

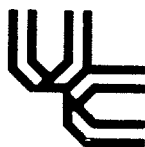
**JEWISH PROSELYTISM -
A PHENOMENON IN THE
RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF
EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPE**

Norman Golb
Ludwig Rosenberger Professor of Jewish History and Civilization
University of Chicago

**THE TENTH ANNUAL
RABBI LOUIS FEINBERG MEMORIAL LECTURE**

**Judaic Studies Program
University of Cincinnati**

March 3, 1987



© 1988, Norman Golb

I

Thanks to the contributions of several writers but particularly to the seminal work of the late Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, the world of learning has become quite well acquainted with the phenomenon of conversion to Judaism in late antiquity.¹ Not only did that period witness the rise of a new Judaizing monotheism whose adherents were known as *phoboumenoi ton theon*, *theosebeis* or *sebomenoi* (“God-fearers”) and not only did pagan conversions to normative Judaism take place then with considerable frequency, but there were Christians too who were attracted to the older faith — a fact that can be traced to at least as late as the 5th Century C.E. Simon, followed by others, attributed the apparent abatement of this interest to the growing presence of Christian imperial authority and to the development of Christian religious doctrines that, in his view, were better adapted to the Graeco-Roman mentality than were those of Judaism.

My purpose in the present study is to show that through the investigation of old Hebrew manuscripts, it becomes evident that this same attraction continued into the early Middle Ages. Writers concerned with Jewish proselytism in antiquity have apparently not been well acquainted with these manuscripts, which come mainly from the Cairo Genizah; had they known of them, had they in particular considered with care the historical evidence for the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism, their conclusions would have been rather different than they were. As it happens, most of the manuscripts discussed below have not yet been dealt with in any general or popular treatment of the history of the Jews or of medieval civilization; even scholarly writings about them are far from abundant. (There is still, for example, no complete published translation into English, or any other language, of the autograph

¹ M. Simon, *Verus Israel. Etude sur les relations entre Chrétiens et Juifs dans l'Empire Romain (135–425)*, Paris, 1964. An English translation appeared in 1986. Cf. the evaluation of Robert L. Wilken, “Judaism in Roman and Christian Society”, *Journal of Religion* XLVII (1967): 313–330. On the *theoseboi* see most recently J. Reynolds and R. Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-Fearers at Aphrodisias* (Cambridge, 1987).

memoirs of Obadiah the Proselyte.) Although meritorious work has already been done on medieval Jewish proselytism in general, it remains a relatively fresh subject of investigation whose pursuit reflects the fluctuating state of knowledge of the Jewish past and the dynamic quality inherent in its investigation.

To be sure, the earliest of the medieval European proselytes with whom we are familiar is known only through Latin sources. This convert to Judaism was a deacon in the court of Louis the Pious who, before his conversion, bore the name Bodo or Puoto. He is described in the chronicle of Prudentius, bishop of Troyes, as having been the "scion of a German tribe, who practically from infancy grew up in the Christian faith, with courtly education, and sciences both divine and human." He was, in other words, a man of noble birth and upbringing, and relatively well educated. In addition, he was not only a deacon well respected in the Carolingian society of his time, but also a personal favorite of the emperor himself at his court at Aachen. In the year 838 "he sought permission of the Emperor," Prudentius writes,

to go to Rome and pray there. But after (Louis) had bestowed many gifts on him and he had reached his goal, Satan incited him, he left his religion and became a Jew. . . . Once circumcised, he let the hair of his head and beard grow long, changed his appearance, and called himself Eliezer; he put on a military garment and took for himself as wife the daughter of a Jew. He also forced his relative (accompanying him on the journey) to become a Jew.

By the wording of his statement, Prudentius implies that Bodo-Eliezer converted either in Rome itself or perhaps on the way from Italy to Spain; he states that it was only after the conversion that Bodo reached Saragossa.² Another contemporary, the bishop Amulo of Lyons, indicates on the contrary that it was in Saragossa itself that Bodo converted.³

Wherever the conversion may have taken place, it was at Saragossa that Bodo-Eliezer settled (August 838) and where he engaged in the study of Jewish belief and practice under the tutelage of scholars resident in that community. In 840

² *Annales Bertiniani* (anno 839) in G. Waitz, *Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in Usum Scholarum* (Hanover, 1883), pp. 17 f.

³ Migne, *Patrologiae Latina* 116, col. 171.

he undertook a literary debate with Paul Alvar (Albar), a Jewish convert to Christianity living in Cordova. Of this correspondence, mainly the arguments of Alvar have been preserved in full, those of Bodo having been largely torn out of the unique manuscript which contained the record of the debate.⁴ The argument, which centered on the question whether the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible did or did not foretell the coming of Jesus as the Messiah, was followed by anti-Christian efforts on Bodo's part. According to Prudentius, Bodo-Eliezer convinced the Muslim authorities ruling Spain at that time to force the resident Christians to convert either to Judaism or Islam; the threat was apparently real enough to move the Spanish Christians to appeal to Charles the Bold and others in Gaul to seek the return of Bodo to the Frankish realm. This incident, if true, took place in 847 C.E., after which no more is heard of Bodo.⁵

Of all the known aspects of his life, one is particularly struck by Bodo-Eliezer's heated anti-Christian message after conversion. There was, on the one hand, his active campaign against the Spanish Christians; on the other, the severe tone of the polemic, which found Bodo not only combatting doctrines of the church but also accusing believers of self-contradiction and immorality. He states, for example, that he personally witnessed an argument involving fourteen clerics at the Frankish court, each of whom had a different point of view about the theological matter under debate; and also that he himself, while a deacon at court, had had numerous sexual encounters — implying thereby a broad immorality on the part of ostensibly celibate men of the cloth. The broad lines of Bodo's life and conversion are the following: first, there is the fact that he was the scion of a prominent European Christian family; secondly, that he was a literate cleric, trained in the doctrines of Christianity; thirdly, that his conversion to Judaism could only be effected through subterfuge and then flight to distant places; and finally, that after his conversion he was active in combatting Christianity.⁶ These characteristics

⁴ Migne, *P.L.* 121, cols. 483, 491-492, and 512-513.

⁵ *Annales Bertiniani* (anno 847) in Waitz, *op. cit.*, pp. 34 ff.

⁶ On Bodo, see A. Cabaniss, "Bodo-Eleazar: A Famous Jewish Convert", *JQR* XLII (1952/53): 313-28; C.M. Sage, *Paul Albar: Studies on his Life and Writings* (Washington, D.C., 1943), 2f.,

appear in varying measure among European proselytes of subsequent centuries.

The earliest known of these, after Bodo-Eliezer, was a cleric (“clericus”) named Wecelin who served Duke Conrad of Carinthia in the very first years of the eleventh century, that is, during the reign of Henry II. The story of Wecelin’s conversion is told by Alpert (Albert) of Metz, who was a near contemporary.⁷ In the first section of his work *De diversitate temporum*, Alpert describes a “horrible comet spewing flames” which appeared in the skies over Germany and, he states, gravely frightened all who beheld it. The comet appeared in the year 1005, three years after Henry had been crowned king; it was followed, Alpert states, “by famine and awful death throughout the world.” Immediately after the description of this comet — whose appearance is independently attested — Alpert describes the “apostate Wecelin” who, he states, “was misled by a diabolical illusion and was won over to the error of the Jews.” Alpert states that Wecelin uttered falsehoods against Christianity, and that King Henry appointed one of his court clerics, also named Henry, to refute him. He publishes in his chronicle a short polemical tract or letter that he attributes to Wecelin, and which includes several salient anti-Christian arguments: that the incarnation cannot have happened insofar as God himself does not “change” (cf. Malachi III.6); that man cannot see God and therefore the attestations of the saints are false; and that the Lord has a covenant not with the nations but only with Israel, which he will remember always (Psalm CIV.8–9) and which he has commanded to be observed, through the Torah of Moses and circumcision. Henry the Cleric’s reply to this polemic is ten times as long as the attack of Wecelin itself, which seems to be given in a much condensed form by Alpert. He has, however, retained Wecelin’s characterization of Christianity as an “accursed faith” as well as a rhetorical sentence of characteristic acerbity: “What,”

11ff.; C. Roth (ed.), *World History of the Jewish People IX* (Rutgers University Press, 1966), pp. 84, 86, 87, 89, 93, 96–97, 140, 141, 358; and earlier articles cited by Cabaniss, *op. cit.*: 316, note 6.

⁷ G.H. Pertz (ed.), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica SS IV* (Hannover, 1841), p.704, 720–23; A. Sapir Abulafia, “An Eleventh-Century Exchange of Letters between a Christian and A Jew”, *Journal of Medieval History VII* (1981): 153–174 and bibliography there cited, pp. 173–174.

says Wecelin to his Christian opponent, “are you barking back at me, animal?” (*Quid contra hiscis animal?*).⁸

Alpert relates no further information about the fate or fortune of this proselyte, but the examples of Bodo-Eliezer and later prominent proselytes of the eleventh and twelfth centuries encourage the assumption that he fled his country prior to or soon after his conversion. There is, to be sure, a Hebrew manuscript letter of the Cambridge Genizah collection (Or. 1080J) that may well reflect the continuation of Wecelin’s biography.⁹ It is a very well-written letter by a Jewish traveller and businessman named Samuel b. Isaac the Sephardi, evidently addressed to Shemariah b. Elhanan of Fustat, who during the first decade of the eleventh century was the head of Egyptian Jewry. The letter, written from Jerusalem to Fustat (Old Cairo), describes the vicissitudes of a proselyte whom Samuel the Sephardi had met earlier. The letter was subsequently brought to Shemariah in Fustat by the proselyte himself. In it Samuel states that

this man, the bearer of my letter [to our master, is a good and righteous man,] and among the proselytes his word is wondrous; [. . .]¹⁰ from his youth he had recognized that the Christians (lit., the uncircumcised) walk in van[ity, whereas our Lord is the ‘God of all gods] and the Master of all masters’. Thus he sought the religion of Israel and did not veer from it; he left in the city of [. . .] He fled from them towards Damascus in order to be gathered unto the Congregation (of Israel); but they went after him, and he took refuge in [the synagogue] [. . .] They [came] with him to their friends, and the elders of the Christians, the important residents, gathered about him — for he is from a great family — and they (attempted to) entice him to return to them. They offered him much money, they [mocked him and] shouted at [him], but he told them that their statutes were vanity and that their god was Bel; wherever he came, it thus befell him [. . .] [he

⁸ Pertz, *MGH Scriptorum* IV, p. 720. The “barking” phrase was used also in medieval Hebrew texts to describe the arguments of Christian opponents.

⁹ See my edition and discussion of this text, “Ger šedeq shebārah lemīṣrayim berēshitāh shel hamē’ah ha’ahat ‘esrēh”, *Sefunoth* VIII (1964): 87–104; the text had not been previously discussed or published.

¹⁰ There are breaks at this point and elsewhere in the manuscript (indicated by [. . .]) which obscure the precise sense of several passages.

said in all] the places where he ca[me to] their priests (lit. 'fathers') that the Holy One had drawn him near to the service of Him.

Samuel's letter, after an illegible passage in the manuscript, then continues:

From the day he came to them (= the Jewish community of Damascus), he has not gone forth from the syn[ago]gue. [They] sought to test him in order to discover any [flaw], but nothing bad could be found. [So I gave] praise to the Holy One . . . who had vouchsafed [unto this man] wisdom to understand . . . that the Lord is one and His name one!¹¹

Samuel the Sephardi now explains the reason for his letter to Shemariah b. Elhanan:

After I had arrived back in Egypt from Damascus and had gone (thence) to Jerusalem, I found him (=that same proselyte) there, for he had gone there with our brethren who were travelling there to celebrate (Tabernacles). He desired to go on to Egypt, for the Christians were persecuting him and being spiteful every single hour, so that he became frightened of them — for because of our sins they have many functionaries and officials in the lands which others do not have [. . .] He requested of me that I write these few lines on his behalf, so that he might bring them to (you) our master, after the truth of his words had become clear to me, so that he might find favor in (our master's) eyes and be gracious before him; and that our master might do with him as he does with every wayfarer and passerby . . . ¹²

In my Hebrew study of this manuscript (see above, note 9) I adduced a number of proofs to show that the letter could not have been written before the first year or two of the eleventh century, nor after 1011. These proofs may be summarized as follows: To begin with, the letter is addressed to an eminent Jewish dignitary of Egypt whose father and whose son were both named Elhanan — and there is only one such dignitary known, namely Shemariah b. Elhanan. The letter was clearly addressed to him. He died, however, in the year 1011, establishing this as the *terminus ad quem* for the writing of the letter. The *terminus a quo*, on the other hand, is fixed by the fact that Samuel the Sephardi asked Shemariah to greet

¹¹ N. Golb, "Ger ṣedeq", pp. 88–89.

¹² Ibid.: 89–90.

the latter's son Elhanan on his behalf, indicating that Elhanan was also residing in Fustat. Elhanan, however, had been a student of Sherirah Gaon in Baghdad, and only returned to Fustat at the very end of the tenth century, *circa* 998 or 999. A further narrowing down of the earliest and latest possible dates of the letter is provided by consideration of political events in Palestine and Syria at the beginning of the eleventh century: Fighting had sprung up during the last few years of the tenth century between the troops of Al-Ḥākim, the Fatimid ruler who controlled Syria and Palestine, and those of the Byzantine Emperor Basil II, and had continued until 1001. Until that year, the land routes in Syria were constantly being threatened — and it is most difficult to imagine travel to and from Damascus, and, in addition, Jewish pilgrimages from Damascus to Jerusalem at the Tabernacles season, before the cessation of these hostilities. The Jerusalem Patriarch Orestes, himself an uncle of the Caliph Al-Ḥākim, was instrumental in the forging of a peace treaty between Byzantium and the Fatimid state in the year 1001. The situation was thereafter peaceful in Jerusalem and throughout Palestine until 1008, when Al-Ḥākim, who in 1004 had already begun persecuting Jews and Christians in Egypt, entered upon the same course in Palestine. It is thus not possible to conceive of our letter having been written before 1001, when peace was established, nor after 1008, when Al-Ḥākim's persecutions would have made Jewish pilgrimages to Jerusalem unthinkable. Equidistant between the palpable *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* of the letter, that is, in 1005, we meet with the conversion, either in Carinthia or possibly Germany, of Wecelin, which must have been followed by his flight to friendlier territory. The land route from Carinthia to Jerusalem leads, of course, through Constantinople and Damascus, where the proselyte described in the Genizah letter could be found during the same period of time.

Moreover, it may be observed that the notably disputatious personality of Wecelin is matched by that of the proselyte described in the Hebrew letter. It is but a few steps from Wecelin's depiction of Christianity as an "accursed faith" and his characterization of his disputant as a barking animal to the Hebrew description that "their statutes were vanity and their god was Bel".¹³

¹³ In my above-mentioned article (see note 9) I indicated that the only "Duke Conrad" living at the

These pieces of evidence thus work in favor of the identification of Wecelin with the proselyte of the Genizah letter — and yet it cannot be said with absolute certainty that the two were indeed identical. It is also possible, but in my own view less likely, that by coincidence two church figures of some prominence and of similarly outspoken personality converted to Judaism at approximately the same time — that is, *circa* 1005 C.E. — and have left separate records, one in Latin and the other in Hebrew, of their unconnected experiences. In this interpretation, however, the conversion of prominent Christians to Judaism in the period under discussion is yet more fully attested.

time Wecelin converted (viz. 1005 or 1006) was Conrad of Carinthia; and as Wecelin, i.e. Veselin, was a characteristic Slovenian name, I suggested that Wecelin was a member of the (large) Slovenian population of Carinthia, and that he served Duke Conrad there and converted in the same region. A. Sapir Abulafia in her aforementioned study, (above, note 7) also arrives at the conclusion that “Duke Conrad” must have been Conrad of Carinthia (p. 155 of her study), and yet surprisingly states that there is “no reason to suppose that Wecelin was a Slovene living in Carinthia” (p. 157). She thereafter states that “even if Wecelin originally came from Carinthia, he could still have travelled with Duke Conrad to Rhenish Franconia”, where Conrad possessed allods, fiefs, and certain privileges (ibid. pp. 157 and 155); and that Wecelin could thus well have converted in Worms, Speyer or Mainz (p. 155). All this is of course possible, (although not as likely as that Wecelin served Duke Conrad in the latter’s own principal seat of power, which was Carinthia) — but does not materially affect the question whether Wecelin is to be identified with the proselyte described in the Genizah texts. The strength of the identification resides in the striking congruity of dates and the apparently similar personality traits of the two described proselytes. Sapir Abulafia states that my dating of the Genizah letter is “somewhat doubtful” without giving a reason for this assertion (cf. her article, p. 157). On the basis of specific statements contained in the letter, the period between 1001 and 1008 is in fact the only possible time during which it could have been written.

II

The Genizah letter described above is the most ancient of a growing number of documents from the same rich storehouse that describes this phenomenon. One of the most intriguing of these is the fragmentary letter (Cambridge, T-S 12.732) of a proselyte who, as those described above, had been a monk or cleric prior to his conversion, and whose account of escape from his priestly captors is unusually poignant.¹⁴ Judging by the peculiar quality of the Hebrew idiom in this letter, it was written by the monk himself after having learned that language. He writes that after he was circumcised and had begun observing the laws of the Torah, he sought to convince his erstwhile colleagues of the truth of his new religion:

I feared lest they slay me, and so I proceeded to write fourteen pamphlets, in which I gave my reasons (for conversion) and (posed) questions. I gave them to the chief priest and the (other) priests, saying 'If only you would know, O my master, that I forsook the religion of Christianity (lit., 'the uncircumcised') because of the questions and reasons written in this book. If the Lord be good, then read this book; and if I have done evil in forsaking the religion, then show me, teach me and respond with good answers and reasons; and then quickly shall I return.' I was trusting in the grace of the Lord, that if they would read them (= the pamphlets I had written), then surely the knowledgeable among them would return to the religion of Israel.

He was thereafter jailed for his beliefs, but managed to escape; he writes that

one of the prison guards . . . let me out at night [secretly] through the window from the wall with a rope; for that man had had a dream regarding me and he said to me, 'As the Lord liveth, do not fear — come and I shall let you escape.' [I hearkened to his voice]; he let me down with the rope and I fled from the prison naked and forlorn; I chose to seek bread . . .

¹⁴ Published by S. Assaf, *Meqorot umehqarim* (Jerusalem, 1946): 143–144, 149. See my observations on this text, and corrections to the edition, in *Journal of Jewish Studies* XVI (1965): 70–74.

The proselyte's letter, which also contains the information that six of the fourteen pamphlets he wrote were being appended to it, breaks off with the description of his flight. But fragments of at least two other letters written by this same person (MSS Cambridge, T-S N.S. 325.7 and T-S 12.244) have also been found in the Genizah, from which it becomes clear that he had to beg the Jewish community in whose midst he had arrived — probably the one in Fustat — to support him.¹⁵ This does not mean that Jewish communities of the eleventh century were hostile to proselytes — all evidence now available is to the contrary. It does, however, show with what caution the communal leaders sometimes dealt with strangers who approached them claiming they were proselytes or travellers from distant lands, without being in possession of letters of recommendation from other Jewish communities. Such letters have turned up in abundance in the Genizah; they clearly served a most valuable function, even on an international level. The proselyte under discussion, however — for reasons which he attempted to clarify in his letter — did not have such a letter, and so was apparently regarded with suspicion. We do not know his fate.

Due to the fragmentary survival of the memoirs of Obadiah the Proselyte — before his conversion known as Johannes son of Dreux of Oppido (see below, Part IV) — we now have knowledge of the conversion of another ecclesiastical figure to Judaism, surely the most remarkable recorded case of this kind during the eleventh century. I refer to Andreas the Archbishop of Bari, who served in that capacity at least from 1062 to 1066 C.E., but probably for several years thereafter as well. Obadiah describes the crucial event in Andreas's life in one of the early passages of his memoirs, where he states that during his own youth

it happened . . . that the Lord put the love of the Torah of Moses into the heart of Archbishop Andreas, the high priest in the metropolis of Bari. He left his land, his priesthood and all his honor, and came to the

¹⁵ T-S N.S. 325, fol. 7 has been published by A. Scheiber, "A Proselyte's Letter to the Congregation in Fustat", in H.J. Zimmels, J. Rabinowitz, and I. Fineststein (eds.) *Essays presented to Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie on the occasion of his seventieth Birthday*, pp. 377–381. (The other fragment is not yet published.) The letter of the proselyte Mordecai (below, beg. of Section III) is in the same handwriting as the fragments of the letters of the anonymous proselyte discussed here, and thus it may well be that the two figures are identical.

metropolis of Constantinople. He circumcised the flesh of his foreskin; terrible, evil events then befell him. He arose and fled for his life from the Christians who were seeking him out in order to slay him; the Lord God of Israel saved him from them in purity. The Lord protect proselytes — blessed be the Lord forever! Then many ¹⁶ went up after him and ob[served his] deeds; they did as he had done, and also entered the covenant of the Living God. Then that man went on to the metropolis of Fustat-Misr, dwelling there until the day of his death. The name of the king of Egypt in th[ose days was] Al-Mustanşir, while the name of his deputy was [Badr] al-[Jamalī]. The n[ews] of Archbishop Andreas travelled to all the land of Lombardy, to the sages of Greece and the sages of Rome, the seat of the kingdom of Edom. When they heard about him, the sages of the Greeks were abashed, and all the sages of Edom were shamed. Johannes heard of his deed while still a youth in the house of Dreux his father

The ecclesiastical records of Bari indicate that Andreas served there as archbishop from 1062 C.E., and that in 1066 he journeyed to Constantinople, whose patriarch in that year still had jurisdiction over the archbishopric of Bari. The records are in some confusion for the years from 1066 to 1078, but specifically state that Andreas passed away in the latter year.¹⁷ Whether this was actually the year of his death rather than of his conversion cannot be determined. Badr al-Jamalī served in Egypt as Al-Mustanşir's vizier from 1074 to 1094, and Andreas may well have fled to Egypt between the years 1074 and 1078, not earlier. Obadiah writes that he was a *na'ar* ("youth") in his father's household at the time of the conversion of Andreas; he also states in his memoirs (see below, Part IV) that he himself became a proselyte in 1102, before which he witnessed, and later would describe with great accuracy, various events in his life, or of his time, which motivated him to convert to Judaism. Within the context of the memoirs, there is no

¹⁶ Scheiber in the first edition of the Budapest fragments of Obadiah's memoirs read this word not as *rabbīm*, "many", but as *hazārīm*, "the strangers" cf. *Kirjath Sefer* XXX (1954): 93 ff.; *Acta Orientalia Hung.* IV (1954): 271 ff. As I indicated in my edition of Obadiah's memoirs (*Goitein Jubilee Volume*, p. 82; see below, note 38), the traces of the letters are not, however, those of the word *hazārīm* but of *rabbīm*, which also fits the context far better.

¹⁷ On the records pertaining to Andreas, see A. Scheiber, *Acta Orientalia Hung.* IV (1954): 94; B. Blumenkranz, *Journal of Jewish Studies* XIV (1963): 34–36; J. Prawer, *Tarbiz* XLV (1976):279–284.

objective reason to cast doubt on the truthfulness or accuracy of Obadiah's account of the conversion of Andreas. If the event was not recorded in church chronicles, this was not because Obadiah at this one salient point in his memoirs had difficulty with his memory or was being mendacious,¹⁸ but clearly because the church hierarchy, as Obadiah writes, was dismayed by the event; it was for this reason that they chose to suppress it from their records. Andreas was, after all, a much more important church figure than either Bodo or Wecelein had been, and news of his defection to Judaism was bound to have a demoralizing effect in Christian circles, particularly on those who had been close to him in the Baresian archbishopric. The effect was such, as Obadiah writes, that others followed the path of Andreas, but of these subsidiary figures in Apulian or Byzantine Christianity apparently no trace has been found in surviving documents.

Another notable conversion to Judaism recorded in the Genizah documents took place approximately one decade after the conversion of Andreas. On this occasion, the proselyte was a young woman of a noble and influential family whose domain was apparently in England, Normandy, or northern France. The remarkable account of tragic circumstances in this proselyte's life is preserved in a single Cambridge letter on parchment (T-S 16.100) written by surviving members of a small Jewish community situated in a town of the Vaucluse region of Provence. Jacob Mann, who first published this Cambridge document, had hesitantly read the name of the town as Anjou, but the four letters of the toponym are demonstrably MNYW.¹⁹ The proselyte, according to the letter, had converted in her native country and then fled to Narbonne, the seat of the most important and influential Provençal Jewish community during the eleventh century. There she married a certain Master David, identified as a member of the family of Todros of Narbonne. Upon hearing that her own family was seeking her out, she fled Narbonne with her

¹⁸ This is the position taken by J. Prawer, cf. e.g. his remarks in *Tarbiz* XLV (1976): 278 ff.; and my criticism in the *Goitein Jubilee Volume*, 80–82.

¹⁹ See J. Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature* I (Cincinnati, 1931), pp. 31–33; N. Golb, "New Light on the Persecution of French Jews at the Time of the First Crusade", *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* XXXIV (1966): 1–63; *idem*, "Monieux", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* CXXIV (1980): 67–94.

husband and settled in the town in question, which, although located in the same general region of France as Narbonne, was sufficiently remote a place to make their discovery by her family's emissaries impossible. As I have shown elsewhere (see above note), the only town which satisfies these exigencies and answers to the Hebrew spelling MNYW is the fortified Vaucluse settlement known as Monieux, formerly Monieu, where the presence of an ancient Jewish community is now independently shown by identification of a nearby plot of land known to inhabitants of the region as the ancient cemetery of the Jews.²⁰

Once settled with her husband in the new community, the proselyte bore David three children, a boy named Jacob, a girl named Justa, and an (unnamed) infant son. Six years to the day of their arrival, however, the life of this family and of other Jews in the town was tragically and irrevocably shattered by a pogrom. David was slain in the synagogue, while Jacob and Justa were taken captive by the attackers. From the fact that members of the Jewish community of Monieux who survived the attack (and who were the writers of the letter on behalf of the proselyte) state that they were left "oppressed and broken . . . a few from many" and unable to care for the destitute widow or her surviving infant son, it is evident that the fate of this family was shared by many or most of the Jews who had been living there. As the salient elements of the pogrom — kidnapping of children, (clearly for purposes of conversion), slaying of Jews in the local synagogue, and plundering of their goods and possessions — are the very ones characteristic of pogroms that took place in western Europe during the First Crusade,²¹ the inference is palpable that the event described in the letter took place also at that time. This inference is raised to a virtual certainty by several circumstantial facts: Not only was Todros I of Narbonne serving as the *nāsī*, or *Rex Judaeorum*, in the Provençal region in the years prior to the First Crusade, and not only did Pope Urban II preach the crusade particularly in this region of France, but, what is more,

²⁰ See my report on the letter of Paul Couren of the neighboring Sault-de-Vaucluse, in *L'Arche*, no. 265 (avril 1979), "Courier des Lecteurs".

²¹ See the details concerning other pogroms of the First Crusade discussed by me in "New Light", *op. cit.*, 19–45.

the road leading from the central area of Provence, where the crusaders of the Midi under Raymond of St. Gilles and Adhemar of Le Puy first began gathering, passed directly by Monieux and on to the Alpine passes taken by those crusaders as they marched eastward in an ever mightier mass.

The attack on the Jews of Monieux was clearly an incident arising out of this movement; it was probably preceded and followed by others of its kind as the Provençal crusaders marched toward the east. The letter provides the only eyewitness autograph account that is extant for a pogrom on French soil during the Crusade, but in the process divulges information about a notable female proselyte of noble lineage who converted despite easy circumstances and strong family traditions.

We do not know the precise ideological motivations for her act. However, after leaving Monieux with the letter written on her behalf, she obviously travelled to a Mediterranean port — more likely Marseilles than Arles — where she boarded a ship and began a voyage that would eventually bring her to Egypt — to an area, that is, not affected by crusade activity, and dominated by Moslem rather than Christian rulers. Likewise, in fleeing from her family's domain, she would have sought to travel away from a zone of danger toward one of relative safety and tranquility. She came not from nearby Spain, but from “the house of her father, from great wealth and a distant land”, leaving behind “her brothers and the great ones of her family” and arrived eventually in Narbonne, thereafter seeking refuge in the relatively secluded town of Monieux — and these facts, together with her subsequent course of travel, show an origin in northwestern Europe and inexorable travel southward and eastward as circumstances absolutely required.

Prevailing religious conditions in France, Normandy and England may perhaps thus be sought as the cause of this proselyte's disaffection toward her Christian faith and her turn toward Judaism. During the years prior to 1095 a particular condition did indeed make itself felt in those lands, which served as a major impetus toward convening the Council of Clermont. William of Malmesbury succinctly described this condition, in stating that

in addition to those crimes in which every one indulged, all, on this side of the Alps, had arrived at such a calamitous state, as to take each other

captive on little or no pretense; nor were they suffered to go free, unless ransomed at an enormous price. Again too, the snake of simony had so reared her slippery crest and cherished, with poisonous warmth, her deadly eggs, that the whole world became infected with her mortal hissing, and tainted the honors of the church. At that time, I will not say bishops to their sees merely, but none aspired even to any ecclesiastical degree, except by the influence of money. Then too, many persons, putting away their lawful wives, procured divorces, and invaded the marriage-couch of others . . . ²²

The church's malady appears to have been widespread in the northwest of Europe, and it is thus not difficult to understand why this proselyte and other European Christians of the same century may have felt impelled to reject their religion of origin in favor of the mother-faith, or to engage in what contemporary Christian writers referred to as "judaizing".²³ In that age Judaism apparently did not suffer from the afflictions described by William, but rather beckoned by the simplicity of its fundamental belief and the guidance offered by its law.

²² J.A. Giles (translator), *William of Malmesbury's Chronicle of the Kings of England* (London 1889), Book IV, Chap. 2, pp. 356–57.

²³ One such "judaizer" was Renard Viscount of Sens (first half of the eleventh century), cf. Raoul Glaber, *Hist.* III.iv, ed. Prou (Paris, 1886), p. 69; another was Jean Count of Soissons (died 1118), as described by Guibert of Nogent in his *Autobiography*, Book III, Chap. xvi. That judaizing activity in southern France during the first half of the twelfth century was of grave concern to the church is clear from the letter of Bernard of Clairvaux on this subject addressed to the Count of Toulouse, cf. J. Mabillon and S. Eales, *Life and Works of St. Bernard II* (London, 1889), p. 707, letter no. ccxli. On this, and the much earlier activity of this nature at Lyon, see I. Loeb, "La controverse religieuse entre les Chrétiens et les Juifs au moyen âge en France et en Espagne", *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* XVII (1888): 311–337 and XVIII (1888): 133–156.

III

Many other proselytes are mentioned or described in the documents of the Cairo Genizah. At least one from Sicily is known (T-S 10J31, fol. 13), who arrived in Alexandria by boat from Trapani. In a letter now at Oxford, a proselyte named Mordecai describes himself as having been “exiled from my own place, removed from my land as a bird wandering from her nest . . .” (Heb. e. 107, fol. 19a).²⁴ The proselyte Solomon b. Abraham testified in a court hearing in Fustat (date uncertain: T-S 12.491). In 1121 C.E. a Byzantine Jew named Jeshua b. Jeshua had joint possession of a house in the Egyptian town of Mahallah with a proselyte named Abraham b. Moses, evidently someone who was also from Byzantium (T-S 16.140). In a letter from a Jewish official, his own “lightness of knowledge, particularly with respect to proselytes male and female” is referred to (T-S 16.154). S.D. Goitein in his masterly work *A Mediterranean Society*²⁵ has discussed these and other examples of proselytes, virtually all of whom must have come to Egypt during the eleventh and twelfth centuries from Byzantine or western European lands. These include the prosperous Abu l'Khayr the Proselyte (*Abu 'l-Khair al-gēr*) mentioned or discussed in at least five Genizah documents;²⁶ perhaps still another proselyte of the same name;²⁷ an Abraham the Proselyte, who is requested in a letter to permit the writer to accompany him on a business trip to Ceuta, in Morocco (Cambridge Add. 3345); a travelling merchant named Zain the

²⁴ See A. Scheiber, in H. J. Zimmels *et al.*, *Essays presented to Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie on the occasion of his seventieth birthday* (London, 1967/68), p. 379; *idem*, “Zur Geschichte der Proselyten”, in *Studies in the Bible and Hebrew Language offered to M. Wallenstein* (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 67–71. As noted above, note 15, this Mordecai may well be identical with the anonymous proselyte who wrote fourteen pamphlets explaining the reason for his conversion.

²⁵ S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Genizah*, II (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1971), pp. 304–11, 592–594.

²⁶ Goitein, *ibid.*, pp. 305–06; 592, note 31; and 593, note 39.

²⁷ Goitein, *ibid.*, pp.478, section 19 (T-S Misc. Box 8, fol. 102).

son of the Proselyte (Or. 1080J, fol. 178); three proselytes named Asher, Issachar and Dan, who in a letter to a Jewish official express their gratitude to the Jewish community of Malij and their concerns about a tanner living there (T-S 8J 14, fol. 6); the "righteous proselyte" Joseph, who was honored by the same community "as is obligatory upon all Israel" (T-S 8J 36, fol. 5); and an extremely pious proselyte named Mubārah, who on a journey to the town of Qus, in Upper Egypt, refused to eat even bread from the marketplace (T-S 13J 26, fol. 6). Particularly interesting is the letter of an elderly woman who had begun observing Jewish laws and customs and was seeking to convert, so as to "die in the Jewish faith" (T-S 8J 27, fol. 3). She travelled to Itfih in order to be inducted into Judaism by Jews living there; but they informed her that permission was needed of the Nagid in Fustat before the ceremony could be performed. She speaks of having moved (viz. to Egypt) from "a foreign place", and in her letter beseeches the Nagid to consent to her conversion.²⁸

An engagement contract of a female proselyte named Mubārah daughter of Abraham has been preserved (T-S K25, fol. 166), while another such contract, made out on behalf of "Ghālib the son-in-law of the proselyte" is once referred to (T-S 13J 20, fol. 17). A small fragment of a letter written by "Moses the [Ri]ghteous Proselyte" is known, but the actual contents of the letter have not survived (T-S A.S. 148.93).²⁹

Poor lists drawn up by the Jewish community of Fustat for distribution of food and clothing mention a considerable number of proselytes (often however not by name). Thus "the proselyte (living) in the synagogue of the Babylonians" once received a cloak as a charitable contribution (T-S K15, fol. 48). Under the rubric of Byzantine³⁰ recipients of charity, "the proselyte . . . and his servant-girl Mubārah" receive their separate allotments (T-S K15, fol. 113). Other charity lists mention a proselyte woman, a "foreign proselyte woman" (T-S Ar. Box 52,

²⁸ Goitein, *op. cit.*, pp. 310–311, and p. 594, notes 48–53.

²⁹ See A. Scheiber, "New Texts from the Geniza Concerning Proselytes", *HUCA L* (1979): 278, 286.

³⁰ The Arabic term *rūm* usually designates Byzantium or people from that region, but may signify, from time to time, Europe or Europeans in general.

no. 247), (British Library, Or. 5566 C, fols. 9–10), the “Cairene proselyte”, a female proselyte plus the daughter of another (T-S N.S. J41), an “Abraham the proselyte” (T-S N.S. J293), a “proselyte, the offspring of Joseph the Tripolitanian” (T-S K15, fol. 85), a proselyte who receives a payment of one-half of a dinar (T-S 10J 13 fol. 1), “the female proselyte . . .” as well as “the strangers in the synagogue” (T-S N.S. J239), and “the daughter of the proselyte” (T-S 24.76).

There are among the Genizah papers yet other letters and legal documents, some of great human interest, that concern proselytes. One such text, although difficult to comprehend fully because of lacunae and the fact that it is written in obscure rhymed prose, is a letter written by the Qaraite Tobias b. Moses concerning a woman who underwent considerable tribulations while in the custody of Christian authorities, and, thereafter, in the custody of Muslims (MSS T-S A.S. 153.82 and Budapest Kaufmann 168). According to Tobias, this woman remained true to her adopted faith despite her suffering, eventually returning to her Jewish husband whom she had in the meanwhile forsaken. The woman described may have been the wife of Tobias himself, although this fact cannot be definitely established.³¹

Another such text is the copy of a writ of testimony concerning two Christian sisters, living evidently in a European country, who wished to convert to Judaism (T-S 12.232)³². They came before the witnesses who had signed the original writ (the copy contains no signatures and no names of individuals) with their request. The witnesses, who were apparently visitors in the town or city where the request was made, then tried to dissuade the sisters from going through with their plan, warning them, in consonance with Talmudic prescriptions, that the life of a Jew in the Diaspora was difficult and required the strict observance of religious commandments. The sisters, however, could not be dissuaded, and so were inducted into Judaism by the witnesses. The unusual ceremony consisted not only in their ritual immersion and the recitation of the Shema^c, but also in the

³¹ See A. Scheiber, “Ein aus arabischer Gefangenschaft befreiter christlicher Proselyt in Jerusalem”, *HUCA* 39 (1968): 163–176; idem, *HUCA* 50 (1979): 277 ff.; Z. Falk, “Min hagenizah shel qahir”, *Sinai* 85 (1979): 145–146; M. Gil, *Toledoth eres yisrael batequfah hamuslimit* II (1983), pp. 528–531.

³² Published by M. Friedman in his *Ribbuy nashim beyisrael* (Tel Aviv, 1986), pp. 335–339.

shaving of their heads, clipping of their fingernails, and weeping over the “idolatry” they had formerly practised, in the manner of the “beautiful captive” described in Deut 21:12. After the ceremony, a Jewish witness who was present announced that he wished to marry one of the two proselytes “so that the Name of Heaven might be sanctified by me”. The other witnesses tried to dissuade him from so doing, indicating that the sister of the prospective bride could not be left abandoned but would have to accompany the couple, and that if the two sisters went with him to his land of origin, far from their own, they might be placed in a position of grave danger were they ever to be abandoned by the prospective groom. The solution arrived at by the assembled party was to have the bridegroom swear that, in the event he were to divorce the proselyte, he would undertake to bring the two proselyte sisters back to their place of origin.

That cases of proselytism of this and similar kinds could eventually give rise to questions of the personal status of the proselytes involved is clear from a responsum (T-S G2.66) in the handwriting of Abraham the son of the Palestinian gaon Solomon b. Judah (first half of the eleventh century) dealing with the question whether the daughter of a proselyte who had converted in order to marry her Jewish husband was herself legally entitled to be married to an Aaronite. (This question was answered positively by the responding authority.)³³ An allusion to a legal quarrel involving a proselyte, which pitted an apparently well-known Talmudic scholar against another personality (referred to as the *nāsī*), is indicative of the passions that could be aroused by questions concerning the halakhic status of proselytes (T-S 8J15, fol. 27).³⁴

An Arabic legal treatise concerned with the status of proselytes, *Maqālat al-gēr*, is referred to in a book list from the Genizah³⁵ but the treatise itself has until now not been discovered. A much later text (1227 C.E.) is a letter of complaint

³³ Published by M. Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 332–35.

³⁴ See A. Scheiber, “New Texts from the Geniza Concerning Proselytes”, *HUCA* L(29799): 278, 286.

³⁵ See N. Allony and A. Scheiber, “An Autograph Book-List of Joseph Rosh-Haseder” (Hebrew), *Kirjath Sefer* XLVII (1972–73): 153, 161.

from “Rachel the Byzantine³⁶ proselyte” concerning her husband Joseph of Barcelona, who “took me from my land and brought me to Alexandria” where she was abandoned by her husband after bearing him two daughters (T-S 12.575);³⁷ in her letter she asks the judge Elijah b. Zechariah to intercede with the Nagid Abraham (Maimūni) so as to force the husband to abandon his plans to marry another woman and return to her. It may be assumed that many similar cases arose in earlier times, that is, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when a much more significant presence of converts to Judaism could be found in Fustat and other Egyptian cities.

³⁶ On the term *rūm*, see above, note 30. It is possible that here and in some other cases discussed above we are dealing with European proselytes in general, but this does not appear to me as likely as that the proselytes designated by this term were from Byzantium. There are other terms which could have been used to designate proselytes from Western Europe, such as *edōmi*, *ifranji*, *allimani*, etc. However, this problem still awaits definitive solution.

³⁷ Published by M. Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 206–213.

IV

The most remarkable record of a medieval proselyte is that contained in the fragmentary memoirs of a monk named Johannes son of Dreux, who converted to Judaism in 1102 C.E. and then assumed the name of Obadiah. The story of the gradual recovery of these memoirs is instructive for the understanding of the way in which knowledge of the phenomenon of medieval proselytism has developed in the present century.

In 1901 S.A. Wertheimer published part of a medieval Hebrew document from the Cairo Genizah containing the following words: "This letter was personally written by our master Barukh son of Isaac . . . to be in the possession of Obadiah the Proselyte when visiting those communities of Israelites where he might come." The other side of the manuscript contained the first part of Rabbi Barukh's letter of recommendation, in fact, only a poetic prologue to the letter, including a dirge on the suffering of the Jews of Palestine at the hands of a conquering army. Only thirty years later, in 1930, did Jacob Mann publish the other half of this letter, which had in the meantime made its way to the Bodleian Library. In it one read that this same Obadiah the Proselyte (who bore the letter) "is of a great family, his father having been a man of high nobility. This man," the letter went on, "is expert in the reading of Christian books. Because of his understanding of what he read in their writings, he returned to the God of Israel with all his heart . . . and was converted in a Jewish court of law . . ."38

Another manuscript published by Mann at the same time (Cincinnati, HUC Genizah fragment 8) contained the final leaf of a prayer-book and a colophon which read: "Obadiah the Normannic proselyte, who entered the covenant of the Lord of

38 All the fragments of Obadiah's memoirs and the letter of recommendation from which these citations are derived have been newly published by me in I. Ben-Ami, S. Morag and N. Stillman (eds.), *Mehqeré 'edot ugenizah: S. D. Goitein Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 77-107. For these two citations, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 105, 106.

Israel in the year 1102 . . . has written (this book) with his own hand.”³⁹ This brief fragment yielded several valuable pieces of information: Obadiah had lived at the turn of the 11th century, he was the member of a family of Normannic stock, and after his conversion he had become expert in the Hebrew language and in Hebrew calligraphy. The colophon itself, as well as the page of the prayer-book, provided examples of Obadiah’s own handwriting. Moreover, the Arabic title on the recto of the same manuscript page made it evident that Obadiah had learned that language as well; and this information had to be coupled with the fact that, according to Master Barukh’s letter, he was also expert in the reading of Christian literature, the use of the term “Normannic” in the colophon suggesting that the language of that literature was Latin.

These few fragments of Hebrew documents thus described a man of learning of the time of the First Crusade from the West, who in the course of his peregrinations in cities of the Near East had studied the literature and beliefs of the Jews — which he adopted as his own — as well as the Arabic vernacular of the inhabitants of that region. Now as it happens, no other figure of precisely this type is known in the annals of the First Crusade. It was thus clear that the study of this man’s writings might yield valuable information on Crusade history, on the Jews of the Middle Ages, on proselytism, and on other subjects of salient interest; thus, ever since those early fragments were found, scholars investigating the Cairo Genizah have been on the lookout for other texts pertaining to him. And not without success. Besides the above-mentioned manuscript fragments, already Jacob Mann in his 1930 essay published several broken pages from a chronicle, or memoirs, written by Obadiah (one leaf of which had been published previously by E. N. Adler in 1919). An additional valuable fragment of the chronicle was discovered in 1953 by S. D. Goitein; and still another by A. Scheiber of Budapest in 1954. Further developments in the study of Obadiah now make feasible the following examination of his fragmentary memoirs and related texts, and their arrangement in chronological order.

³⁹ Golb, “Megillat Obadiah hager”, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

1. *Budapest Fragment, fol. 1*: This fragment⁴⁰ is written in Obadiah's own handwriting, and informs us that once, in the town of Oppido, twin sons named Rogerius and Johannes were born to Maria the wife of Dreux. By drawing on a statement in another fragment — the Bodleian letter of Barukh ben Isaac mentioned above — one may infer that this Dreux was a man of noble lineage. Johannes was the younger of the two brothers; Maria had given birth to the first with ease, whereas she bore Johannes with great suffering — a fact which must have been divulged to Johannes quite early in his life. Rogerius learned chivalry as he grew older, while Johannes devoted himself to the pursuit of learning. (A Rogerius of Oppido is indeed mentioned in 12th-century Latin records of that region.) The memoirs state these facts, as it were, in a single breath; and it is left to us to speculate whether the pain of the mother was inflicted in any measure on the spirit of the thoughtful and withdrawn child.

It was while still a youth that Johannes heard of the conversion to Judaism of Andreas the Archbishop of Bari (see above, Part II), an event which obviously made a deep impression upon him.

The memoirs at this point go on to mention the cities round about Oppido, giving their ancient Italian colloquial pronunciation in Hebrew transliteration. We may speculate that on the previous folio of the memoirs, now lost, Obadiah had described events in connection with the arrival of the Normans, and of his family, in southern Italy some thirty or forty years before his birth.

Soon after the events concerning Archbishop Andreas, we read in our fragment, the youth Johannes had a mystical dream which was brought on by the beginning of his puberty. He envisioned himself serving as priest at the basilica in Oppido; suddenly he “beheld a man standing to his right, opposite the altar, and the man called to him ‘Johannes!’” Here this part of the Budapest fragment of the memoirs breaks off, and we are left to speculate on the continuation of the dream. Evidently the apparition was a saintly or charismatic figure who urged Johannes to perform a religious act, one undoubtedly connected with the youth's studious and

⁴⁰ Golb, “Megillat Obadiah”, pp. 95–96.

withdrawn nature and with the conversion of Andreas to Judaism, which had taken place several years previously.

But the conversion of Johannes, son of Dreux, occurred only at the beginning of the next century — at least twenty years, that is, after that of Andreas, and long after Johannes' mystical dream. We again have to speculate about the intervening years; only enough is known to make clear that the youth Johannes became a serious student of Christianity and of the scriptures. Evidently this introspective son of noble parents was groomed for the priesthood and in his teens entered a monastery to further his studies.

II. *Cambridge Fragment A (T-S 8.271), fol. 1*: Johannes was approximately thirty years of age when the First Crusade broke over Europe. At this point his memoirs resume again, with the first folio of the fragment found by Professor Goitein at Cambridge.⁴¹ Obadiah describes the first portents of the crusade, evidently dwelling on an eclipse which took place in February of 1095 or 1096, for which he quotes in Latin — but using Hebrew characters — the verse from Joel III.4 pertaining to the darkening of the sun and the bloody color of the moon. (References to the same events, but with use of other Biblical verses, may be found in Latin chronicles of that period.) There is a reference to Pope Urban II's journey to France in the autumn of 1095, in an almost unseen spot.⁴² We see Obadiah in his role as chronicler, carefully recording what he considered the special events of his time. On the verso of this fragment, we read that each crusader "put crosses on his garment and on his shoulder" in preparation for the journey to Jerusalem. At this point the restoration of the fragment first made by Goitein may be cited verbatim: Before embarking on their journey, the Frankish crusaders "[said to one another], 'Why should we [go to a country far away to fight our ene]mies, while in our own countries [and in our own cities there are] our enemies and those who hate [our religion? Why should we lea]ve them here with our wives?' [This was the talk in

⁴¹ Golb, "Megillat Obadiah", pp. 96–97.

⁴² See my discussion of previously proposed readings in "Megillat Obadiah", p. 83; and the photographic enlargement in *Goitein Festschrift*, plate IX-2.

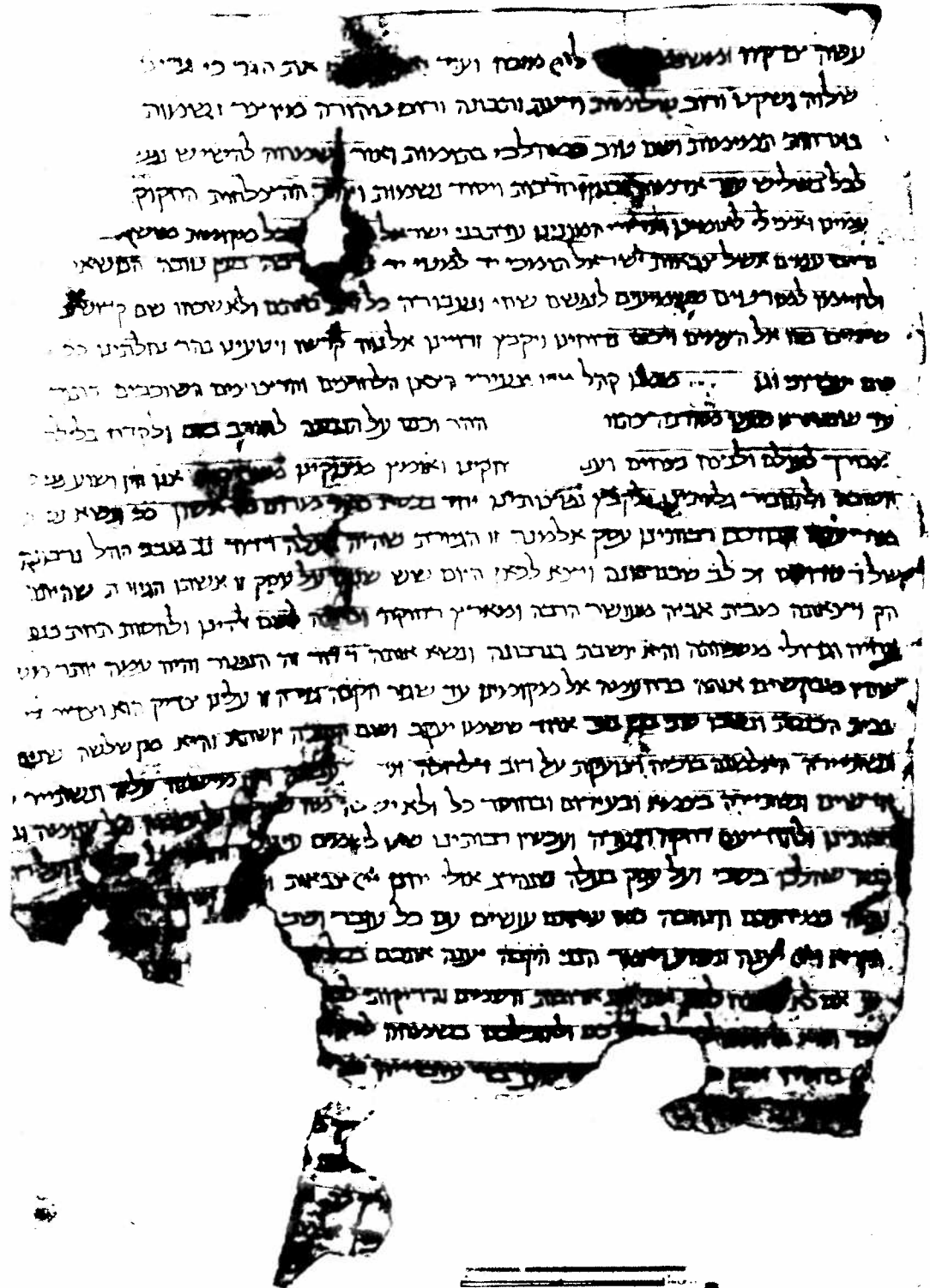


Fig. 2. Manuscript Cambridge T-S 16.100. The letter of survivors of a pogrom in the town of Monieux (Vaucluse, France) concerning a proselyte who had settled there with her husband and children several years prior to the First Crusade.

all] the camps of the Franks . . .” Johannes here echoes the language used by still other chroniclers, both Jewish and Christian, in describing the beginnings of anti-Jewish sentiment at the time of the Crusade. It is clear that he knew of the persecutions, and possibly was witness to some of them. A few years later, in either August or September of 1102, he converted to Judaism, assuming the name of Obadiah he-Ger (*viz.*, the Proselyte).

III. *Letter of Barukh b. Isaac (Bodl. Heb a.3, fol. 1)*: Obadiah-Johannes forsook Europe entirely, and no more than a few years after 1102 must have arrived in Syria. His first main stop there evidently was Aleppo, where Barukh b. Isaac — who gave Obadiah the letter of recommendation mentioned above — officiated as head of the Talmudic academy. I find in this same letter⁴³ a clear hint which points to the country where Obadiah’s conversion actually took place. The hint is contained in the vowels of the line of the text preceding the statement indicating that Obadiah was of a great family — that is, the statement with which the second and main portion of the letter began. (Mann neglected to publish this lonely line of vowels, which in Hebrew, of course, sit below the consonants, not next to them.) The first legible words of this portion of the letter are “who dwell in his lands (*hashōkhenīm be’aršōtāw*), and they told us that this man is of a great family.” (See the continuation above, prior to note 38.) The vowels just preceding are a:-i-é/a-ā. In another place in this letter Barukh ben Isaac spells the Hebrew word for scholars *talmidé ḥakhām* (as an abbreviated form for *talmidé ḥakhāmīm*) — precisely with these vowels. It becomes clear that just such a phrase is called for in the line whose consonants are missing: “*scholars* who dwell in his lands, and they told us . . .” The previous word, for which the vowels are *i-e-e*, was palpably *iggeret*, “a letter”: *viz. iggeret mitalmidé ḥakhāmīm hashōkhenīm be’aršōtāw*, “a letter from scholars who dwell in his lands.” Before that are the vowels sitting below words that in context with the following phrase may be restored to *bā*

⁴³ See my edition of the letter, “Megillat Obadiah”, pp. 103–106; and compare the restoration with the photograph including the pertinent line of vowels in the *Goitein Jubilee Volume*, plate XII-2.

le'irénu 'im, “came to our city with”. We thus arrive at the sentence: “He (Obadiah) came to our city with a letter from scholars who dwell in his lands, and they told us (i.e. in the letter) that he is of a great family” etc. The analysis of this line of vowels, in other words, hints at the fact that Obadiah converted in meridional Italy, quite likely in a port city such as Bari or Otranto, and that the present letter of Barukh b. Isaac contains the substance of still another letter written by Apulian Jewish scholars on Obadiah’s behalf, in which his ceremony of conversion had been described, as well as important facts pertaining to his background and scholarship. It is the ceremony itself which is described at length in Barukh’s letter.⁴⁴

IV. *Cambridge Fragment A (T-S 8.271), fol. 2*: One cannot know precisely how long Obadiah stayed in Aleppo during his initial sojourn there. Some years after 1102, however, we find him, in the second portion of the fragment identified by Goitein,⁴⁵ on his way toward Baghdad. While on the road, he had at least one harrowing adventure. He writes that he beheld a troop of people fleeing westward, while others pursued them close behind. One assailant approached Obadiah and apparently attempted to strike him. He writes at this point that only much later, by searching carefully in the Hebrew scriptures, did he understand the hidden meaning of what had transpired. (This passage and some others, incidentally, show that Obadiah had a certain tendency toward mysticism, as did many Latin chroniclers of those times.) On the following page of this fragment, we learn that Obadiah “left the city of Makisin”, arriving first at al-Raḥbah and later at Baghdad. Now the mention of Makisin,⁴⁶ following upon the description of troops fleeing westward, is reminiscent of events of 1109 described by the Muslim chronicler Ibn al-Athīr, who has troops of Ghāzi ibn Urtuk fleeing from those of Jāwalī — both enemies of the crusaders.⁴⁷ During this flight, we are told that Jāwalī travelled westward in pursuit

⁴⁴ See further my analysis and discussion in “Megillat Obadiah”, pp. 91–93, and the text, p. 105.

⁴⁵ Golb, “Megillat Obadiah”, pp. 97–98.

⁴⁶ See the photographic enlargement in *Goitein Festschrift*, plate X-1.

⁴⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, *Chronicle*, ed. C. J. Tomberg, X (Leiden, 1864), vol. 10, p. 321.

of Ghāzi toward al-Raḥbah precisely by way of Makisin, where he took Baldwin into custody a second time. The harmony of details is such as to raise the possibility that it was these troops that Obadiah saw on his journey — by which token his arrival in Baghdad would have taken place in 1110 C.E.

The aforementioned fragment closes with the statement that Muslims (*gōyyīm*)⁴⁸ at Baghdad attempted to slay Obadiah on his arrival there. In those times of turmoil, when every day brought news of crusader successes in the battles raging in Syria and upper Mesopotamia, it is not to be wondered at that the population of Baghdad would be suspicious of a traveller of strange countenance, whose Arabic, if he had it then at all, must have been heavy with the intonations of Normannic Lombardy.

V. *Budapest Fragment, fol. 2*: Once safely in Baghdad, Obadiah was supported by the community. He was given living quarters in the synagogue, and the head of the academy soon invited him “to be with the orphan youths in order to learn the Torah of Moses and the words of the prophets in the writing of the Lord and the language of the Hebrews”. These facts we learn from the second folio of the fragment found by Dr. Scheiber.⁴⁹ On this same page, recto and verso, Obadiah describes at length the persecutions of the Jews of Baghdad carried out by the Vizier Ibn al-Shujā‘ during the reign of al-Muqtadī (1075–1094). In fact we learn important details of this oppression which appear in no other source.

VI. *Cambridge Fragment B (T-S K21, fol. 1)*. In still another fragment reflecting the sojourn in Baghdad — this one published by Dr. Mann in 1930 — Obadiah describes the appearance in parts of Mesopotamia of certain false messiahs, each of whom claimed, during times of great tribulations for the Jews, that he was the true redeemer of the people.⁵⁰ The events concerning these imposters are described

⁴⁸ In texts written in Islamic countries by Jews, the term *goyyim* means Muslims rather than Christians, the latter being generally designated as ‘*arēllim*, lit. “uncircumcised ones”. See further my remarks in “Megillat Obadiah”, p. 84.

⁴⁹ See my edition of the text, “Megillat Obadiah”, pp. 99–100.

⁵⁰ See my edition, “Megillat Obadiah”, pp. 100–101.

minutely. Here it must be emphasized that there is no “Tbn Duji” in the text of this fragment, but rather a “Solomon b. Rūjī”,⁵¹ and according to traces of the letters in lines 15–16 of the verso of this Cambridge fragment, it was Solomon b. Rūjī himself who claimed to be the Messiah, not his son. It is the son Menahem, on the other hand, who is described by Samaw'al al-Maghrabī in his *Ifhām al-yahūd*, in the Cairo 1939 edition of which work may also be found the authentic reading *al-Rūjī* (p. 60 near top). Later on, when Benjamin of Tudela visited the Near East (approximately 1165), he heard a slightly deformed version of the story of these two false Messiahs; the name appears incorrectly in copies of his *Itinerary* as “David al-Roi”.⁵² The *gimel* of the *nisbeh*, Rugi (=Rūjī), became an *aleph*.

From all that one may observe of his work, it is clear that Obadiah, who redacted his memoirs only years later, actually sought to be an observer and recorder of events of his day, while at the same time studying, either through oral tradition or Arabic and Hebrew chronicles or both, events which had taken place in previous generations. The larger purpose of his memoirs thus begins to emerge.

VII. *Cambridge Fragment C (T-S Loan 31)*: After a sojourn in Baghdad of several years, Obadiah decided, for reasons we cannot know, to return to Syria. On his way he must have stopped at Raqqah, which is mentioned by its Hebrew name of Kalneh (i.e., Kallinikos) in still another fragment of Obadiah's memoirs published by Dr. Mann.⁵³ This same fragment contains much other information of value: it is

⁵¹ See *Goitein Jubilee Volume*, plate X-2. Even this enlargement, however, does not entirely clarify the reading, which I could determine with certainty only by studying the original under ultra-violet light at Cambridge.

⁵² It is this incorrect form that Benjamin Disraeli unwittingly adopted for his novel *Wondrous Tales of Alroy* (1839). There is no such name in autograph Hebrew texts or anywhere in the Genizah documents, and it evidently never existed as an authentic Hebrew or Arabic personal name. There is an “Alroy” article in *Encyclopaedia Judaica II* (1971), cols. 750–751, despite the fact that the author (N. Poliak) states there that the name “Alroy” and “Al-ruḥy” are “evidently corruptions of al-Dūjī”. Poliak's view goes back to Mann's reading of the term in the Obadiah fragment under discussion. The appellative “Rūjī” refers to the Rūj area, in Syria.

⁵³ Cf. my edition, “Megillat Obadiah”, pp. 101–102, and the word *Kalneh* in *Goitein Jubilee Volume*, plate XII-1. This word too is better perceived under ultra-violet light in the original at Cambridge.

a remnant of Obadiah's eyewitness account of conditions in Aleppo at the time of the great siege of that city by the forces of Roger of Antioch *circa* 1118 C.E. If one transposes the side termed the verso by Mann to its proper position as the recto of the fragment, and then deciphers the several small portions of the text left unedited by him, it emerges that Obadiah returned to Aleppo during the siege, and found the Muslims there in dire straits. He describes the intrigues which took place in the palace after the death of Raḍwān of Aleppo. Power temporarily passed to the eunuch Lu'lū, who, however, was slain in a conspiracy. The Muslims there sought the aid of Ghāzi ibn Urtuk, while Aleppo groaned under the siege of Roger, and people died in the streets. All this we learn from the keen observations contained in Obadiah's memoirs. As he informs us, he thereafter returned from Aleppo to Raqqah.

VIII. *New York, JTSA Adler, 3098/4208, fol. 7*: In this fragment Obadiah writes that he travelled on to Damascus, where he was again supported by the community.⁵⁴ It is evident that Obadiah travelled from Raqqah to Damascus in approximately 1119 A.D.; but to get there he would not have returned to Aleppo and thence gone directly southward, as this road was then the scene of intense combat with crusader forces. It is tempting to think that Obadiah took the desert route to Damascus, which would have brought him to Palmyra (Tadmor). The pertinent folio of his memoirs, however, in which the journey from Raqqah would have been described, is unfortunately not extant.

In 1121, so we learn from the same Adler fragment, Obadiah left Damascus for Banias, in the north of Palestine. Here he engaged in discussion with a vegetarian Qaraite Jew named Solomon, who claimed that it was he who was the Messiah, and who predicted the ingathering of the Jews to Jerusalem — then, of course, already occupied by the Crusaders — “within two and a half months”. Obadiah, who shows by his argument that he was by then well acquainted with Jewish doctrine, was sceptical of the claim of the sectarian. The latter urged him not to go on to Egypt, but to remain in Palestine awaiting the ingathering; with regard to

⁵⁴ See my edition of this fragment, “Megillat Obadiah”, pp. 102–103.

which the proselyte writes in his memoirs: “Then Obadiah said to Solomon, ‘I shall go to Egypt and return with our brethren the Israelites who are in Egypt to Jerusalem,’” — at which Solomon fell silent. Does Obadiah intend scorn here, or only humor?

From Baniyas both Obadiah and Solomon travelled separately to Tyre in the autumn of 1121 — only a few years, that is, before that city fell into the hands of the crusaders. Tyre was surrendered to the Franks in 1124, Baniyas in 1129, Damascus never — and the route taken by Obadiah suggests that he scrupulously avoided entering crusader territory in Palestine. It was from Tyre that he evidently went on to Egypt and its chief city of Fustat-Misr, where the portions of his memoirs were found some eight hundred years later buried and scattered amidst thousands of other fragments from the Cairo Genizah.

Thus we have the route of Obadiah: From a port city of Italy to Syria; from Aleppo to Makisin and Rahbah; thence to Baghdad, thereafter back to Aleppo by way of Raqqah, then back to Raqqah and down to Damascus, Baniyas and Tyre, and finally to the chief metropolis of Egypt, where we may assume he passed away a few decades thereafter.

IX. *New York JTSA Adler 4096 b and Cambridge T-S K5, fol. 41*: The memoirs break off with Obadiah’s departure for Egypt; and for many years nothing at all was known of his activities in that country itself. There exists by chance, however, a manuscript page containing a Hebrew poem annotated with Lombardic musical neumes of the twelfth century, which had been a puzzle to scholars ever since its photographic publication in 1921. The prevalent view until some years ago was that the Gregorian melody contained on this page was written by a Jew of Palestine or Syria and showed that the music of the medieval church was modeled upon some Near Eastern, Jewish prototype. However, while studying this fragment in 1964, I recognized (as did A. Scheiber in Budapest virtually at the same time) that it contained the actual handwriting of Obadiah-Johannes; another such fragment was soon thereafter identified by N. Allony at Cambridge.

The manuscripts contain Italian music in the Gregorian style adapted by Obadiah to Hebrew poetry with which he became familiar during his extensive

travels in the Near East early in the twelfth century, and thus reveal yet another facet of the personality of this remarkable man of crusading times.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ See my studies, "Obadiah the Proselyte: Scribe of a Unique Hebrew manuscript with Lombardic Neumes", *Journal of Religion* XLV (1965): 153–56; and "Al Obadiah hager wa' abodato hamusikologit", *Tarbiz* XXXV (1965): 81–83; "The Music of Obadiah the Proselyte and his Conversion", *Journal of Jewish Studies* XVIII (1967): 1–18. Bibliographic notes relating to other publications on Obadiah's music will be found in the last-mentioned study. The custom of musical adaptation — widespread in Obadiah's time — was known as *contrafactum*.

In his article in the Wallenstein *Festschrift* (see above, note 24), A. Scheiber proposed that Obadiah was the illuminator and scribe of MSS Oxford Bodl. Heb. c 13 fol. 20 and Cambridge T-S Box K10, fol. 4 — perhaps the two most beautifully illuminated engagement contracts in the Genizah. While further study of the script is needed, I believe that the identification may well be correct — thus supplying us with information on still another aspect of Obadiah's personality.

V

We may perceive, from the variety of texts available, that Jewish proselytism in the earlier Middle Ages was a phenomenon that can be traced from the ninth century onwards, and seems to have reached its apogee in the eleventh century. There were certainly proselytes in the seventh and eighth centuries as well, but records no longer survive to tell us about them.

Many of the proselytes described in the Cairo Genizah manuscripts came from either western European or Byzantine lands. An unknown percentage of proselytes, however, did not succeed in leaving their native countries, but simply changed their places of residence or otherwise hid their Christian origins — a fact which may be inferred from the well-documented presence of such proselytes in France, Germany, and other European countries during the period of the First Crusade and throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These included, at the time of the First Crusade, Jacob B. Sulam of Mainz — whose Christian family was evidently of high social standing — and an anonymous proselyte of Xanten;⁵⁶ in the twelfth century, a number of scholars including the Hungarians Abraham and Isaac⁵⁷ a certain Yehosafiah or Joseph who composed liturgical poetry,⁵⁸ and Jonathan the Proselyte who may have been of English origin;⁵⁹ an Abraham b. Abraham of Wuerzburg who, either toward the end of the twelfth century or during the first few decades of the thirteenth, was obliged to consult a Latin translation for

⁵⁶ See Chronicle of Solomon b. Simson in A. Neubauer and M. Stern, *Hebraeische Berichte ueber der Judenverfolgungen waehrend der Kreuzzuege* (Berlin, 1892) pp. 10, 22, and my discussion of this passage in *PAAJR* XXXIV (1966):24, note 32.

⁵⁷ See E. E. Urbach, *Ba' alé hatossafot*, 4th ed. (Jerusalem, 1980), p. 226 and sources there cited. That the Hungarians Abraham and Isaac were father and son is an undemonstrated supposition.

⁵⁸ See E. Landshut, *'Amudé ha' abōdāh* (Berlin, 1857–62), p. 88; and Urbach, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

⁵⁹ See C. Roth in his introduction to B. Klar, *Sefer hashoham lerabbi mosheh ben yiṣḥaq hanesi'ah me'ingleterra* (Jerusalem, 1947), p. 12.

his better understanding of the Pentateuch;⁶⁰ a group of seven men and women listed as martyrs in the Memorial Book of Pferse;⁶¹ and approximately twenty anonymous proselytes who are discussed in responsa of the tossafists during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁶²

As for the number of proselytes who resettled in Islamic lands in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, there were at least hundreds more than those actually described or mentioned in the extant records of the Cairo Genizah. This may be asserted for two basic reasons.

The first is that the approximately fifteen thousand Genizah texts of a documentary (rather than literary) character, themselves badly fragmented, cannot possibly represent more than a small fraction of the total number of such documents that were produced and/or sequestered by the Jews of Fustat during those two centuries. The documents now known were those preserved in the synagogue of the Palestinian Jews; the synagogue of the Babylonians, and that of the Qaraites, were in the course of time destroyed, and most of the records of those communities along with them. In the case of the records of the Palestinians — the only ones preserved in any abundance — it is obvious that they represent merely the surviving remnants of a far greater mass of texts once in the possession of those particular inhabitants of Fustat. Many complicated court cases, for example, are now represented only by single pages of the originally extensive dockets in which they were recorded seriatim by the court scribes. Charity lists are extant only for certain months of particular years, whereas originally they were drawn up for each month of every year, over the entire period of the medieval existence of the Jewish community of Fustat. The extant correspondence of individual Jewish traders and entrepreneurs of that city reflects a much greater original correspondence of these same individuals, an inference that necessarily follows from the fact that their letters refer to still other letters which are no longer extant, and often form small portions

⁶⁰ See A. Aptowitz, *Mabo lesefer rabiah* (Jerusalem, 1938), pp. 446–447.

⁶¹ See J. Perles in *MGWJ* XXII (1873): 513; B. Wacholder in *JQR* LI (1961): 33, note 109.

⁶² See B. Wacholder, “Cases of Proselytizing in the Tosafist Responsa”, *JQR* LI (1962): 288–315.

of what may be demonstrated to have been very extensive and ramified correspondence with fellow merchants and traders residing in Fustat as well as in many other cities in Egypt and throughout the Near East. It may be estimated on this basis that only a small proportion, between no more than five to ten percent, of the original number of court-records, legal deeds and communal, personal and business correspondence of the Jews of Fustat in the period from 1000 to 1200 C.E. has conceivably survived until the present time. As the mention or description of proselytes in the Genizah texts is of an entirely sporadic and haphazard nature, it is not possible to believe that the approximately thirty proselytes of the known Genizah texts represent anything but a small proportion of the original number of proselytes who resettled in, or about whom correspondence passed through, Fustat — namely, a minimum of approximately three hundred in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The second reason for surmising that the Genizah records describe or mention only a small proportion of the total number of medieval proselytes who resettled in Islamic lands during the centuries under discussion is that all of the texts containing information about the known proselytes were found in a synagogue located in one city of a single country. Important Jewish communities could, however, be found in many such cities during the Middle Ages: In Egypt there were such communities, for example, in Alexandria, Rosetta, Damietta, Tanta, Mahallah and Damanhur — not to mention smaller communities such as the fifty or perhaps many more that could be found throughout the Delta region, the Fayyum, and upper Egypt. Important Jewish communities likewise were implanted in North Africa (e.g., at Sirt, Lebda, Tripoli, Jerba, Qabes, Sfax, Mahdia, Qairowan, Tunis, Tahert, Tlemsen, Tangier, Fez, Meknes etc.), in Andalusia (e.g., at Toledo, Cordova, Seville, Granada, Lucena, to mention only some of the more important communities), in Palestine and Syria (e.g., at Jerusalem, Tiberias, Jaffa, Acre, Tyre, Sidon, Beirut, Tripoli, Damascus, Aleppo, Antioch etc.), in Iraq (e.g., at Baghdad, Mosul, Samarra, Basra, Hilla, Rahba, Oqbara, etc.), and in many cities of Iran. The Genizah records of the Palestinian synagogue of Fustat prove beyond doubt that the medieval Jews of Islamic lands in general wrote and possessed various kinds of written records, including business and personal letters, and that

their correspondence was not only local but also regional and international in scope. The other large Jewish communities of Islamic lands, of which, as we may observe, at least forty are readily identifiable, would have had communal and personal records in no lesser degree than did the community of Fustat, and even though few of those records have survived, it may be assumed that the proportions of documentary text-genres once found in those individual communities, at any one given period of the Middle Ages, was roughly the same as those at Fustat. The great majority of those cities of the Islamic world in which large Jewish communities could be found were, with the exception of those in Iran, no less accessible from the European lands than was Fustat, and those cities which served as seaports were yet more easily in the reach of European travellers and couriers than was that Egyptian city. There is thus no reason to believe that the number of proselytes arriving in the large cities elsewhere would have been any less than the number arriving at Fustat. In addition, the Genizah texts make clear that proselytes not infrequently settled in smaller Jewish communities, of which there were hundreds in the Islamic lands during the Middle Ages. The members of these smaller communities also possessed documents and also wrote and received correspondence, but virtually all of these documentary records have been destroyed except for the minuscule number by chance preserved in the one Genizah of the Palestinian synagogue of Fustat. The total Jewish population of Fustat could not by any stretch of the imagination have been more than one-fiftieth of the total Jewish population of the entire Medieval Islamic world — excluding Iran but including upper and lower Egypt, the entirety of North Africa and Andalusia, Palestine, Syria, and Iraq — nor could the percentage of the written documents of the Fustat community during the eleventh and twelfth centuries have been greater than this figure. In consonance with Jewish custom and the provisions of Jewish law, proselytes fleeing from their European countries of origin would have been received hospitably in the Jewish communities of all of these countries.

Given these geographic and demographic factors, which can be deduced without precise knowledge of the population figures of the Jewish communities of the Islamic world, and on the relatively generous assumption that the documentary portion of the Genizah contains as much as ten percent of the total number of

documents produced or possessed by the Fustat Jewish community in the two centuries under discussion, it becomes evident that the total number of proselytes fleeing their European homelands and arriving in the Jewish communities of the Islamic world (excluding those of Iran) between 1000 and 1200 C.E. was approximately 300 x 50, or fifteen thousand men and women over the span of two centuries. Due to unknown factors, the figure could have been either somewhat higher or somewhat lower, but hardly less than a minimum of ten thousand individuals, or five thousand each century. In this interpretation, the data in Genizah texts pertaining to Jewish proselytism constitutes only the paradigm of a quite large and interesting phenomenon of the earlier Middle Ages requiring explanation and further study.

While the causes of this phenomenon must be dealt with separately at length, several factors may presently be adduced to account for its rise. The church was in serious theological difficulty during the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. It took men of the stature of Anselm, Duns Scotus, Aquinas, and others to modify the problematics entailed by doctrines such as that of the Trinity and the Incarnation. An underlying disquietude with these doctrines is reflected in the writings of the great theologians themselves, and has been documented at length by modern historians of the church. The interest of Christians in the synagogue and Jewish ritual, described by Agobard of Lyons and other early medieval writers, coupled with discontent with the state of Christian belief, quite naturally gave rise to actual conversions in various European countries. Still another cause for the move toward Judaism may have been the decline of moral discipline in the monasteries and other ecclesiastical institutions precisely during the same period of time — a fact also recorded by contemporary church chroniclers and which has been dealt with at length by modern historians. One may have little doubt that the horrors of the First and Second Crusades also had an impact on various individuals in the Christian world the result of which was to further enlarge this phenomenon.

The main cause may, however, have been the inherent attraction of Judaism itself, which in the ninth through the twelfth centuries was a religion of great vitality. Jewish monotheism required no particular qualifications and was uncompromised by conflicting doctrines. That it successfully competed with

Christianity and Islam in attracting large numbers of converts to its midst is particularly shown by the Khazarian conversion to Judaism during the eighth and ninth centuries.

VI

The Khazars were a Turkic-speaking group of tribes living in the vast region between the Volga and Dnieper rivers, in what is now southern Russia. We know about them from certain Arabic and Russian sources, but particularly from several Hebrew texts of great historical importance which somehow have managed to survive into modern times.

The best known of these Hebrew sources is a detailed exchange of correspondence between the most eminent Jewish political personality of the tenth century, Ḥasdai ibn Shaprūt of Cordova, and King Joseph of the Khazars, who ruled in the middle of that century. In addition, there is another lengthy letter, discovered by Solomon Schechter in the Cambridge Genizah collection over 75 years ago, that was composed by another, anonymous Khazarian Jew and sent also to Ḥasdai at about that same time, i.e., *circa* 950 or 960 C.E. We shall discuss below still another document of the Khazars discovered some years ago also in the Cambridge Genizah collection.

The letters exchanged between Ḥasdai and the Khazars have stimulated debate among scholars almost since they were published — debate which has in our own day spilled over into the public domain. Both King Joseph and the anonymous Khazar emphasize in their letters to Ḥasdai, written from different places, that the religion practised by the Khazars was not merely monotheism or Jewish-tinged sectarianism such as we encounter frequently in the history of religions, but bona fide rabbinic Judaism. This Judaism, according to the Hebrew letters, was instituted in Khazaria by a willful act on the part of an early Khazar king, and was instilled among the Khazarian people by teachers brought to the Khazar lands by King Obadiah in the ninth century. The Hebrew letters are also in agreement that Judaism was widespread among the Khazars — and not only among their rulers or what some call the “ruling class”. Judah Halevi based his famous eleventh-century dialogue *The Kuzari* on the historical circumstance of conversion of the Khazar king, but the world of Christian scholarship, which was acquainted with Halevi’s

book, never suspected that a phenomenon of mass conversion had occurred in the Khazar lands. Thus, when Ḥasdai's letters first became known, they elicited a highly negative reaction among scholars, who could not believe that such a conversion had taken place at a time when both Christianity and Islam were available options for this people. These scholars simply could not comprehend the power of Judaism to attract large numbers to its midst, and so preferred to characterize the Hebrew texts about this conversion as falsifications. When Solomon Schechter published his discovery of a new letter of the Khazars to Ḥasdai in 1912, his findings were of course also attacked.

This skepticism of scholars about Hebrew texts which are, as we shall see, demonstrably authentic, soon played into the hands of certain writers in the Soviet Union, for some of whom historical scholarship was basically an instrument of doctrinal inculcation. To these writers the thought was abhorrent that Judaism had ever reigned in the southern reaches of the USSR, more abhorrent yet that the great city of Kiev, lying at the western extremity of Khazaria, might have been founded by Jewish Khazars and not by the Slavs. When one Soviet scholar, after much research, put forth the theory that the origins of Kiev were evidently tied up with the Khazar presence, he was severely reprimanded in the Soviet press (as recently as 1952). *Pravda* stated:

All these things have nothing in common with historical facts. The Khazar kingdom . . . played no positive role whatever in creating the statehood of the eastern Slavs . . . The Khazar kingdom, far from promoting the development of the ancient Russian State, retarded the progress of the eastern Slav tribes . . . The idealization . . . of the Khazar kingdom reflects a manifest survival of the defective views of the bourgeois historians . . .⁶³

The Soviet academician who had erred thereupon changed his theory, and later wrote:

The Khazar kingdom disintegrated and fell into pieces, . . . and a minority of the people, settling in (the city of) Itil, lost its nationality and

⁶³ See the report in the *London Times* of Sat., Jan. 12, 1952.

turned into a parasitic class with Jewish coloration . . . Jewish learning flourished only at the king's court . . . ⁶⁴

Other Soviet scholars joined in the denunciation of the Jewish Khazars and the authenticity of the Hebrew sources describing them. Their common theme was that those among the Khazars who adopted Judaism could be no more than “ruling circles”, “the top of the social pyramid”, “the rulers and their entourage”; and that these Khazars had made no positive contribution to the enlightenment of ancient Kievan Russia. The hostility of these Soviet academicians not to the ancient Khazars but to the idea that they had practised Judaism was palpable.

Then, in the early 1950s, the noted Arabist D. M. Dunlop restudied the history of the Jewish Khazars and in a book published at that time⁶⁵ supported the authenticity of the Hebrew sources. He did this not through examination of the original manuscripts but by word and content analysis of the printed texts. Dunlop was entirely unconcerned by any political or ideological consequences his findings might entail.

When Arthur Koestler, in the wake of Dunlop's findings, began to see that there was truth in this chapter of history, he sat down to ponder his own views on Judaism, and in 1976 published *The Thirteenth Tribe*. Koestler, who evidently could read neither Hebrew nor other languages needed for research on the Khazars, became more celebrated, or newly acclaimed, through this book than all previous authors of works on the Khazars put together. Koestler's message was that the Ashkenazi Jews of today, in their millions, were in fact descended not from the patriarchs, but from the Turkic-speaking Khazars of the Volga plains. His message: These Khazars adopted Judaism and then spread all through eastern and even central Europe. They were the true forebears of the Ashkenazim. Virtually all other medieval Jews of northern Europe, he claimed, died out or disappeared — and there were simply no others to account for the large Jewish population of central and eastern Europe in later centuries except the Khazars.

This conclusion in turn allowed Koestler to insist that there was no bond of

⁶⁴ M.I. Artamonov, *Istorija Khazar* (Leningrad, 1962), Eng. summary pp. 519–520.

⁶⁵ D.M. Dunlop, *History of the Jewish Khazars* (Princeton, 1954).

blood between the ancient Jews of Palestine and Ashkenazic Jewry, revealed now to be totally descended from converts. Thus Zionism, Koestler's old anathema, had no compelling historical justification. Koestler allowed that the State of Israel had the right to exist, but, for him, "Whatever the Israeli citizens' racial origins, and *whatever illusions they entertain about them* (italics mine — N. G.), their State exists . . . and cannot be undone, except by genocide . . ." The implication of this and other remarks was that the return to Zion was not an historically justifiable concept — only the actual presence of Israelis in the Jewish state compelled and sanctioned its existence. Diaspora Jewry, however, did not share in this nationhood, said Koestler; as they had no Jewish or Hebraic culture of their own, and were only, to use his term, a "pseudo-nation", there was only one solution: "Immigration to Israel or gradual assimilation to their host nations" (p. 226). In brief, Diaspora Jewry should voluntarily disappear.

Thus Koestler's final solution, for which the phenomenon of Khazarian Judaism appears to have been only a pretext.

The wide appeal of Koestler's claims aroused the concern of a number of Jewish historians, and rightly so — for they perceived the mischief at the bottom of his arguments, and the distortion of Jewish history that he had fashioned to get to his goal. At the time that the critical reviews of Koestler's book by Jewish historians began appearing, I and my colleague at Harvard, Omeljan Pritsak, were preoccupied with completing a book on the Khazars, and refrained from contributing to the debate. I took note, however, of the arguments of critics, and was surprised by the turn that they took. One writer, for example stated: "According to fragmentary evidence, the Jewish elite of Khazaria remained concentrated in the capital (city of) Itil. The surrounding masses of semi-nomadic tribes remained untouched by Judaism. Instead, over the centuries they became increasingly attached to Islam . . ." ⁶⁶ Another wrote: "As for the extent and permanence of the Khazar conversion . . . there is really much uncertainty among historians as to how many Khazars became Jews and stayed Jews . . . Most (writers) limit (the Jewish) penetration to the upper crust of the pluralistic Khazar

⁶⁶ Henry Huttenbach, in *New York Review of Books*, Dec. 9, 1976.

society.”⁶⁷ Similar statements by Jewish historians and writers appeared in the *London Times* and elsewhere. In other words, Jewish historians joined forces with the Soviet academicians in claiming that the Khazar conversion affected only the “upper” or so-called “ruling” class — that is, it was of relatively little consequence. The Soviets did so because, for them, the thought that the Jewish Khazars had contributed to the cultural and political formation of Kievan Russia was abhorrent; Jewish historians did so because they found Koestler’s ultimate racial and religious theories and his counsel of Jewish disappearance offensive and unhistorical. Both the one group and the other made their claim in defiance of the express wording of the Hebrew sources, which describe a large-scale conversion extending over two centuries.

There are, as it happens, firmer grounds for rejection of Koestler’s Khazar theory. He is fundamentally wrong in claiming that the Jews of medieval France, Germany and England disappeared or had no culture to transmit in any migration eastward. In his words, “After the destruction of Jerusalem the Jews ceased to have a language and secular culture of their own . . . the Jewish scholars and poets in Spain wrote in Arabic, others later in German, Polish, Russian, English and French . . .” (*The Thirteenth Tribe*, p. 225). Elsewhere in the book he claims that the Jewish population of medieval France and Germany was small to begin with and further reduced by such events as the Crusades, the expulsion from France of 1306, and the Black Death; while, according to him, “There were apparently no more than 2500 Jews in England at any time before their expulsion in 1290.”

It is surprising that these fallacious statements should have been allowed to appear in print uncorrected. The figure cited by Koestler as representing the number of Jews in pre-expulsion England, 2,500, is only that of those Jews over twelve years of age residing in *London* just before 1290, not in all of England; the total number of English Jews expelled in 1290 is given by chroniclers, with different sources of information, as approximately fifteen to sixteen thousand individuals, all of whom were forced to flee to the Continent in 1290. Then again, the Jews of France and Germany were by no means a small and insignificant body; the

⁶⁷ Edward Grossman, “Koestler’s Jewish Problem”, *Commentary*, Dec. 1976, pp. 59–64.

Sephardic Jew Nahmanides, who had excellent sources of information, writes in the thirteenth century that the number of the French Jews alone was two hundred thousand. Jews inhabited hundreds of cities and villages in medieval France, and when they were expelled in 1306 they moved eastward in a mighty stream. Both in France and in Germany the medieval Jews had an intense *Hebrew* culture; their scholars and authors (of whom Koestler appears to have known nothing), wrote hundreds of books on diverse subjects in Hebrew, not in French or German. The movement eastward of German Jews can be demonstrated by the wide spread of Judaeo-German (which became Yiddish) virtually all through the eastern European diaspora. What has apparently not been emphasized by scholars is the remarkable fact that, when rabbinical schools, or *yeshivot*, began springing up in the great eastern European centers in the fifteenth century approximately, the fundamental Talmudic study in which their pupils engaged was that system employed by the French Jews, and it was the writings of Franco-Jewish rabbinic scholars whom they primarily consulted in elucidating the Talmud. (Thus any volume of the Talmud printed, for example, in Slawita, Vilna, Czernowitz, or elsewhere in eastern Europe will inevitably have the commentary of Rashi, a French Jew, on the inner margin of every page, and that of the Tossafists, most of whom were also French, on the outside margin of each page.) These phenomena of Judaeo-German language on the one hand and French rabbinic culture on the other, appearing pervasively in the Jewish populations of eastern European lands, can only be explained with satisfaction on the assumption of widespread migrations eastward of French and German Jews, in the wake of the expulsion of 1306 and the persecutions following the spread of the Black Death in the 14th century. And any theory of the origins of today's Ashkenzic Jewish population that excludes these factors — such as Koestler's — does not merit serious thought.

Yet at the same time there remains the question, raised by various writers, of the authenticity of the tenth-century correspondence concerning the Khazars, which describes a widespread conversion to Judaism. The theme of inauthenticity of Hebrew texts is, to be sure, not unknown in modern historiography. Passages in the writings of Obadiah the Proselyte have, for example, sometimes been described as false or inauthentic; while so ancient and precious a text as the Copper Scroll

found near Khirbet Qumran has also been so labelled, on no more solid a basis than assertions of authors whose historical judgments were formed and hardened before its discovery, and thereafter found to be in conflict with statements in the new document. In the case of the Khazarian Hebrew texts, the accusation of inauthenticity, indeed of forgery, reached its apogee with H. Grégoire's 1937 article "Le 'Glozel' Khazare"⁶⁸ — but neither he nor critics who preceded or followed him were aware of the wider background of the Khazarian Hebrew texts, which in fact form part of a corpus of writings that once constituted the diplomatic correspondence of Ḥasdai ibn Shaprūt.⁶⁹ Parts of this correspondence have been discovered over the past century among the documents of the Cairo Genizah.

Ḥasdai, both in his capacity as *major domo* in the Cordovan court of 'Abd al-Rahmān III and Al-Ḥakam and in his role as chief figure of the Andalusian Jewry, had an extensive correspondence with important personalities in other countries. It is not surprising that the surviving copy of a letter sent to him by Provençal communal figures (T-S Misc. 35.45)⁷⁰ should come from the very same codex as the extant Cambridge copy (T-S Misc. 35.38) of an anonymous Khazarian Jew's letter to Ḥasdai, in which various historical events in Khazarian history are described. This same Provençal letter, which concerns the infamous and otherwise well-documented blow to the Jews inflicted annually upon a Jew by the bishop of Toulouse, refers by name to the very diplomatic emissaries described in Ḥasdai's epistle to King Joseph of the Khazars, who were instrumental in establishing contact between Ḥasdai and the monarch.⁷¹ The details in Ḥasdai's lengthy letter to

⁶⁸ See *Byzantion* XII (1937): 225–66, and my criticism in N. Golb and O. Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1982), p. 78, note 11, and generally *ibid.*, pp. 77.

⁶⁹ The extant portions of this correspondence are described in detail in Golb and Pritsak, *op. cit.*, pp. 75–95.

⁷⁰ This and other letters of the Ḥasdaian correspondence (see below) were first published by J. Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, I (Cincinnati, 1931), pp. 3–30. Cf. the new readings of phrases in these texts and the ensuing discussion in Golb and Pritsak, *op. cit.*, pp. 79 ff.

⁷¹ Cf. Golb and Pritsak, *op. cit.*, pp. 91–93.

Joseph,⁷² moreover, are such that they could only have been known and related by an important official in the court of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, and are obviously of a genuine historic nature. The letter is preceded by a poetic prologue which not only is in the style of Menahem b. Sarūq, Ḥasdai’s secretary and the most eminent of the Andalusian Hebrew poets at that time, but also acrostically bears both Hasdai’s and Menahem’s names.

In another letter, sent by Ḥasdai to Helena of Byzantium evidently at a time of local or regional persecution of Byzantine Jews, Ḥasdai pointedly reminds the empress of the well-being of the Christians of Andalusia under the benevolent rule of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. Then, turning to another subject, he speaks of the “land of the Khazars”, and requests use of a raft-like ship of the Byzantine navy — one which could, it is clear from the context, navigate the Don and Volga rivers and in this way eventually arrive at the Khazar capital of Itil.⁷³

All of these details in the remnants of the Ḥasdaian diplomatic correspondence are indicative of the authentic historical quality of the letters exchanged between Ḥasdai and the Khazars. What is more, there is much historical data in the replies of King Joseph and the anonymous Khazar to Ḥasdai⁷⁴ that corroborates or augments facts already known from other sources about the Khazarian kingdom and its relations with neighboring peoples.⁷⁵ Such sources as these two valuable letters cannot become inadmissible as historic evidence simply because they, in addition, supply new information to the meager repertoire of knowledge otherwise available about the Khazars: the new information on the contrary only enhances their historical value. Moreover, if Joseph of the Khazars states in his reply to Ḥasdai that rabbinic Judaism was widely practised in Khazaria

⁷² Published by P. Kokovcov, *Evrejsko-xazarskaya perepiska v X veke* (Leningrad, 1932), pp. 10–19.

⁷³ Cf. my discussion of the pertinent details in this letter, and the new readings of the text, in Golb and Pritsak, *op. cit.*, pp. 79–83.

⁷⁴ See Kokovcov, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 ff. and 33–36. A new edition and translation of the anonymous Khazar’s epistle appears in Golb and Pritsak, *op. cit.*, pp. 106–121; cf. the photographic reproduction of this latter text, and of the recto side of the Provençal letter, *ibid.*, pp. 96–100.

⁷⁵ See the detailed discussion by O. Pritsak in Golb and Pritsak, *op. cit.*, pp. 125–156.

by proselytes, and if the anonymous Khazarian Jew in his reply to Ḥasdai confirms this fact by his own independent testimony — all within the context of a sober diplomatic correspondence that by now has become well known — it is hardly appropriate, as a matter of investigative method, to single out such passages as inauthentic because of old preconceptions concerning the nature of medieval Judaism, or its attraction or lack thereof to non-Jews, in those times. There is now too much known about medieval Jewish proselytism to allow the claim of inauthenticity or forgery of the Khazarian correspondence on such grounds.

On the nature of Jewish proselytism in Khazaria, the two epistles sent to Ḥasdai contain precious information, although the letters are of course couched in the idiom of medieval chroniclers, not of modern historians. Joseph explains to Ḥasdai that after the religious disputation that resulted in Bulan's choosing Judaism over the other two monotheistic faiths

he circumcised himself, his slaves and servants, and all his people; he sent for and imported Israelite sages from various places, and they expounded the Torah to him and arranged all the commandments for him. We are until the present day of that religion . . . ⁷⁶

The anonymous Khazar in his separate reply to Ḥasdai augments Joseph's description in stating that the inhabitants of Khazaria, although at first "without Torah", were "confirmed . . . in the covenant of circumcision" while only some among them observed the Sabbath.⁷⁷ He writes that, after the religious disputation and the discovery of books of the Torah in a cave — evidently an element in the Khazarian historical mythos — "the sages of Israel explained (those books) according to the previous words which they had spoken", i.e. during the disputation.⁷⁸ He adds that the inhabitants of Khazaria "returned" wholeheartedly to Judaism; then

⁷⁶ Ed. Kokovcov, p. 30; cf. Golb and Pritsak, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁷⁷ See the text and translation in Golb and Pritsak, *op. cit.*, pp. 106–107 (fol. 1 recto, lines 6–7).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 110–111 (fol. 1 verso, lines 10–11).

the Jews began to come from Baghdad, from Khorasan and the land of Greece — they strengthened the men of the land, so that (these latter) held fast to the covenant of the “Father of a Multitude”.⁷⁹

According to Joseph’s letter, a descendent of Bulan named Obadiah later on

renewed the kingship and strengthened the religion as was fit and proper; he built synagogues and schools, brought together Israelite scholars, and gave them silver and gold. They expounded the Twenty-Four Books (=the Hebrew Bible), the Mishnah, Talmud and mahazors (=liturgical works) of the precentors. (Obadiah) was a pious man, loving the Torah, a servant of the Lord . . . ⁸⁰

Joseph thus emphasizes that the turn to Judaism was widespread in Khazaria, and that the Judaism practised was the traditional rabbinic form of that religion, not an exotic or sectarian variety such as has been suggested from time to time by modern historians. Abraham ibn Da’ud, writing *circa* 1160 C.E., knew Ḥasdai’s correspondence, and emphasized that Joseph had described Khazarian Judaism as being in the traditional rabbinic mold; he adds that

we have seen in Toledo some of (the Khazars’) descendants who are scholars, and they informed us that their remnant was of the rabbinic belief.⁸¹

That a genuine, widespread proselytized rabbinic Judaism was implanted in Khazaria in the ninth and tenth centuries is now demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt by the discovery in the Cambridge Genizah collection of an autograph letter (T-S 12.122) of the Khazarian Jewish community of Kiev, the westernmost city of the Khazar state. This letter, which was written *circa* 930 C.E., concerns a captive redeemed by that community.⁸² It is phrased in excellent

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 110–111 (fol. 1 verso, lines 12–15).

⁸⁰ Ed. Kokovcov, pp. 31 ff.

⁸¹ Gerson Cohen, *The Book of Tradition by Abraham ibn David* (Philadelphia, 1967) p. 68; cf. Golb and Pritsak, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–31.

⁸² See the full edition and translation of this text in Golb and Pritsak, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–15; and the discussion concerning its significance *ibid.*, pp. 3–8, 20–71. S. Schwarzfuchs (*Revue de l’Histoire des Religions*, CCI-4/1984: 432–434) proposes that the letter is written to, rather than by, the community of Kiev. Taken out of context, the crucial words of the letter (line 8) may indeed be so

rabbinic Hebrew expressing fundamental concepts and beliefs of rabbinic Judaism, and yet is attested at its end by a number of signatories six of whom have distinctively Khazarian names.⁸³ What is more, the Hebrew names appearing in the document are not those characteristically found in autochthonous Jewish communities, but are almost exclusively Biblical names favored by proselytes and borne by the rulers of Khazaria after the period of initial Judaization.⁸⁴ At the bottom of the document is a single word in Khazarian runes meaning "I have read (it)", and indicating that the letter was approved by a censor or customs official at a border station before its bearer was allowed to proceed on the journey he had undertaken, which apparently ended in Fustat.⁸⁵

Thus this letter, a genuine autograph of Khazarian proselytes, proves, if proof were needed, the authenticity of the other Khazarian Hebrew texts, and demonstrates anew that this people did indeed undergo a widespread conversion to

construed. Since, however, lines 4–6 of the letter are unambiguously addressed to "men of truth . . . holy communities scattered to all (the world's) corners", the subsequent statement of identification in line 8 must clearly be translated as "We, community of Kiev, (hereby) inform you" etc., rather than "We (hereby) inform you, community of Kiev", as Schwarzfuchs proposes. Letters of recommendation found in the Genizah are characteristically addressed to Jewish communities in general, while the communities sending them are identified by name. This and other considerations (cf. Golb and Pritsak, *op. cit.*, p.6) were completely disregarded by Schwarzfuchs when making his proposal.

⁸³ See particularly the treatment of these names by O. Pritsak in Golb and Pritsak, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–40.

⁸⁴ See Golb and Pritsak, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–26. M. Gil (*Journal of Near Eastern Studies* XLVI, 1987:145) argues that the Khazarian names were merely those that original Jewish settlers rather than proselytes took on as a measure of name-assimilation after their arrival in Khazaria. In formulating this proposal, however, he disregarded the evidence of the *Hebrew* name-characteristics, examined by me in considerable detail (*Khazarian Hebrew Documents*, pp. 21–26), and which are demonstrably proselytic in nature. It is the combination of evidence drawn from both the Khazarian and the Hebrew names which makes Gil's proposal highly unlikely, and the reason for suggesting it unclear.

⁸⁵ Golb and Pritsak, *op. cit.*, pp. 41–43. M. Gil (*op. cit.*, p. 146) argues that it was more likely that the bearer of the letter first brought it to Jerusalem, but there is no evidence within the text to corroborate this suggestion. The document was preserved in the Fustat Genizah, and as a general rule it is more reasonable, in my opinion, to assume, in the absence of specific evidence to the contrary somewhere in the texts, that such documents were brought to their final destination by their original bearers.

Judaism. (At the same time, some of the Khazarian sub-tribes remained pagan or in the course of time chose other monotheistic faiths.) The Jewish Khazars played a definite role in the history of Kiev, the mother city of earliest Russia. While there is no evidence that Khazarian Judaism ever contributed creatively to Hebraic literary culture or higher Jewish learning, there can be no doubt that, in choosing rabbinic Judaism, the Khazars also adopted the fundamental writings of that faith, that is the Bible as well as the Talmudic and Midrashic literature; and that they had among them teachers and learned men, in most cases brought in from centers of Jewish culture such as Palestine and Iraq, to teach and minister to the people. It is inconceivable that this mass adhering to the Jewish faith did not survive the coming of the early Russians and eventually mingle and intermarry with elements of Ashkenazic Jewry. The Khazarian Jews could not but have formed a stream in the emerging eastern European Jewry of the later Middle Ages, and this should surprise no one, nor be the cause of any unease or puzzlement. Long before the Khazars, Judaism had fully validated the principle of conversion, and worked out the means whereby it might be effected. As stated above, in the Roman Empire Judaism competed with Christianity for the pagan mind, and there were many then who chose its path, as others did in later civilizations. The Khazars were among these, and their vicissitudes demonstrate, as do those of the individual proselytes considered above, that in early medieval times rabbinic Judaism was neither racist nor exclusivist, but a fundamentally spiritual entity, fostered by a group whose deep impulse was to reach out to the world and embrace it.