was substantial enough that the Italian authorities took action to stem it. In 1428, a papal order was issued prohibiting sea captains from carrying Jews to Palestine. Soon afterward, the Venetian government forbade the use of their city's port for this purpose, while Sicily issued a similar prohibition in 1455.⁴⁵

The Vatican's concern about the growing strength of the Jewish settlement in Palestine was not without grounds. In 1427, for instance, the Jews of Jerusalem attempted to wrest control of the Tomb of David on Mount Zion from the members of the Franciscan order who held it, and to acquire ownership of the site from the Muslim authorities. As a result of the subsequent dispute, the Franciscans were removed from the holy site, but the Jews of Jerusalem also lost their hold on it. The audacity of Jerusalem's Jews, which elicited the anger of the Church against them, was certainly fueled by the messianic euphoria which had come to characterize Jewish life at the time. The Jews were energized not only in their bid for Mount Zion, but also in their success in expanding the area of their residence into a new quarter of the city: The "Street of the Jews' Synagogue," today known as the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. Jews purchased extensive property in this area, as a Christian traveler reports in 1421.⁴⁶ The confidence of the Jews during this period led them to build a synagogue on the Street of the Jews—despite the strict prohibition in Omarite law against building new synagogues under the rule of Islam. A document from 1425, discovered recently in the archive of the Islamic court in Jerusalem, indicates that in exchange for payment, the authorities accepted a Jewish claim that a synagogue had already existed on the site in ancient times, and that it could therefore be left in Jewish hands.⁴⁷

The assertiveness among the Jews of Jerusalem also stemmed from a major demographic boost they received from immigrants who had arrived in anticipation of 1440. One source from this period depicts worshippers

in Jerusalem on the festival of Shavuot. According to the report, the community was overwhelmed with pilgrims and local Jews; the author was deeply moved by the display of devotion, which he describes as a miraculous sign of the approaching redemption: "At the time there gathered there on the festival of Shavuot more than three hundred celebrants, all of whom came in and could be seated comfortably, for it [Jerusalem] still retains its sanctity, and this is a sign of the third redemption."⁴⁸ Another testimony mentions that at this time there were as many as five hundred Jews residing permanently in Jerusalem; a later source places the number at 1,200.⁴⁹

But the boom of the Jewish community in Jerusalem did not last long. A heavy increase in taxation forced many members of the community to sell their property in order to pay off debts.⁵⁰ The erosion of the economic power of the Jews played into the hands of their Muslim rivals in the city. After the Mameluke sultan and his court in Cairo rejected the demand of the Waqf to tear down the synagogue on the Street of the Jews, Muslim fanatics took matters into their own hands, destroying it in 1474. If not for the protection of the government in Egypt, they would have expelled all the Jews from the city as well. These and other events led to a waning of the Jews' hopes for imminent redemption.

Nonetheless, the *aliya* leading up to the year 1440 played an important role in setting the stage for future efforts to settle the land of Israel. Most importantly, it was much larger and more diverse than the "*aliya* of the three hundred rabbis" that preceded it, and included both ordinary Jews and intellectual elites. In this respect, it laid the foundation for the great messianic ingathering that was to take place during the first half of the next century.

V

Of all the messianic *aliyot* of the sixth millennium, the one that took place in the years leading up to 1540 (5300 in the Jewish calendar) is the best known, because of its formative impact on the development of Judaism and the Jewish world. During this period, a new wave of immigration sustained a material and spiritual flowering such as the Jewish community in Palestine had not enjoyed since the period of the Mishna. This relatively brief heyday, centering on the northern town of Safed, gave rise to some of the most important intellectual achievements of Jewish history—of which the most enduring were the *Shulhan Aruch* and *Beit Yosef* of R. Joseph Karo, which today remain two of the pillars of the Jewish legal tradition; and the kabalistic teachings of R. Isaac Luria, which revolutionized Jewish mysticism and later formed part of the doctrinal basis of Hasidism.

Not surprisingly, this revival came in the wake of one of the most traumatic events in Jewish history. In 1492, after a century of persecution, the vast Jewish community of Spain was expelled. Messianic thought of the period was strongly influenced by this catastrophe: According to many rabbis at the time, the scope and severity of the persecutions were indicators of a divine hand behind them, aimed at spurring the Jewish people to realize the “return to Zion” and bring about the redemption. One of the leaders of Spanish Jewry, the noted Bible commentator R. Isaac Abravanel, found a proof in the book of Isaiah: “I will say to the north, Give; and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar, and my daughters from the ends of the earth.”⁵¹ Abravanel interpreted this passage to mean that the expulsion from Spain was an act of God meant to push the Jews towards Zion:

And in the year 5252 [1492], the Eternal roused the spirit of the kings of Spain to expel from their land all of the Jews, some three hundred thousand souls, in such a manner that all of them would leave... and all of them would pass before the land of Israel, not only the Jews but also the Conversos [i.e., Jews who had converted to Christianity under the Spanish persecutions]... and in this way they would gather upon the holy soil.⁵²

After the trauma of expulsion at the hands of the Christian rulers of Spain, the Jews viewed the Ottomans' conquest of Palestine in 1517 as a significant turn for the better. The Ottoman government's sympathetic attitude towards Jewish immigration raised messianic anticipations further, as did the religious upheavals in Christendom which accompanied the advent of Protestantism. In the words of the kabalist R. Abraham Halevi, who headed the Sephardi yeshiva in Jerusalem, "And now, there have recently arrived in Jerusalem faithful Jews from the lands of Ashkenaz and Bohemia... who tell of the man... named Martin Luther... who began in the year 5284 [1524] to reject the creed of the uncircumcised and to show them that their fathers had inherited a lie."⁵³

At the same time, messianic longing found expression in the feverish efforts of David Reuveni and Solomon Molcho in Italy and Portugal. These two figures created a new model of Jewish leadership, characterized by a combination of messianic and political activism. Reuveni, who claimed to be a member of the lost tribe of Reuben and the king of a portion of the ten lost tribes, went so far as to visit Pope Clement VII and urge that he advise the king of Portugal to form a military alliance between the Christians and the Jews to wage war against the Muslims and wrest the Holy Land from Turkish rule. Reuveni's diplomatic efforts grew, in part, out of messianic calculations that placed redemption in the year 1540.⁵⁴ Reuveni's colleague, Solomon Molcho, was born into a Converso family and rose to the position of secretary of the Portuguese royal council. When Reuveni came to the Portuguese royal court in 1525, he convinced

Molcho to return to Judaism—a decision which forced Molcho to flee to Salonika, where he met R. Joseph Karo and became deeply involved in esoteric studies and mystical rites aimed at bringing about the redemption. He believed that at the end of days, “all the secrets of the Tora which have been hidden from us due to our sins will be revealed, and then the teachings, laws, and testimonies, whose divine secrets we do not apprehend today, will be interpreted for us.”⁵⁵ According to the scholar of mysticism Moshe Idel, Molcho saw 1540 as the date of the restoration of the Davidic dynasty: “The year 5300 will complete the appointed number of days, and over it will rule the house of David.”⁵⁶ Reuveni’s and Molcho’s activity came to an end in Regensburg in the summer of 1532, when they were arrested by Carl V, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and king of Spain and Germany. Molcho, the former Converso, was taken to Mantua, in Italy, where he was burned at the stake, while Reuveni was exiled to Spain, where his story, as far as we know, comes to an end.

As the year 5300 drew near, the messianic ferment intensified. R. Abraham Halevi, who immigrated to Jerusalem at that time, expressed this sentiment in describing what he considered to be clear signs of the coming redemption. He notes the troubles that have befallen the Jewish people in exile, and the special prayers that are recited in Jerusalem to arouse the mercies of heaven and bring the redemption; most importantly, he writes of the divine response to these prayers, in the form of a fire which he describes as having come down from heaven and damaged the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.⁵⁷ Further testimony appears in a letter that students from the yeshiva in Jerusalem sent to Italy in 1521, in which they describe vigils held in the city on Mondays and Thursdays for the recital of special prayers requesting divine intervention to hasten the redemption.⁵⁸ The authors of the letter also interpreted certain unusual events as a sign of divine response to their prayers:

And on the day that we arranged the vigil, that night the sleep of the King of the World was disturbed, and he showed us a sign of

redemption, and the Eternal thundered in the heavens, and his voice was heard from on high, and there was a driving rain and a great wind that broke up mountains and smashed rocks. And this was on the eleventh day of the *omer*, when rain in Jerusalem is a miracle, for rain does not fall there in the summer days, but only during the rainy season between Succot and Passover... and this was nothing if not a sign of redemption.⁵⁹

In the last few years leading up to 1540, the movement to bring Jews to the land of Israel, which encompassed thousands of families, intensified. Jews from Poland and Lithuania took part, in addition to those who came from Western Europe in the wake of the expulsions. In 1539 the land registry of Horodno (Grodno) records the sale of homes by Jews who intended to go to Palestine. About the same time, Lithuanian King Zygmunt I sought to verify rumors that the Jews were taking with them to Palestine Christian children whom they had circumcised.⁶⁰ The historian Yitzhak Shefer attributes the messianic sentiment underlying this *aliya* from Central Europe to the appearance of Solomon Molcho in Prague and his meeting with Emperor Carl V.⁶¹ Messianic enthusiasm may also have prompted R. Jacob Pollack, the rabbi from Prague and Krakow who is credited with having founded the world of Eastern European yeshivot and pioneering the method of talmudic study known as *pilpul*, to move to Jerusalem in 1530.⁶²

The great majority of those who moved to Palestine at this time settled in the Galilee, particularly in Safed. The choice of this small town in the hills west of the Sea of Galilee had to do with a tradition that the Messiah would first make himself known in the Galilee,⁶³ and also with the fact that neither Muslims nor Christians had a religious center there. Moreover, the income that could be gained from the local textile industry added a further incentive to settle there.⁶⁴ The local authorities even commissioned some of the newly arrived merchants and businessmen to handle the collection of taxes and other state income, or to act as leaseholders in different areas. Safed and the Galilee were rapidly transformed into a

flourishing economic center, which exported fruits and grain, sheep and wool, and woven goods. Merchandise was shipped abroad via the ports of Acre, Haifa, Beirut, Sidon, and Tripoli. A contemporary source describes the dramatic change that occurred in Safed within just ten years of the arrival of the first wave of Jewish immigrants: “Whoever saw Safed ten years ago, and sees it today, will find it remarkable, because more and more Jews are coming all the time, and the clothing industry grows daily.... Any man or woman who works in wool at any labor can earn his living comfortably.”⁶⁵

Safed’s prosperity and the growth of its Jewish community were matched by the spiritual flowering that resulted from the arrival of a learned elite, which included such prominent scholars and kabalists as R. Jacob Berab, R. Joseph Karo, R. Solomon Alkabetz, and their followers. This vanguard added to the messianic spirit of the time, and sought to take an active role in bringing about the redemption. Within a very short time, the Safed community had transformed the city into one of the greatest spiritual centers of world Jewry since the redaction of the Talmud.

The period of Safed’s intellectual renaissance began in 1524, with the arrival of R. Jacob Berab, one of the leading Spanish scholars of his generation. Berab, a man of great boldness and energy, sought to reinstate the ancient practice of rabbinic ordination known as *semicha*, and through this to enable the reestablishment of the ancient Jewish legislative-judicial body, the Sanhedrin. These efforts were of a plainly messianic character. The reestablishment of the Sanhedrin was universally accepted as a major step in the messianic process, since it represented the most concrete expression of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel; however, a requirement for membership in the Sanhedrin was ordination by *semicha*, which had been handed down through the generations of rabbinic leaders until around the fifth century C.E., at which time the chain of transmission was broken, and the tradition was lost. Berab’s efforts to reinstate *semicha* were thus aimed at eventually reestablishing Judaism’s sovereign legislative

house, in preparation for the messianic era.⁶⁶ In 1538, in the presence of twenty-five of the greatest rabbis in Safed, Berab was ordained—creating the first link in what was meant to be a renewed chain of ordination. But the leading rabbi of Jerusalem, R. Levi ibn Habib, objected that the ordination did not satisfy one of the conditions stipulated by Maimonides without which the *semicha* could not be reinstated—namely, the agreement of all the sages in the land of Israel—and as a result had no halachic validity. The controversy between the two sides grew increasingly heated, to the point that Berab’s opponents apparently reported on him to the authorities for disloyalty. Fearing imprisonment, Berab was forced to flee the country—but not before he had hurriedly ordained four of the great scholars of the generation living in the city, including R. Joseph Karo.

Following Berab’s departure, Karo assumed leadership of the community in Safed. Karo was born in Portugal; because of the persecutions and expulsion there he emigrated, together with many other refugees, to Egypt, which was part of the Ottoman Empire. In 1536 he came to Palestine along with a group of kabalists headed by R. Solomon Alkabetz, and settled in Safed. The kabalists had an explicitly mystical motivation for moving to Palestine: Alkabetz had preached a sermon on Shavuot night, the eve of the group’s *aliya*, in which he described how a *magid*, an emissary from God, had urged Karo to lead his disciples to the land of Israel because it was a time of grace: “Fortunate are you, my sons,” the *magid* told him. “Return to your studies and do not interrupt them for even a moment, and ascend to the land of Israel, for not all times are equally [propitious].... Therefore make haste and go up... for it has already been said, ‘the time of reaping the fruits has come,’ and not all times are the same.”⁶⁷

Alkabetz, the third outstanding figure in the spiritual leadership of Safed, introduced special prayer customs and composed works of Kabala and many religious poems, which were suffused with a yearning for redemption (one of his best-known poems, *Lecha Dodi*, “Come, My Beloved,” became part of the Sabbath Eve service throughout the Jewish

world). In one of his prayers, Alkabetz calls upon the Almighty to redeem the Jewish people, arguing that by going up to the land of their fathers, he and his colleagues had proven their devotion and were worthy of divine assistance:

And now their spirit has led them to go up to Mount Zion, the Mountain of the Eternal, to please its stones and to reestablish the dust of its ruins; they all are gathered and come unto you; they have put their lives in their own hands, setting their path upon the sea. They were lighter than eagles, stronger than lions, to go up and to worship before you upon this land. And they abandoned their property and their houses of pleasure, silver and gold were of no account to them, to come to the land. And the land is abandoned, ruined and desolate before them, and its inhabitants are gentiles who rule over it, and they are wicked and sinful. And every day your servants are beaten, and your servants go up to it. Shall not the Eternal remember and save us from these things? Have you had contempt for them, is your soul disgusted by such a nation?⁶⁸

Another major religious figure who left his imprint on Safed was R. Isaac Luria, also known as the “Ari.” Luria was born in Jerusalem and attended the yeshiva of R. Betzalel Ashkenazi in Cairo, where he studied the *Zohar*. By his account, the prophet Elijah appeared to him and commanded him to go back to the land of Israel in order to attain the highest holiness, an understanding of the divine wisdom, and a knowledge of the secrets of the Tora. Inspired by this revelation, he returned to Palestine and settled with his disciples in Safed, where he played an unparalleled role in the development of Jewish mysticism. His doctrines concerning creation and redemption, and the kabalistic school that formed around them, were crucial not only for the development of Kabala in subsequent generations, but also in the emergence of the Hasidic movement in the eighteenth century.

The Messiah did not materialize in 1540, but this did not discourage those who had built their vision of the future around that date. A number of mystics tried to resurrect messianic hopes by pushing the date back to 5335 (1575), based on their reading of a verse in the book of Daniel.⁶⁹ However, the messianic anticipations for the later date paled in comparison to those that had preceded the year 5300. An aborted plan to rebuild the city of Tiberias raised hopes among Italian Jews during this intermediary period (according to several midrashic traditions, the first step in the process of redemption is to take place there),⁷⁰ but these were quickly dashed and did not trigger any serious movement of *aliya*.⁷¹ Luria died three years before the second date posited for redemption, in 1572, at the age of 38; and Karo's death followed in 1575—the very year that he had hoped to see the Messiah.

As the messianic ferment subsided, Safed itself declined. One main cause was the severe economic crisis that struck the country and damaged most of the city's wool industry. Government authorities also grew more hostile to the Jews, and in 1576 even attempted to expel about one thousand Jewish families from Palestine to Cyprus. Religious persecution of the Jews of Safed—on the pretext that they had built synagogues without permission—brought an end to the community. R. Moses Alsheich's lamentation, modeled on the book of Lamentations, which Jews read every year on Tisha B'av, depicts the end of this crucial chapter in the history of Jewish settlement in Palestine: "And who is the man who has seen the city, which has been called the acme of beauty, the joy of all the world, a great city of scholars and scribes...? How has its blossom been plundered like a wilderness.... Many are its enemies and those who destroy it."⁷²

VI

Despite these crises in the Jewish community in Palestine towards the end of the sixteenth century, and especially in Safed, a new movement of immigration to the land of Israel started up only a few decades later. This time, the messianic ferment was based on a passage from the *Zohar*, which concluded that in the year 5408 (1648), the dead would be resurrected, an event which the tradition describes as one of the later stages in the process of redemption.⁷³ In the words of the *Zohar*:

In the sixth millennium, in the 408th year, all those who dwell in the dust will rise.... And the verse calls them “the children of Heth,” because they shall arise in the year 408,⁷⁴ as it is written, “In *this* jubilee year each of you shall return to his property.” And when “*this*” is completed, which is 5,408,⁷⁵ each man will return to his property, to his soul, which is his property and his inheritance.⁷⁶

Dozens of leading rabbinic sages and their families came to Palestine in the years before 1648. Most of them were kabalists of the school of R. Moses Cordovero and R. Isaac Luria, who believed that by studying and disseminating esoteric doctrines they were fulfilling one of the important conditions for the coming of the Messiah. These included R. Abraham Azulai from Morocco, author of the important kabalistic treatise *Hesed Le'avraham*; R. Jacob Tzemah from Portugal, who edited the writings of R. Haim Vital, the renowned disciple of Luria; and R. Nathan Shapira of Krakow, author of the well-known work *Tuv Ha'aretz* which deals with the sanctity of the Holy Land according to the Kabala.

But perhaps the most illustrious figure who came to Palestine at this time was R. Isaiah Horowitz, author of *Shnei Luhot Habrit* and known as

the “Shelah,” after the acronym of the title of this work. Around 1620, Horowitz, who had served as chief rabbi in Dubno, Ostraha, Frankfurt am Main, and Prague, decided to move to Palestine. Prior to that, Horowitz had argued strenuously for the existence of a natural link between settling the land and the coming of the redemption, and it upset him deeply that the masses of Jews did not go to the land of Israel. “For my heart burned continually,” he wrote, “when I saw the children of Israel building houses like princely fortresses, making permanent homes in this world in an impure land... which seems, heaven forbid, as if they were turning their minds away from the redemption.”⁷⁷ Horowitz saw his own *aliya* as a necessary step in bringing about the redemption that was expected with the turn of the fifth century of the millennium.⁷⁸

Horowitz arrived early in 1622, staying for a short time in Safed. From there he went to Jerusalem, where he made his home. He had several reasons for relocating to Jerusalem, the most important of which was his belief that Israel’s historic capital, and not Safed, would come first in the process of redemption, and he wanted to focus his efforts on rebuilding it: “Our rabbis also said... ‘I will not come to the Jerusalem above until I come to the Jerusalem below.’ The simple meaning of this is that the Jerusalem below is the Jerusalem that is here, in the land, whose rebuilding we anticipate speedily in our days...”⁷⁹ The growth of the Jewish community in the city during that period, driven by an influx of immigrants from various countries, also encouraged the move. In a letter he wrote while still in Safed, he observed: “For, thank God, it has become crowded in Jerusalem. For the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem is already twice that of Safed; may it be speedily rebuilt in our days, for every day it increases.... Also the Sephardim in Jerusalem increase greatly, to literally hundreds [of families].” Horowitz particularly praised the quality of the *aliya*, noting that “the Ashkenazi community includes quite a few important people, great scholars of the Tora.” This being the case, he cherished the hope that the number of immigrants would swell further in

the wake of his own arrival: “And in a short time, God willing, we will hear that the Ashkenazi community has become inspiring in its grandeur, for I know that, praise God, many will come there and wish to attach themselves to me.”⁸⁰

The enthusiasm Horowitz expressed over his expected move to Jerusalem did not subside after he settled in the city. In a letter from Jerusalem, which was recently uncovered by Avraham David, he again asserts that the city has changed profoundly, emphasizing its sanctity no less than the great improvement in the physical conditions that he found there.⁸¹ Whereas the praise in his earlier letter had been based on hearsay, now he extols Jerusalem on the basis of direct experience, and even compares its scope to that of the major cities of Eastern Europe: “And know... that it is a large city like Krakow, and every day large buildings are added to it and it is filled with people, whether of the nations of the world without number or limit, or of the children of Israel.”⁸² The rapid growth convinced Horowitz that the time of the Messiah was drawing close. “We consider all this a sign of the approaching redemption quickly in our days, amen,” he wrote. “Every day we see the ingathering of the exiles. Day by day they come. Wander about the courtyards of Jerusalem: All of them, praise God, are filled with Jews, may their Rock and Redeemer protect them, and with houses of study and schools filled with small children.”⁸³

Horowitz’s attempts to discover the manuscripts of R. Isaac Luria also reflected his messianic enthusiasm. He was convinced that the works attributed to Luria that were circulating in the diaspora were not authentic, since Luria’s disciple, R. Haim Vital, had forbidden his master’s writings to be copied or removed from the land of Israel. In one of his letters, Horowitz mentions that when he arrived in Damascus on his way to Palestine, local Jews allowed him to inspect the writings of Vital. He expressed the hope that after arriving in Jerusalem he would continue to study the Lurianic Kabala from Palestinian manuscripts, identify and confirm the authenticity of its mystical doctrines, and succeed in annulling the ban on their dissemination and publication:

For I desire and yearn for this wisdom. And there are many great sages here, and all of them have the treatises of his [Vital's] disciples that have become widespread. And we have found and seen that they differ regarding many matters.... But we hope to the Eternal that the time may come when the holy book of that godly man [Luria] will be revealed, for there is a time and season to every purpose. And if God sees our merit as I have hoped, then surely the vow will be nullified, that is, the earlier ban.... And we are certain that with God's mercies we shall quickly merit it, and the secret things will be revealed to us....⁸⁴

Horowitz's quest to uncover Luria's original manuscripts was not motivated by intellectual curiosity alone. Vital had taught that the discovery of Luria's true, original writings would be a sign of the coming of the Messiah: "In these generations it is a commandment and a great joy before the Holy One that this wisdom be revealed, for by its merit the Messiah shall come."⁸⁵ The hope expressed by Horowitz—"But we hope to the Eternal that the time may come when the holy book of that godly man will be revealed, for there is a time and season to every purpose"—indicates his faith that the dissemination of Luria's true teaching would assure the redemption.⁸⁶

Horowitz's impassioned letters reflect the pervasive messianic ferment in the Jewish community of Palestine in the years before 1640 (5400). But, as at many times in the history of the Jews in the land of Israel, this period of success came to an end. In 1625, Jerusalem came under the control of the Ibn Farukh family. The family, which had purchased control over the city from the Ottoman government, saw themselves as free to oppress the city's inhabitants and embitter the lives of anyone too poor to pay a sufficient levy. Most of all they targeted the city's Jews, who were politically powerless and could be exploited by taking the financial support they received from the diaspora.⁸⁷ Within a two-year period, from 1625 to the end of 1627, the position of the Jewish community in Jerusalem was completely undermined. The governor, Muhammed ibn Farukh, persecuted the Jews of the whole country, issued various edicts against

them, restricted their numbers arbitrarily, and extorted enormous sums of money.⁸⁸ When they were unable to pay their debts, they were summarily jailed and tortured. The new regime destroyed the Jews' sacred objects; placed their synagogues in lien against debts and shut them down;⁸⁹ interrupted their prayer services; desecrated their Tora scrolls, tearing and stealing them to make clothing and bags; closed their religious courts and dispersed the judges; and shut down Jewish schools and sent the children away. Many Jews starved. Those with means fled far from the reach of Muhammed ibn Farukh. Among the refugees was Horowitz, who succeeded in escaping to Safed. Of the 2,500 to 3,000 Jews who lived in Jerusalem in 1624, on the eve of Ibn Farukh's rise to power, only a few hundred remained by the end of his rule in 1627.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, the messianic excitement that had characterized the period prior to Ibn Farukh did not dissipate. The Christian traveler Eugene Roger, who visited Palestine between 1629 and 1634, was witness to persistent efforts by the Jews to greet the Messiah. Roger recounts two occasions on which he saw more than two thousand Jews awaiting the coming of the Messiah—on Shavuot of the year 1630, and again in 1633: "The gathering of the Jews took place in the city of Safed in the Galilee, because they think, as several of their rabbis have taught them, that in this city of Safed the Messiah whom they await will come."⁹¹ A mood of optimism also suffuses an anonymous testimony of the time, entitled *The Ruins of Jerusalem*, printed in Venice in 1631, which describes the persecution of the Jews of Jerusalem, with all its horrors, as having been temporary in nature. The author expresses the hope that the Jews of the land of Israel will again prosper as in the past, as befitting the age of the "footsteps of the Messiah." He thus begins his survey with a description of the settlement of the Jews in Jerusalem that preceded the arrival of the Ibn Farukh regime: "And the city of our God was settled by members of our people, more than it had been since the day that Israel was exiled from its land, for from day to day more Jews came to dwell there.... And many of them bought fields and houses and rebuilt the ruins, and old

men and women settled in the streets of Jerusalem, and the streets of the city were filled with little boys and girls.”⁹² Further on, the author rejects the complaints of the Jews who remained in Jerusalem and regretted that they had not fled. He argues that with the passing of the danger, it is crucial to remain strong, to act so as to realize the hopes for redemption, and to settle the land of Israel, and especially Jerusalem:

For from the day the Temple was destroyed, did God not take an oath—and he will not go back on it—that he will not enter the heavenly Jerusalem until he enters the earthly Jerusalem? And before the coming of Ibn Farukh, children from the four corners of the earth fluttered like birds in their eagerness to settle in Jerusalem. And to us, this was an evident sign of the beginning of the ingathering of the exiles.... All the more so, now that God has remembered his people and his land and expelled before our eyes the enemy Ibn Farukh; they hover like an eagle, and the children will return to their borders.⁹³

According to the author of *The Ruins of Jerusalem*, the sufferings endured by the Jews during the two years under Ibn Farukh’s rule were essentially “birth pangs of the Messiah” that served to purge Israel of its sins before the redemption: “Reason suggests that God is testing us like one who smelts and purifies... [in order] to cleanse us and whiten us in the purifying fire that has passed over us, that he may relieve us of these birth pangs of the Messiah.”⁹⁴

But instead of the long-awaited redemption, 1648 [5408], the very year cited by the *Zohar* as heralding the resurrection of the dead, brought with it one of the worst tragedies in the history of the Jewish people. In the course of an uprising against the Polish government, Cossacks under the leadership of Bogdan Chmielnicki killed tens of thousands of Jews. They sowed ruin and desolation, destroying about three hundred Jewish communities. One of the great rabbinic figures of that time, R. Shabtai Hacohen (also known as the “Shach,” after his major halachic commentary, *Siftei Kohan*), expressed the widespread bitterness among the Jews:

“In the year 5408, which I had thought would reflect the verse ‘*Thus* shall Aaron come into the holy place,’ to the innermost sanctum, instead my harp was turned to mourning and my joy to anguish.”⁹⁵ The chronicler R. Joseph Sambari similarly writes: “And in the year 5408... the Eternal’s anger flared up against his people... for they thought that it would be a year of redemption, in ‘*this*’ year, as is written in the *Zohar*... ‘In the year of “the sons of Heth”’; and now it is turned into *thistles*.”⁹⁶ (The numerical values for “thus,” “this,” “Heth,” and “thistles” in the foregoing all add up to 5,408 or 408.)⁹⁷

But despite the disillusionment brought about by tragedy where there had been hope for redemption, the Jewish longing for the Messiah did not take long to resurface. A new messianic fervor came to the fore less than twenty years later, focused on the renowned false messiah Shabtai Tzvi. Despite his peculiar behavior, which was later explained by some scholars as manifestations of mental illness,⁹⁸ his messianic claims fell on eager ears. After an extended tour through various Jewish communities and a brief stay in Palestine, his proclamation in 1665 that he was the Messiah met with substantial support among rabbis and kabalists, which increased in subsequent months as the messianic fever spread. His pronouncements caused great excitement among the masses, who were instilled with a renewed belief in imminent redemption. His followers began to take up ascetic practices and to engage in mystical acts of repentance (*tikunei teshuva*); some of them sold their property, packed their belongings, and made ready to move to Palestine. Certain communities even attempted, with the help of their wealthy members, to rent ships that would carry them en masse to the Holy Land. In 1666, the new movement came to a sudden end, when Shabtai Tzvi converted to Islam under threat from the sultan.

Unlike other messianic movements among the Jews, Sabbateanism did not see *aliya* as a precondition for redemption, since the Messiah himself had ostensibly been revealed already. Moreover, Sabbatean

messianism distanced itself from political, earthly activism, focusing instead on spiritual-mystical activity directed heavenward.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, it did not take long before a new messianic movement arose, bringing many hundreds of Jews to Palestine in a new mass *aliya*. At the center of this movement was the itinerant preacher R. Judah Hasid and his circle, who went to Palestine from Europe in 1700 with the aim of bringing about the redemption.¹⁰⁰ It is known that a number of Shabtai Tzvi's followers, believing that their messiah would have a second coming in the year 1706, took part in the movement surrounding R. Judah.¹⁰¹ Several scholars have even attributed Sabbatean tendencies to the movement as a whole.¹⁰² However, there is no indication that R. Judah himself, or the majority of those who came with him, were Sabbateans.¹⁰³ Either way, at some point after 1706 passed without Shabtai Tzvi's having revealed himself a second time, hopes for imminent redemption subsided.

VII

In the aftermath of the Sabbatean apostasy, messianic expectations began to focus on the next likely date for the redemption: The year 1740, or 5500 on the Jewish calendar.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the crisis occasioned by the appearance and downfall of a false messiah did not detract from the force of the next awakening. Though they were approaching the five hundredth year of the sixth millennium without the footsteps of the Messiah being heard, the spirits of those Jews who longed for redemption remained unbroken. Now their hopes were pinned on a theory of messianic history that had emerged in the early eighteenth century, according to which the sixth millennium was to be divided into halves. The first five hundred years, from 1240 to 1740, was the period of

“night,” symbolizing the darkness of exile; the second half-millennium, beginning with 1740, would be the period of “day,” during which the redemption would occur.¹⁰⁵

One of the most influential advocates of this view was the Italian kabalist R. Immanuel Hai Ricchi, better known as the author of *Mishnat Hasidim*, who in the eighteenth century was considered the most authoritative interpreter of Luria’s kabalistic works. Rather than pointing to one specific year as the time for redemption, Ricchi spread his estimate over forty years, from 1740 (5500) until the middle of 1781 (5541), a prediction which became widely accepted among Eastern European Jewry.¹⁰⁶ The acceptance of this understanding of the coming of the messianic period may have had something to do with the events in Eastern Europe during the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1768, Jews in the Ukraine suffered persecutions; in the years 1768-1774, Russia fought and won a war with the Ottoman Empire; and in 1772 Poland was partitioned. In the eyes of many Jews, these events had eschatological significance and were interpreted as signs of the Messiah’s approach onto the stage of world history.

Recently discovered historical sources from the period indicate that the messianic expectations that preceded the year 1740 sparked a mass immigration to Palestine lasting many years. These immigrants, whose numbers reached several thousand within a decade, arrived in Palestine from all over the diaspora, and particularly from within the Ottoman Empire and Italy. They settled mostly in Tiberias and Jerusalem, two cities that the talmudic tradition had singled out for a central role in the redemption.

The year 1740 indeed brought good news to the Jewish settlement in Tiberias. At that time, the Ottoman authorities invited the renowned kabalist R. Haim Abulafia, the rabbi of Izmir, to come to Palestine and rebuild Tiberias, which had lain desolate for some time. The Ottoman authorities wanted the city rebuilt for economic reasons, but the Jews considered Abulafia’s mission a sign of the approaching fulfillment of

their messianic hopes. Abulafia personally encouraged these hopes, according to the rare testimony of an Arab of Tiberias, who reports that Abulafia “told the Jews who lived there that the Messiah would soon come.”¹⁰⁷

At the same time, the Jews of Jerusalem also enjoyed a resurgence. The Jewish immigrants significantly boosted their numbers, prompting complaints from their neighbors: “[The Muslims] stood like a wall when they saw that [the Jews] were a great host, and that they added dwelling places in the courtyards of Jerusalem, and they took counsel together, saying, ‘Behold the people of the children of Israel are too numerous to count, and there are ten thousand Jewish men.’”¹⁰⁸ Sources indicate that the stream of immigrants arriving in the city during this period increased the demand for housing and drove up food prices dramatically. The impressive growth of the community was also reflected in its spiritual and educational needs: Within a short time, eight new yeshivot were founded; synagogues were repaired and expanded, and new ones were built.¹⁰⁹

Among the immigrants during this period were several spiritual leaders of the first rank. Particularly notable were R. Moses Haim Luzzatto, renowned author of *Mesilat Yesharim*; the kabalist R. Haim ben Atar, author of *Or Hahayim*, one of the central mystical texts in Jewish tradition;¹¹⁰ R. Elazar Rokeah, chief rabbi of Brody and Amsterdam; R. Gershon of Kutow; as well as R. Gedaliah Hayun and R. Shalom Sharabi (known as Rashash), who served as heads of the Kabala-oriented Beth-El Yeshiva in Jerusalem. A Hasidic tradition, which until recently could not be documented, refers to attempts by the founder of Hasidism, R. Israel Ba’al Shem Tov, to move to Palestine at this time. According to this tradition, the Ba’al Shem Tov sought to meet with R. Haim ben Atar in the land of Israel, so that together they might bring about the redemption through a joint mystical effort. Evidence recently uncovered by Adam Teller confirms this tradition: It seems that during a visit he paid in 1733 to a wealthy Jewish family in Slutsk, the Ba’al Shem Tov asked for financial support for his intended move to the Holy Land.¹¹¹

And indeed, a number of the Ba'al Shem Tov's closest friends and disciples in fact undertook the move between the years 1740-1781. The largest group of these Hasidic immigrants, numbering about three hundred and led by R. Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk (a disciple of R. Dov Baer of Mezrich, the "Magid of Mezrich"), arrived in Palestine in 1777, four years before the end of the messianic period outlined by R. Immanuel Hai Ricchi. Opinions are divided regarding the motivation for the *aliya* of the disciples of the Ba'al Shem Tov—which included a significant number of simple Jews who attached themselves to the group during the course of their travels. Some scholars have suggested that perhaps it was the hostility of the Mitnagdim in Lithuania which compelled them to flee; others have claimed that the Hasidim wanted to achieve sanctification and mystical elevation, or to set up a new center for the Hasidic movement in Israel.¹¹² However, from a contemporary source which I recently discovered in an archive in St. Petersburg, we may be able to conclude that this great Hasidic *aliya* was endowed with a messianic purpose. This source quotes a Karaite who had spoken with the immigrants shortly before their arrival:

May it be remembered by the later generations what happened in the year 5537 [1777], how a rumor came about that the Messiah son of David had come. Then the rabbis living abroad began to go up to the city of Jerusalem, may it speedily be rebuilt.... And the reason they believed that the Messiah son of David had come was that at that time the evil nation of Moscow [Russia], that bitter people, a people whose language has not been heard, stretched its hand over the entire world, so that there was no place left that was not caught in war. And they thought that this was the time of the end of days, as promised by the prophets.¹¹³

This testimony helps to confirm Benzion Dinur's speculation that the movement of the Ba'al Shem Tov's disciples was of a messianic nature; it reveals that at the beginning of Hasidism, a significant portion of its

leadership wished to bring the redemption closer by moving to the land of Israel.

But it was not only Hasidim who undertook messianic *aliyot* at this time. R. Elijah of Vilna, the “Vilna Gaon,” also set off for Palestine, but his attempt did not succeed, and upon arriving in Holland he was forced to turn back.¹¹⁴ From his son’s writings we learn that the Gaon had intended to compose in the land of Israel a “new *Shulhan Aruch*”:

Two things I heard from his holy and pure mouth, to which his Creator did not consent, and which he did not do. Towards his old age I asked him many times why he did not complete his journey to the Holy Land, and he did not answer me.... And he also promised me that he would make [a collection of] halachic rulings from the *Arba’a Turim* [upon which Karo’s *Shulhan Aruch* was based], using decisive reasoning to write the one opinion that was correct in his wise eyes, with strong and powerful proofs that could not be rejected.¹¹⁵

The Gaon’s desire to compose a standard, unifying halachic code in the land of Israel was an echo of R. Joseph Karo’s immensely influential halachic efforts more than two hundred years earlier—efforts that had clear messianic overtones: A grand unification of Jewish law was widely seen as a first step in the reestablishment of the Sanhedrin, and therefore could serve as a catalyst in the redemptive process.

For a number of reasons, Jewish messianic activity in Palestine declined towards the end of the eighteenth century. The economic restrictions the Ottoman authorities and the local Muslim establishment imposed upon the Jews in Jerusalem, violent persecutions by the local Arab population, and bitter controversies within the Jewish leadership led to a severe deterioration of Jewish life in the land of Israel. A significant number of Jews left Palestine; those who remained suffered harsh poverty. Nevertheless, the Jewish community continued to hold together, enjoying a rich spiritual life alongside its economic hardship. The Tora was studied by

some three thousand Jews who continued to live in Jerusalem; the rabbis preached on Sabbaths and festivals and wrote halachic responsa. The presses of Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire published the output of this intellectual center—dozens of books of commentary, homiletics, halacha, and Kabala. The Jewish community in Palestine maintained contact with the communities of the diaspora, which provided them, whenever possible, with economic and diplomatic support. As the eighteenth century drew to a close, Jewish life in Palestine, fueled largely by a messianic devotion to the land of Israel that was shared not only by the members of the *yishuv* but also by their brethren abroad, continued despite difficult conditions, laying the groundwork for the great influx of Jewish immigrants that was soon to come.

VIII

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a great many Jews took part in the movement known as the Haskala, or Jewish Enlightenment. Among the movement's goals was to enable the Jews to assimilate into European society and culture, which necessarily would mean abandoning their traditional expectations of imminent national and political redemption in the Holy Land. But despite the efforts of the *maskilim*, a large portion of the Jewish world continued to believe in the centrality of the land of Israel.¹¹⁶ In the years leading up to 1840 (5600), messianic fervor again spread throughout traditional Jewry in the West and East and inspired a mass movement of *aliya*. In strictly numerical terms, this movement was more successful than all those which had preceded it: Over the ensuing decades, tens of thousands of Jews arrived in Palestine, radically changing the demography of the Jewish community there; by the time the first of the Zionist immigrants began arriving towards the end of the

nineteenth century, the land of Israel was already host to its largest and most vibrant Jewish community in many centuries.

The textual source behind much of the messianic ferment in the nineteenth century was R. Dosa's prediction in the Talmud, according to which the messianic age would begin in the last four hundred years of the sixth millennium—that is, starting around 1840.¹¹⁷ A statement in the *Zohar* lent support to this belief:

When the sixth millennium comes, in the six hundredth year of the sixth millennium, the gates of wisdom shall be opened above, and founts of wisdom below.... And the Holy One shall raise up the congregation of Israel from the dust of exile, and remember it.¹¹⁸

A great many sources of the early nineteenth century cite the *Zohar's* prediction. Thus, R. Yaakov Tzvi Yalish of Dinov writes: "In the *Zohar* there are several different times suggested for the end of days, and the last of them is the year six hundred of the sixth millennium, and it seems that later than this it will not tarry. Thus we find that when 5,600 years have been completed, everything will be clarified, and our righteous Messiah will come."¹¹⁹

Until recently, historians did not attribute real importance to these mystical texts, and saw no connection between them and the awakening of widespread messianic activism. Sources uncovered in recent years have revised these evaluations, demonstrating that faith in the Messiah's coming in 1840 was responsible for the *aliya* of thousands of people. Thousands of letters in the archive of the Officers and Administrators of Amsterdam, from officials who maintained close contact with the leadership of the Jewish community in Palestine, provide ample evidence of the messianic sentiment that prevailed. In one letter, dated 1831, R. Tzvi Hirsch Lehren, head of that organization, writes:

But the simple and imminent salvation for which we have longed is the coming of our Messiah, and we shall express our hope to the Holy One

that salvation is not far off. Many pious people have said that it will be no later than the year 5600, may it come upon us for the good.¹²⁰

Diaries of the Anglican missionaries who were active among the Jews in Palestine and throughout the world during that time also mention this sentiment. Missionary reports from Russia in 1812 state that between 1809 and 1811, hundreds of Jewish families immigrated to Palestine. When asked the purpose of their journey, these Jews replied that they “hope that the words of the prophets will soon be realized, that God will gather his dispersed people from all corners of the earth.... [They] therefore wish to see the appearance of the Messiah in the land of Israel.”¹²¹

Among the *olim* of this period, the disciples of the Vilna Gaon particularly stand out. Together with their families, they numbered about five hundred souls; but their organization, their ideological motivation, and their standing as Tora scholars of the first rank lent them a degree of influence far beyond their numbers. This group adopted an ideology of “natural redemption” that translated the messianic faith into practical activity. In this spirit, the Gaon’s disciples sought to advance the redemption by rebuilding Jerusalem. Their involvement in rebuilding the ruins of the “Court of the Ashkenazim,” a complex of buildings where the Ashkenazi community lived, worked, and studied, was to them a realization of the call to build the “earthly Jerusalem”—a condition for the redemption. In 1820, R. Menahem Mendel of Shklov, a disciple of the Gaon, wrote from Jerusalem to donors in Europe, describing the building of the courtyard as the beginning of redemption:

And you should understand fully that the lowly situation of our group in general, and regarding the ruin in particular, which we needed to... redeem from the hands of cruel foreigners.... And we rely upon responsive people like yourselves, who pursue righteousness... to greet our words with rejoicing, for, thank God, in our day we are witnessing the beginning of the redemption....¹²²

The documents of the Gaon's disciples echo this same sentiment some twenty years later, when the group finally received the long-awaited permission to rebuild the ruin: "And now our horn is raised up to the Eternal our God, to honor and establish our Temple, and to build synagogues on the holy mountain of Jerusalem.... This is a good sign of the beginning of redemption...."¹²³ Once they had received permission to build, the Gaon's disciples initiated changes in the Jerusalemite order of prayer, including the removal of the verse "Arise, shake off the dust, arise" from the Friday night liturgical poem *Lecha Dodi*—since, in their mind, the divine Presence had already risen from the dust.¹²⁴

Some members of this group sought to further the redemption by reinstating the Sanhedrin, and the institution of *semicha* upon which it depended. To this end, they were forced to contend with the halachic problems that had led to the failure of the previous attempt, hundreds of years earlier in Safed. In particular, they had to deal with Maimonides' ruling that once the chain of ordination had been broken, its renewal required the agreement of all the sages in the land of Israel. To circumvent this objection, R. Israel of Shklov, the leader of the Gaon's disciples in Safed, sent an emissary to the deserts of Yemen in order to locate the ten lost tribes; according to tradition, the tribes still preserved the institution of *semicha*, and might be enlisted to renew the ancient ordination for the Jewish world. In a letter carried by the envoy, R. Israel wrote to the ten tribes as follows: "It is a well-known principle... that before our righteous Messiah may come, there needs to be a great court of ordained judges.... In your mercy for all of the people of the Eternal, please choose several of your ordained sages, and please come to the land of Israel, the inheritance of our fathers, and let them ordain the great scholars so that there may be an ordained court in the land of Israel, upon which the beginning of the redemption depends."¹²⁵

The disciples of the Gaon also purchased agricultural lands in order to carry out those commandments of the Tora that were applicable only in the land of Israel. They believed that the flourishing of the harvest would

serve as proof of God's renewed love for his people, as per a well-known talmudic interpretation of a verse in Ezekiel: "But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to my people Israel—there is no better sign of the End than this."¹²⁶ R. Haim ben Tuvia Katz, who had been a leading rabbi in Vilna, gave voice to this belief in 1810, when he wrote from Safed: "Regarding the matter of the contributions that were sent for the fulfillment of the commandments dependent upon the land, we have already purchased lands in accordance with the view of my dear friend, the true great and pious one, our teacher R. Haim of Volozhin... and it seems that we shall yet buy lands that shall become available according to the time and place...."¹²⁷ The immense significance that the Jews in Palestine attributed to agriculture also emerges from a letter sent by the leaders of the community in Jerusalem—both Sephardim and Ashkenazim—to the philanthropist Moses Montefiore in 1839, when they learned of his intention to purchase lands for rural Jewish settlement:

And his mercies were aroused and his pure heart offered to establish pillars and stands... by giving them a hold in the holy soil, the soil of Israel, to plow and sow and reap in joy.... And all of us take this thing upon ourselves with love.... We await and anticipate the divine salvation through Moses, the faithful one of his house, to say when he shall begin this beginning of the redemption.¹²⁸

In 1836, R. Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer proposed an even more far-reaching project to Baron Anshel Rothschild: The latter would purchase the Temple Mount from the Egyptian ruler Muhammed Ali, in order to renew the sacrificial service. In a letter to the baron, Kalischer writes:

And particularly at a time like this, when the province of the land of Israel is not under the rule of a powerful regime as it was in former times... he may well sell you the city of Jerusalem and its surroundings.

From this too there will spring forth a horn of salvation, if we have the power and authority to seek the place of the altar and to offer acceptable burnt offerings to the God of Eternity, and from this may Judah be delivered in an eternal deliverance.¹²⁹

Kalischer's idea was explicitly messianic; like R. Yehiel of Paris six centuries earlier, he planned, by the renewal of sacrifices at the Temple Mount, to quicken the redemption and to hasten the coming of the Messiah.¹³⁰

The messianic expectations of the Jews of Palestine were sorely tested, however, by the tragic events that they faced in the years leading up to 1840. The plagues that raged throughout the region, the earthquake of 1837 that killed more than two thousand Jews in the Galilee, and particularly the systematic attacks by the Muslim authorities and the local Arab population, threatened to make Jewish existence there intolerable. Anti-Jewish violence reached its height during the rebellion of the Arab farm workers that broke out in 1834 against the rule of Muhammed Ali. In the course of these riots, the rebels also attacked the Jews living in major cities. Over a period of several weeks, they rampaged against the Jews of Safed, looting their property, destroying their homes, desecrating their synagogues and study houses, and raping, beating, and in many cases killing Jews. R. Shmuel Heller of Safed reported:

For forty days, day after day, from the Sunday following Shavuot, all of the people of our holy city, men, women, and children, have been like refuse upon the field. Hungry, thirsty, naked, barefoot, wandering to and fro in fear and confusion like lambs led to the slaughter.... They [the Arab marauders] removed all the Tora scrolls and thrust them contemptuously to the ground, and they ravished the daughters of Israel—woe to the ears that hear it—and the great study house they burned to its foundations.... And the entire city was destroyed and laid ruin, they did not leave a single wall whole; they dug and sought treasures, and the city stood ruined and desolate without a single person....¹³¹

These events took a heavy toll in lives on the Jews in Palestine, causing many to leave. But in spite of it all, most Jews did not leave Palestine. Those who stayed enjoyed the protection and active support of Jewish groups and institutions throughout the world, as well as the aid of such philanthropists as Moses Montefiore and the Rothschild family; and, especially, the protection of the representatives of European powers, including the consuls in the coastal cities of Syria, Egypt, and Palestine, who protected the Jewish settlement and demanded compensation from the authorities for the damage caused by the 1834 riots. In many ways, Jews in the land of Israel were less vulnerable than in earlier periods.

Even the failure of the Messiah to appear in 1840 had only a minor impact on the lot of the Jewish community in Palestine, though it was accompanied by a period of crisis and a brief decline in the spirit of the Jews living there. Most importantly, the flow of Jewish immigrants did not stop, as the successes of the messianic *aliya* of the first half of the nineteenth century laid the groundwork for a large wave of Jewish immigrants in the following decades, most of whom came due to other, non-messianic motives: Most were pious, traditional Jews who sought refuge from the influences of the Haskala, the Emancipation, and the Reform movement, which at that time were spreading throughout Europe. As a result of this continuing wave of immigration, the number of Jews in Palestine increased dramatically: By the 1870s, the Jewish population in Jerusalem was already greater than that of the Muslims and Christians combined. For the first time since the destruction of the Temple, Jews formed a majority in the city.¹³²

And indeed, from a broader perspective, the Jewish community in Palestine advanced a great deal during the course of the nineteenth century. If early in the century the number of Jews there stood at a few thousand and their situation was anything but stable, by the second half of the century tens of thousands of Jews lived in Jerusalem alone, and they enjoyed the political and economic protection of representatives of

the great powers, as well as support from Jewish communities in the diaspora. These developments allowed the continuation of settlement in distinctly agricultural areas as well, and facilitated the immigrations of tens of thousands of additional Jews during the 1880s—the “First Aliya,” which opened an entirely new chapter in the history of Jewish settlement in the land of Israel.

IX

U ntil the appearance of Zionism, it is difficult to find more conclusive evidence for a deep, abiding historical connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel than the messianic *aliyot* of the sixth millennium. Over a period lasting more than six centuries, the traditional longing of the Jews for their homeland found concrete expression in repeated efforts to realize the dream of return. From the practical viewpoint, these messianic waves of immigration, which began early in the thirteenth century, represented a quantum leap in scope and energy above the efforts of individuals and groups who had gone to Palestine previously. First, they were more communal in nature, numbering hundreds and at times even thousands. Second, the *aliyot* drew on Jewish communities from different countries, rather than the more localized efforts that had characterized earlier pilgrimages. Third, they comprised Jews of all classes: Alongside the common folk, they included communal leaders and Tora scholars of the first magnitude. One can only imagine the effect that the relocation of such central figures in the Jewish world to the land of Israel had on the diaspora communities they left behind. Even if the majority of Jews did not dare to make the journey, there can be no doubt that the departure of so many of their luminaries to the Holy Land, and in a context of messianic hope, left a profound impression.

Fourth, the messianic *aliyot* of the sixth millennium were characterized by a spiritual and ethical vigor the likes of which had not been seen before. The new immigrants were called upon to repent, to develop their character, and to act according to a strict moral code. In some of these movements, the demand for character improvement attended the mystical activity of kabalists or other individuals who took it upon themselves to catalyze the messianic redemption. Among the concrete projects for hastening the redemption, one finds attempts to find the ten lost tribes, to renew the ancient rabbinic ordination (*semicha*) and the institution of the Sanhedrin, to summarize the halacha so that a uniform code would be accepted by all of Israel, to uncover the “secrets of Tora” and hidden kabalistic writings, and even to renew the sacrificial service of the Temple in Jerusalem.

The activism of the messianic immigrant movements also demonstrates that long before the advent of modern Zionism, Jews did not limit themselves to spiritual yearning and symbolic remembrance of the land of Israel. Inspired by messianic anticipation, many Jews regarded a return to the Promised Land as a practical goal. True, the overwhelming majority of Jews did not go to Palestine. Considering the numerous hardships entailed by such a journey, the uncertainty of arriving in peace, finding a livelihood, and dwelling securely in the land, this is hardly surprising. Nonetheless, during the sixth millennium, the land of Israel was no longer an abstract, inaccessible ideal; no longer only a subject of dreams, whose name was mentioned mainly in prayers. It was a real place, absorbing waves of Jewish immigrants from many countries, sustaining a full-fledged Jewish community that preserved its unique identity throughout the generations.

Of course, there were major, substantive differences between the messianic *aliyot* and the Zionist awakening which followed. The nationalist ideology which revived the Jewish people in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries was indeed modern in many ways, not the least of

which was its rejection of the traditionalist worldview that had characterized the messianic movements. Nevertheless, the deep longing for their ancestral homeland and the profound faith in the possibility of national redemption, which ultimately drove the waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine in the sixth millennium, were also at the heart of the Zionist return. The widespread belief in the Jewish right to the land of Israel, the Zionist vision of the spiritual and physical redemption of the land, and the immense efforts of so many Jews to turn the dream into reality, could never have taken root without these prior beliefs. In this sense at least, one may see the period of messianic immigration to the land of Israel and the Zionist revolution as milestones on the same historical path, different chapters in an ongoing national story.

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Notes

1. Benzion Dinur, "The Messianic Fermentation and Immigration to the Land of Israel from the Crusades until the Black Death, and Their Ideological Roots," in Benzion Dinur, *Historical Writings* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1975), vol. ii, p. 238. [Hebrew]

2. Jacob Barnai, *Historiography and Nationalism: Trends in the Research of Palestine and Its Jewish Population, 634-1881* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995), p. 39. [Hebrew]

3. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Nationalist Portrayal of the Exile, Zionist Historiography, and Medieval Jewry*, doctoral dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 1996, p. 331. [Hebrew]

4. Elhanan Reiner, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage to the Land of Israel, 1099-1517*, doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1988. [Hebrew]

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5. Raz-Krakotzkin, *Nationalist Portrayal*, pp. 333-334.
6. See David N. Myers, *Reinventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (New York: Oxford, 1995); Uri Ram, "Zionist Historiography and the Invention of Modern Jewish Nationhood: The Case of Benzion Dinur," *History and Memory* 7:1 (1995), pp. 91-124. For a critique of Dinur that does not tend towards a critique of Zionism as a whole, see Jacob Katz, *Jewish Nationalism: Essays and Studies* (Jerusalem: Zionist Library, 1979), pp. 230-238. [Hebrew]
7. Psalms 90:4.
8. "It was taught in the school of Eliyahu: The world will exist for six thousand years: Two thousand years of chaos; two thousand years of Tora; two thousand years of the age of the Messiah." Sanhedrin 97a.
9. The destruction of the Temple took place around the year 68 C.E., which was close to the end of the fourth millennium of Creation, in the year 3828.
10. See Joseph Dan, *Apocalypse Then and Now* (Tel Aviv: Yedi'ot Aharonot, 2000), pp. 49-68. [Hebrew]
11. The Jewish year begins in the fall; therefore every Jewish year overlaps two years of the Christian calendar, and vice versa. For simplicity's sake, however, Christian years in this article are identified with the Jewish year with which they overlap for nine out of twelve months, that is, from January through September.
12. Isaiah 60:22.
13. Reference is made in the book of Daniel to three enigmatic dates for the end of days, which are not conditional upon repentance. Even Daniel himself, according to his own words, did not understand what they were. The three periods are expressed in obscure language: "Time, times, and half a time," "1,090 days," and "1,335 days." Daniel 12:1-13. The assumption throughout is that the end of days will come at a fixed time, without room for human influence.
14. Sanhedrin 97a. We will not enter here into the details of the debate cited in the Talmud, but it is worth noting that according to the rabbis, when the patriarch Jacob wished to reveal to his sons the time of the end of days, this referred to the end that would come about "in its time."
15. Sanhedrin 97a. This approach also appears in *Zohar*, Bereshit 117.
16. Sanhedrin 97a.
17. *Genesis Rabbati*, a midrashic collection compiled at the beginning of the sixth century, states: "The entire subjugation is during the fifth millennium, and

during its course, morning will come for Israel, when they shall be redeemed.” Hanoch Albeck, ed., *Genesis Rabbati* (Jerusalem: Mekitzei Nirdamim, 1940), p. 16. [Hebrew] R. Judah Barceloni likewise states that “we are to be speedily redeemed at the end of the fifth millennium; thus has it been conveyed at all times to Israel.” See his commentary in J.Z. Halberstamm, ed., *Sefer Yetzira* (Berlin, 1895), p. 239. [Hebrew] Among the earlier practitioners of messianic calculations, some placed the time of the redemption well before the sixth millennium; they argued that since the destruction of the land and of the Temple occurred in the year 3828 [68 C.E.], the current era would end one thousand years later, in 4828 [1068 C.E.], at which time the age of redemption would commence. But generally speaking, practitioners of messianic calculation identified the sixth millennium as the time of the redemption.

18. The source of these prohibitions is found in the Song of Songs, where the formula “I adjure you, O maidens of Jerusalem...” is repeated with minor variations. Cf. Ketubot 111a.

19. Psalms 102:14-15.

20. Judah Halevi, *The Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel*, trans. Hartwig Hirschfeld (New York: Schocken, 1964), 5:27, p. 295.

21. The book of Daniel posits the dates for the end of days in relation to some unidentified starting point. In every generation there were attempts to decipher the apocalyptic dates with reference to various events in Jewish history, such as the Exodus, the entrance into the land of Israel, the building of the First and Second Temples, and the Babylonian exile.

22. Maimonides, *Epistles of Maimonides*, ed. Yitzhak Shilat (Jerusalem: Ma’aliyot, 1987), vol. i, p. 153. [Hebrew] *The Epistle to Yemen* was composed about 1172.

23. Arie Morgenstern, *Mysticism and Messianism* (Jerusalem: Ma’or, 1999), p. 305. [Hebrew]

24. Avraham Ya’ari, *Travels in the Land of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Gazit, 1946), p. 67. [Hebrew]

25. Aaron Ze’ev Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1988), p. 188. [Hebrew]

26. Yisrael Yuval, “Between Political Messianism and Utopian Messianism in the Middle Ages,” in S.N. Eisenstadt and M. Lissak, eds., *Zionism and the Return to History* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1999), p. 84 n. 10. [Hebrew]

27. Yuval, “Political Messianism,” pp. 85-86. A short passage from this manuscript is quoted in another anonymous travel journal of around the same time, *Totza’ot Eretz Yisrael*. See Ya’ari, *Travels*, p. 98.

28. Regarding the expectations of redemption, see Maimonides' calculation for the renewal of prophecy in 1212, mentioned above. On the reaction to the Crusades, see Yuval, "Political Messianism," p. 87.

29. Parallel to the messianic activism that found expression in the "aliya of the three hundred rabbis," the opposite tendency, a lowering of the profile of messianic expectations, could also be found among the Jews of Central Europe. Unlike the Jews of France, the latter were worried about the possibility of a Christian backlash to any Jewish messianic ferment, and tended to be resistant towards any activity aimed at bringing the redemption closer. The spiritual leaders of this community focused their efforts on mass repentance, and refrained from expressing their messianic hopes. Concerns about persecution were exacerbated by the Mongol invasion that was menacing Europe at the time. Christians identified the Mongols with the ten tribes, and subjected the Jews to reprisals as "partners" of the invaders. R. Moses of Coucy, author of *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*, conducted a campaign for repentance in 1236, four years before the decisive Hebrew date of 5000. According to him, Jews were to refrain from any efforts of a political nature to hasten the coming of the Messiah. The only activity capable of bringing the redemption in his view was mass repentance. Yuval, "Political Messianism," p. 87.

30. Estori Hafarhi, *Kaftor Vaferah* (Berlin: Julii Sittenfeld, 1852), p. 15. See Reiner, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage*, p. 79; and cf. Yisrael Ta-Shema, "Land of Israel Studies," *Shalem* 1 (1974), pp. 82-84. [Hebrew]; Arie Morgenstern, *Redemption through Return: The Vilna Gaon's Disciples in the Land of Israel* (Jerusalem: Ma'or, 1997), pp. 182-185. [Hebrew]

31. Avraham Grossman, "A Letter of Vision and Rebuke from Fourteenth-Century Ashkenaz," *Katedra* 4 (1977), pp. 190-195.

32. And indeed, a series of messianic calculations from around the year 1440 deals with the different stages of the anticipated redemption: The beginning of the ingathering of exiles, the discovery of the ten lost tribes, the return of prophecy, the restoration of the Sanhedrin, the appearance of the Messiah, and the building of the Temple. The calculations closest to the year 1440 are based on astrological calculations of the "system of the stars," and are directed towards the years 1444 (5204 in the Hebrew calendar) and 1464 (5224), and towards the year equal to the numerical value of the Hebrew word for "the end" (*haketz*), which came out to 5190 on the Hebrew calendar, or 1430 C.E. Earlier calculations from this period were based on similar methods of *notarikon* and *gematria*. One of them, drawing on the verse in Habakkuk 2:3, "for still the vision awaits its time," was understood as referring to the year 1391 (5151). See Joseph Hacker, "The *Aliyot* and Attitudes Towards the Land of Israel Among Spanish Jews, 1391-1492," *Katedra* 36 (1985), p. 22 n. 83.

33. About 1400, Mulhausen stated: "And many among the multitude agree that the coming of the Messiah and the building of the Temple will be no later than the year 170 of the sixth millennium [1410]." See Yom-Tov Lipmann Mulhausen, *Sefer Hanitzahon* (Jerusalem: Dinur, 1984), par. 335, p. 187.

34. Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, p. 223.

35. I.F. Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1965), p. 320. [Hebrew] Based upon Crescas' *Or Hashem*, part iii, 8:2.

36. Avraham Gross, "The Ten Tribes and the Kingdom of Prester John: Rumors and Investigations Before and After the Expulsion from Spain," *Pe'amim* 48 (1991), pp. 5-38.

37. The primary source is the Darmstadt manuscript. See Yisrael Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2000), p. 276 n. 27. [Hebrew] By contrast, the manuscript copied in 1429 was the Rome manuscript, cited by Reiner, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage*, p. 115 n. 232. My thanks to Yisrael Yuval, who allowed me to compare the manuscript in his possession with the Rome manuscript and to discover that the section beginning "And now many people have awakened..." appears only in the latter.

38. Reiner, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage*, pp. 114-115 n. 232.

39. Baer, *History of the Jews*, pp. 318-319.

40. Binyamin Ze'ev Kedar, "Notes on the History of the Jews of Palestine in the Middle Ages," *Tarbitz* 42 (1973), pp. 413-416. Kedar ignores the connection between the messianic expectations expressed here and the *aliyot* originating in various countries. As a result, he does not see in messianism a motivation for *aliya*, and can only wonder why the latter took place at all, just when the situation of the Jews in Spain was improving, while the situation in Palestine had worsened.

41. Benzion Dinur, "The Emigration from Spain to the Land of Israel After the Decree of 1391," *Tzion* 32 (1967), p. 162.

42. Dinur, "Emigration," p. 163.

43. According to one testimony of the time, "And now, of late, people have come, great sages and elders together with their disciples... and have continued to settle and to increase the study of Tora far more." Quoted in Hacker, "*Aliyot* and Attitudes," p. 28 n. 107.

44. Joseph Hacker, "R. Elijah of Massa Lombarda in Jerusalem," *Tzion* 50 (1985), pp. 253-256.

45. Moshe Schulwas quotes historical sources indicating that the inhabitants of Malta captured Jews who were on their way to Palestine. See Moshe

Schulwas, "On the Immigration of German Jews to Palestine in the Fifteenth Century," *Tzion* 3 (1938), pp. 86-87.

46. Elhanan Reiner, "'For Do Not Jerusalem and Zion Stand Apart?': The Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem in the Post-Crusade Period (Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries)," in Yossi Ben-Artzi, Israel Bartal, and Elhanan Reiner, eds., *A View of His Homeland: Studies in Geography and History in Honor of Yehoshua Ben-Aryeh* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000), pp. 314-315. [Hebrew] The discovery that the Jewish settlement in the center of the Old City dates only from the beginning of the fifteenth century is consistent with Reiner's conclusion that the Nahmanides Synagogue was near Mount Zion, where the Jewish neighborhood was located after the Crusader period, and not as the folk tradition has it, near the Court of the Ashkenazim. See Reiner, "The Jewish Quarter," pp. 277-279.

47. Reiner, "The Jewish Quarter," p. 306 n. 106. Around 1452, the Jews of Jerusalem were compelled to give money to the rulers of the city, and the community was forced to sell much of its land. Three hundred Tora scrolls, ancient books, and precious ritual objects that had been brought to the country by the immigrants around the year 1440 were also sold. These findings suggest an *aliya* of wealthy people during this period. See Avraham Ya'ari, ed., *Letters from the Land of Israel* (Ramat Gan: Masada, 1971), pp. 129-130. [Hebrew]

48. Hacker, "Aliyot and Attitudes," p. 12.

49. Hacker, "Aliyot and Attitudes," p. 32.

50. Michael Ish Shalom, *In the Shadow of Foreign Rule: The History of the Jews in the Land of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Karni, 1975), p. 312. [Hebrew]

51. Isaiah 43:6.

52. Abravanel's commentary on Isaiah 43:6.

53. Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, p. 331. R. Abraham ben Eliezer Halevi wrote several works of a messianic character and engaged in messianic calculations concerning the Jewish year 5300. According to Moshe Idel, there is no connection between his messianic calculations and the expulsion from Spain, as his interest in the problem of the end of days had already begun in his youth, that is, before the expulsion. Moshe Idel, introduction to Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, pp. 24-26. Messianic calculations thus were not prompted by historical events alone; these events only heightened the mystics' faith in an imminent redemption.

54. Idel, introduction, pp. 24-34.

55. Moshe Idel, "Solomon Molcho as Magician," *Sefunot* 18 (1985), p. 215.

56. Moshe Idel, introduction to Aaron Ze'ev Aescoly, *The Story of David Hareuweni* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1993), p. 33. [Hebrew]

57. According to R. Abraham Halevi, “The things said in the midrash of the *Zohar* about the great troubles and destruction that will herald the time of the Messiah are very frightening.... Only repentance annuls everything. And in regard to the instructions about the year of visitation, which is the year 5284 [1524], it is fitting that every man take to heart the great wonder that was done in Jerusalem.... For when, gentlemen, the sages gathered together and set vigils... to plead for mercy for themselves and their brethren in the exile... when they said, ‘And a redeemer shall come to Zion’—at that moment fire descended from heaven upon the abomination in Jerusalem, and made it into a great ruin, and this was a sign and symbol of the redemption.” See Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, p. 329.

58. Ya’ari, *Letters*, p. 165.

59. Ya’ari, *Letters*, p. 165. To emphasize that God acts in order to hasten the redemption, the authors open with a literary allusion to a passage in the book of Esther that they consider an instance of divine intervention for the sake of the Jews: “On that night the sleep of the king was disturbed” (Esther 6:1; according to rabbinic interpretation, the “king” referred to is God).

60. Dov Rabin, “The History of the Jews in Grodno,” in *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora* (Jerusalem: Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora, 1977), vol. ix, p. 43. [Hebrew]

61. Ignacy Schipper, *Polish-Lithuanian Jews in Palestine* (Wieden: Moriah, 1917), p. 10. [Polish]

62. Tuvia Preschel, “R. Jacob Pollack’s *Aliya* to Jerusalem,” in Shaul Israeli, Norman Lamm, and Yitzhak Raphael, eds., *Jubilee Volume in Honor of Our Teacher Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1984), vol. ii, pp. 1124-1129. [Hebrew]

63. Thus, according to the *Zohar*: “In 66 the King Messiah will be revealed in the land of the Galilee.” *Zohar*, Vayera 478.

64. Many of the immigrants from Spain who came to Safed had been weavers and dyers. They saw Safed, located near water sources in the Galilee, as a suitable place to continue in their professions, as it was relatively close to their contacts in the Salonikan clothing trade and was safer than other places in Palestine, including Jerusalem. The Ottoman army protected the city from attacks by the surrounding Bedouin tribes, and in 1549 the authorities added to the city’s security by building a wall around it.

65. Ya’ari, *Letters*, p. 184.

66. Apart from R. Jacob Berab’s principal reasons for renewing the *semicha*, restoring the Sanhedrin was meant to solve a practical halachic problem that fell within the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin alone. The inhabitants of Safed included

a number of forced converts from Spain and Portugal, who wished to atone for their past as Conversos. This atonement could be accomplished only by administering the punishment of lashes, which the Sanhedrin alone could dispense.

67. R. Isaiah Horowitz, *Shnei Lubot Habrit* (Haifa: Mechon Yad Rama, 1992), vol. 2, pp. 250-251. [Hebrew] The verse cited is Song of Songs 2:12.

68. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, "R. Solomon Halevi Alkabetz's *Tikun Tefilot*," *Sefunot* 6 (1962), pp. 152-155.

69. They based their calculations mainly on a verse in the book of Daniel that alludes to the time of the end of days: "Fortunate is he who waits and reaches 1,335 days" (Daniel 12:11); and on the talmudic statement attributing messianic significance to the *notarikon* of Jacob's blessing to his sons: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and the homage of the peoples be his" (Genesis 49:10). According to the messianic calculations, these two sources point towards the 335th year of the sixth millennium—the numerical value of "Shiloh." On messianic expectations for the year 1575 (5335), see David Tamar, "The Messianic Expectations in Italy for the Year 1575," *Sefunot* 2 (1958), pp. 61-85.

70. According to the tradition, the order of redemption will parallel in reverse the order of exile. Hence, since on the eve of the destruction of the Temple the Sanhedrin was removed from its place there, and subsequently reconvened at various locations until it reached its final seat in Tiberias, the redemption is destined to begin in Tiberias. From there, it will progressively expand until it reaches Jerusalem and the Temple is rebuilt: "And we have a tradition that it shall first return in Tiberias, and from there they shall be relocated to the Temple." Maimonides, *Mishneh Tora*, Laws of Sanhedrin 14:12.

71. Tamar, "Messianic Expectations," pp. 63-65.

72. Mordechai Pachter, *From Safed's Hidden Treasures* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 1994), pp. 103-105. [Hebrew] Cf. Uriel Hed, "Turkish Documents from Ottoman Archives Concerning Safed Jews in the Sixteenth Century," *Mehkerei Eretz Yisrael* 2 (1955), pp. 169, 174-175.

73. Later sources repeat this prediction. Thus, for example, the kabbalist R. Naftali Bachrach, author of *Emek Hamelech*, stated that in 1647 Ishmael's rights over the land of Israel, which he had enjoyed for observing the commandment of circumcision, would come to an end. From this point on, the rights of the Jewish people would be acknowledged, and would be realized by the Messiah at the end of days: "And even today we await God, and he shall pour his spirit upon us from above... and the land of Israel will be taken from the Ishmaelites, as it is written, 'I will multiply him exceedingly... and I will make him a great nation,' which [referring to the word *asimenu*, 'I will make him'] is numerically equivalent to 407. That is, until that time of 'I will make him,' he [Ishmael] will

be a great nation. And he shall be paid for the merit of the commandment of circumcision... and in the year 5408 [1648], the Messiah will take the kingship from him.... And this is the secret of ‘This [*zot*] is my resting place forever’ [Psalms 132:14].” See Naftali Bachrach, *Emek Hamelech* (Amsterdam: Immanuel Benvenisti, 1648), p. 33b; and regarding the year 5408, see *ibid.*, pp. 68a, 79c.

74. The numerical value of the word “Heth” is 408.

75. The word for “this” is *hazot*, of which the numerical value is 5,408.

76. *Zohar*, Toldot 139. The passage is found in the earliest manuscript of the *Zohar*, from the fourteenth century. See Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah 1626-1676* (Princeton: Princeton, 1973), p. 88. The verses quoted in the above passage are Genesis 23:3 and Leviticus 25:13.

77. Horowitz, *Shnei Lubot Habrit*, 65, vol. 2, pp. 478-479.

78. Horowitz, *Shnei Lubot Habrit*, 261, vol. 1, p. 86. It is surprising that scholars of Horowitz have not at all noticed this source and do not attribute messianic significance to his *aliya*.

79. Horowitz, *Shnei Lubot Habrit*, 291, vol. 1, p. 97. It follows from this that Horowitz wrote these words when he was already living in Jerusalem.

80. Ya’ari, *Letters*, p. 216. We do not have exact figures for the Sephardi population of Jerusalem, but in his letter Horowitz mentions that in Jerusalem there were more than five hundred “important Sephardi householders, and every day their number grows, thank God.” If Horowitz is referring only to wealthy family heads, then one is speaking here of at least 2,000 members of the Sephardi elite, apart from the numerous poor people from this community who lived in Jerusalem. Regarding the Ashkenazi population, no figures exist. Ya’ari, *Letters*, p. 220.

81. Horowitz sent this letter to his wife’s relative, R. Shmuel ben Meshullam Feibusch, chief rabbi of the Krakow community. An important discussion of this letter was related at a lecture by the historian Avraham David at Bar-Ilan University on December 31, 2000; the lecture is soon to be published. My thanks to David for allowing me to use his article prior to publication. In this paper, David does not deal with the connection between messianic expectations for the year 5408 and Horowitz’s *aliya*.

82. Avraham David, “R. Isaiah Horowitz’s Letter from Jerusalem After the Year 5538,” unpublished. [Hebrew]

83. David, “Horowitz’s Letter.”

84. See David, “Horowitz’s Letter.” This section of the full letter was published in its day by Joseph Solomon Delmedigo of Candia in the introduction to his book *Novlot Hochma* (1631).

85. See R. Haim Vital, *Etz Hayim* (Jerusalem, 1973), introduction to *Sha'ar Hahakdamot*.

86. According to Jacob Elbaum and Elliot Wolfson, the main reason for Horowitz's *aliya* was his wish to study the teachings of Lurianic Kabala more deeply, without the limitations that were placed on its study outside of the land of Israel. See Jacob Elbaum, "The Land of Israel in Isaiah Horowitz's *Shnei Lubot Habrit*," in Aviezer Ravitzky, ed., *The Land of Israel in Modern Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi, 1998), p. 94; cf. Elliot R. Wolfson, "The Influence of Luria on the *Shelah*," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 10, 1992, p. 430. However, it seems that this activity too was directed towards a messianic purpose: The realization of the redemption in the year 5400, which Horowitz wished to ensure by uncovering Luria's writings.

87. The amount of money extracted from the Jews by the local rulers during the period of Ottoman rule was unparalleled in any other place of Jewish settlement during that period. R. Samuel de Ozida wrote: "What we have in our day is that of all the places under the rule of the king... there is no country in which there are so many taxes and levies on the Jews as in the land of Israel, and particularly Jerusalem. And if money were not being sent from all over the diaspora to pay off the taxes and levies, the Jews would be unable to live there because of the abundance of taxes." R. Samuel de Ozida, *Lehem Dim'a* (Venice: Daniel Zenitti, 1600), commentary on Lamentations 1:1.

88. Presumably, the rapid growth of the Jewish population in Jerusalem after 1620 upset the Muslims. Eventually they restricted the number of Jewish inhabitants in the city, and to this end even ordered the expulsion from Jerusalem of Jews who were already living there. "What the rulers demanded of the inhabitants of Jerusalem was that whoever had come to live there during the past three years should leave. And they again [later] said that whoever had come during the past ten years [should leave]." Eliezer Rivlin, ed., *The Ruins of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Salomon, 1928), p. 45. [Hebrew] According to the author of *The Ruins of Jerusalem*, the Muslims' fear of the return of the Jews to Jerusalem was one of the main reasons for the persecution and expulsion of the Jews of the city: "When a man rose against us who gathered together empty and impudent people... and they took counsel together to cut off the name of Israel from the holy city.... When they saw the ingathering of the exiles of our brethren from East and West, from North and South, going up to Jerusalem..." Rivlin, *Ruins*, p. 49.

89. Among other things, they denounced the Jews for violating the prohibition against building synagogues. In return for not razing the synagogues, the Muslims demanded ever higher "penalties" to be paid by the Jewish community. Rivlin, *Ruins*, p. 51.

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90. Rivlin, *Ruins*, p. 14.
91. See Michael Ish Shalom, *Christian Travels in the Holy Land* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1979), pp. 333, 341. [Hebrew]
92. Minna Rozen, ed., *The Ruins of Jerusalem* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1981), p. 87. [Hebrew] The quotations are a combination of verses of consolation from Jeremiah 32:15 and Zechariah 8:5.
93. Rozen, *Ruins*, pp. 81-82.
94. Rozen, *Ruins*, pp. 82-83.
95. Simon Bernfeld, *The Book of Tears* (Berlin: Eshkol, 1925), vol. iii, p. 140. [Hebrew] The verse cited is Leviticus 16:3.
96. Avraham Neubauer, *Seder Hahachamim Vekorot Hayamim* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1888), p. 149. On the expectations for the year 5400, see also Joseph Hacker, "Despair of the Redemption and Messianic Hopes in the Writings of R. Solomon Halevi of Salonika," *Tarbitz* 39 (1970), pp. 195-213.
97. The word for "thus" is *zot*; for "thorns," *dardar*. Both have a numerical value of 408, as does "Heth." The word for "this," *hazot*, can be readily understood as having a value of 5,408.
98. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, pp. 103-198.
99. Yehuda Liebes, "Sabbatean Messianism," *Pe'amim* 40 (1989), pp. 4-20.
100. Benzion Dinur attributed great importance to this *aliya*, because in his opinion it marked the beginning of the period of "realistic" *aliyot*, which constituted the basis for the new Jewish presence in the land of Israel. See Dinur, *Historical Writings*, vol. i, pp. 19-68.
101. Meir Benayahu, "The 'Holy Brotherhood' of R. Judah Hasid and Their Settlement in Jerusalem," *Sefunot* 3-4 (1959-1960), pp. 131-182.
102. In the wake of Shabtai Tzvi's conversion to Islam, some of his followers developed the idea that his apostasy was meant to elevate the "holy sparks" within Islam, as only the descent of the Messiah himself to the "shells" would be able to lift up the "sparks." After the Messiah had fulfilled this purpose he would be revealed again, forty years after his conversion; that is, in the year 1706.
103. The disciples of R. Elijah of Vilna, the "Vilna Gaon," who came up to Jerusalem a century later, refer in their writing in a very positive way to R. Judah Hasid, using extraordinary terms of honor. The disciples of the Gaon were aware of the fact that some of the immigrants during this period were Sabbateans. See "The Appointments of Emissaries from the Ashkenazic Community in Jerusalem

for the Building of the Hurvah from 1837,” in Pinhas Ben-Tzvi Grayevski, ed., *From the Archives of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Tzion, 1930), vol. 2. [Hebrew]

104. It may be that R. Judah’s circle of immigrants to Palestine had seen 5500 as the date of redemption from the outset, and not only retrospectively. Even such a confirmed Sabbatean as Gedaliah Hayun stated that: “You shall surely know that our rabbis said, ‘All the day he laments’—that the Exile was the entire fifth millennium. And when we come to the sixth millennium, the first five hundred years are called night... and the latter five hundred years are called day... and the redemption is the morning.” See Zalman Shazar, *The Messianic Hope for the Year 5500* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1970), p. 29 [Hebrew]; Shazar cites Nehemiah Hayun, *Divrei Nehemia* 9a. I will discuss this issue at greater length elsewhere, on the basis of new documents that I have uncovered in the archive of the community of Livorno, in Italy.

105. R. Haim ben Atar, *Or Hahayim*, commentary on Leviticus 6:2.

106. Immanuel Hai Ricchi writes concerning this: “According to the words of R. Shimon bar Yohai [the putative author of the *Zohar*], in 5541 and two-thirds, the mountain of the house of the Eternal will have been established.” See Immanuel Hai Ricchi, *Yosher Levav* (Amsterdam, 1742), p. 37b. The composition of the manuscript itself was completed in Aram-Zovah, in modern Syria, in 1737.

107. Morgenstern, *Mysticism and Messianism*, p. 64 n. 76.

108. Morgenstern, *Mysticism and Messianism*, p. 39.

109. Jewish officials of Istanbul wrote in a letter early in 5501 (late 1740): “Praise to his great name, several benches have been added and several new yeshivot established in the holy city; such a thing has not been since the day of the exile from the land.... Everyone is ascending to the land of Israel, and the multitude of the people has been the reason for the doubling and redoubling of the expenses. Due to the large numbers of homes in the holy city, whose like has not been since the day of the exile from the land... sustenance has become expensive in the holy city....” Morgenstern: *Mysticism and Messianism*, p. 40 nn. 8-9.

110. In Jerusalem in 1742, R. Haim ben Atar established Yeshivat Kneset Yisrael, whose students engaged in, among other things, the study of esoteric teachings and mystical practices.

111. Adam Teller, “The Tradition from Slutsk Concerning the Early Days of the Ba’al Shem Tov,” in David Assaf, Joseph Dan, and Immanuel Etkes, eds., *Studies in Hasidism* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1999), pp. 15-38. [Hebrew]

112. Morgenstern, *Mysticism and Messianism*, p. 180. On the messianic motivations for *aliya* and mystical activity of R. Yehiel Michel “Magid” of Zloczow,

on Shavuot 5537 [1777], see Mor Altshuler, *R. Meshullam Feibusch Heller and His Place in Early Hasidism*, doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1994. [Hebrew] Cf. also Arie Morgenstern, "An Attempt to Hasten the Redemption," *Jewish Action* 58:1 (1997), pp. 38-44.

113. Morgenstern, *Mysticism and Messianism*, p. 182.

114. Morgenstern, *Mysticism and Messianism*, pp. 263-274.

115. Introduction of R. Elijah's sons to *Shulhan Aruch: Orah Hayim* (Shklov, 1803); cf. Morgenstern, *Mysticism and Messianism*, pp. 275-306.

116. Arie Morgenstern, *Messianism and the Settlement of the Land of Israel* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi, 1985). [Hebrew]

117. Sanhedrin 99a. Cf. Morgenstern, *Messianism*, p. 38.

118. *Zohar*, Vayera 445-449, and *Sulam* ad loc.

119. Morgenstern, *Messianism*, p. 55 n. 92.

120. Morgenstern, *Messianism*, p. 58 n. 104.

121. Morgenstern, *Messianism*, p. 75 n. 39, and pp. 66-83.

122. The letter is in the archive of Manfred Lehmann of New York. I am grateful to the family for permission to publish this excerpt.

123. Morgenstern, *Messianism*, p. 133.

124. Morgenstern, *Messianism*, pp. 156-159. In kabalistic terminology, "the rising of the divine Presence from the dust" refers to activity of messianic preparation and is symbolic of the redemption.

125. Ya'ari, *Letters*, pp. 353-354. See also Arie Morgenstern, "Messianic Concepts and Settlement in the Land of Israel," in Marc Saperstein, ed., *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History* (New York: New York University, 1992), pp. 433-455; and Arie Morgenstern, "Symposium: Messianic Concepts and Settlement in the Land of Israel," in Richard I. Cohen, ed., *Vision and Conflict in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi, 1985), pp. 141-189.

126. Sanhedrin 98a. The verse cited is Ezekiel 36:8.

127. Ya'ari, *Letters*, p. 341.

128. Morgenstern, *Messianism*, p. 193 n. 179.

129. Yisrael Klausner, *Zionist Writings of Rabbi Kalischer* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1947), p. 13. [Hebrew] Cf. Morgenstern, *Redemption through Return*, pp. 182-185.

130. Jacob Katz, "The Historical Image of R. Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer," *Shivat Tzion* 2-3 (1951-1952), p. 28; cf. Morgenstern, *Redemption through Return*, pp. 182-185.

131. Tzvi Karagila, "R. Samuel ben R. Israel Peretz Heller Describes the Sack of Safed, 1834," *Katedra* 27 (1983), pp. 112-114.

132. Yehoshua Ben-Aryeh, *A City Reflected in Time: Jerusalem in the Nineteenth Century* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi, 1977), vol. i, p. 395. [Hebrew]