One Image

> Was it for you, oh giants of the Talmud, that he toiled? He was forced to create a book that would provide refuge from the Greek philosophers, to afford some distance from Aristotle and Galen. Have you heard their words? Have you gone astray after their proofs? Not for you, my masters.
>
> Moses ben Nahman, letter to northern France

These words were penned in 1232 by Moses Nahmanides, doyen of Aragonese Jewry, in an effort to dissuade the leading rabbis of northern France from supporting a campaign against the teachings of Moses Maimonides. Maimonides should not be condemned, reasons Nahmanides, because his purpose was noble: He sought to provide the Jews of Arab lands with a theology compatible with the Greco-Arabic science and philosophy in which they were steeped, but one that would also safeguard them from the heresies of the ancient Greeks. Nahmanides explains to his northern addressees that they cannot possibly appreciate the challenge facing Maimonides because they were never exposed to philosophy and its perils.

Nahmanides' passage is among the earliest recorded testimonies by an outsider about the nature of Jewish culture in Ashkenaz, or Franco-Germany, in the Middle Ages, which is the subject of this book.[1] In referring to the northern rabbis as giants of the Talmud, Nahmanides spotlights the centrality of the Talmud in the culture of Franco-German Jewry, and more important for his purpose, he emphasizes the Ashkenazic Jews' innocence of Greco-Arabic philosophical thought and its pernicious theological impact.

The comparison between Spain and Ashkenaz has been a common theme in the historiography of medieval Jewry, although intellectual horizons is only one issue concerning what differentiates the two cultures. And just as the comparative exercise served Nahmanides in the raging Maimonidean controversy, so too has it served a variety of agendas in modern Jewish historiography. Surveying the range of portrayals of medieval Ashkenaz offered by latter-day historians is the goal of this first chapter, which sets the stage for the reexamination of the prevailing image.

Medieval and Early Modern Perspectives

Modern Jewish historiography begins in nineteenth-century Germany, in the wake of the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, and these early historians certainly had a great deal to say about the Jews of medieval Ashkenaz for reasons particular to their own historical context. But as the Nahmanides quote illustrates, characterizations appear before the modern era in various genres, and for the most part these early discussions were known to modern historians and provided grist for their mills. Our story begins, therefore, in the Middle Ages.

Medieval Jewish writers rarely left accounts of historical events involving medieval Jews or Jewish communities. The most popular genre of writing about the past is the so-called chain of tradition, which lists scores of rabbis in chronological order, from master to disciple, to convince the reader of the integrity of the Oral Law. Although these texts usually focus on late antiquity, they sometimes continue into the Middle Ages, naming the heads of the Babylonian academies. Abraham ibn Daud's *Book of Tradition*, written in twelfth-century Toledo, falls within this genre and was highly influential. At the end of his particular chain, which concentrates on the Jews of Andalusia, Ibn Daud turns his gaze on those of northern Europe: "We have heard that in France there are great scholars and geonim, and that each and every one of them is a rabbi who inherits the Torah appropriately, [that is,] with the intention of passing it on." Ibn Daud names a few scholars from Narbonne, which was relatively nearby, and then adds the name of the greatest of the French tosafists or glossators, Jacob of Ramerupt, who is generally known as Rabbenu Tam.[2] Clearly the Jews of France had acquired a reputation for excellence in rabbinic scholarship, word of which had reached the Iberian peninsula. This was also the impression of Benjamin of Tudela, who visited the Jewish communities of southern France in the twelfth century as he began his journey to the East. In his well-known itinerary, Benjamin expresses great respect for their institutions of rabbinic scholarship, singling out the academy of Rabad, that is, Abraham ben David of Posquières, the leading talmudist of southern France.[3]

At around the same time, Moses Maimonides notes a distinction between the halakhic expertise of rabbis living in the Christian domain and

those of the Islamic realm. He observes that the scholars of "France" (i.e., the lands of the Franks) and of the lands of the uncircumcised generally (i.e., Christendom), are not expert at the laws of jurisprudence (*dinin*) "because they do not use them extensively, since the uncircumcized do not allow them to judge, as the Ishmaelites do. Thus, when a case comes before them, they go on and on, and do not know it [the law] until they search the Talmud thoroughly, as we do today regarding the laws of sacrifices, for we do not deal with them."[4] True or not, this is an astute suggestion about the significance of the political-religious context for the course of halakhic scholarship in Europe.

In contrast to the halakhic expertise of the Franco-German scholars, Jews from the Islamic realm noted their ignorance of other disciplines. Sephardic Jews saw their Ashkenazic brethren as deficient in Hebrew language and literature, in which realms the Sephardic Jews had made great strides under the influence of Arabic linguistics and literature.[5] For instance, Joseph Kimhi, a Spaniard who settled in Provence in the mid-twelfth century, disparages the contribution of French Jewry—primarily Jacob of Ramerupt—to the linguistic debate about the nature of Hebrew, an issue over which Menahem ben Saruq and Dunash ben Labrat, the master grammarians of tenth-century Spain, had locked horns: "The Jews of France and environs engaged primarily in Talmud, and occasionally in Bible . . . but not in Hebrew usage, and thus they did not gain mastery thereof."[6] A bit later, Judah Alharizi, who pioneered Hebrew *maqamah* (rhymed-prose tales interspersed with metered verse), terms the poetry of French Jewry "not worth hearing . . . hard as iron . . . their rhymes are full of errors, they strain for innovation but are incomprehensible without explication."[7] He sums up, "When the sages of France and of Greece set their hearts on the Torah and claimed its domain, all knowledge and wisdom they won for themselves—but abandoned song's kingdom to Spain."[8]

The Jews of Germany and France were weak in Hebrew linguistics because they knew no Arabic, the language used by the Andalusian giants even when discussing Hebrew language. This curricular handicap also denied them access to the scientific achievements of the Islamic world, including those of its Jewish thinkers. In reply to a letter from Samuel ibn Tibbon, a Spaniard living in southern France who was then

preparing a Hebrew translation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides expresses astonishment at his interlocutor's erudition: "How could it be in the nature of one born among the mumblers to chase after the sciences . . . ? This can only be 'like a root out of arid land' [Isa. 53:2]."[9] Maimonides' amazement and his reference to Christendom as the land of the mumblers, an arid land, barren of scientific knowledge, fleshes out the curricular aspect of the prevailing image of northern European Jewry in the Sephardic and Oriental world.

The translation of numerous scientific works from Arabic to Hebrew, beginning in the twelfth century, is eloquent testimony to the deficiency of European Jewry in the arts and sciences. Abraham ibn Ezra, a twelfth-century scholar who left Spain and spent several years in Latin Europe, wrote new works in several fields, including Hebrew language, for the edification of the European audience, on account of their ignorance of Arabic and thus of scientific knowledge.[10] In a poem bemoaning his own ill fortune, Ibn Ezra writes, "In Edom [Christendom] there is no glory for any scholar who dwells in the land of the son of Qedar [Islam], and they hoot at us; whereas if there were to come a Greek grasshopper, whom they esteem, and he were to ride anyone's back, he would be deemed one of the giants!"[11] Ibn Ezra's feeling that he commanded little respect among the Jews of Latin Europe, who were intellectually oriented toward Byzantine rather than Arab culture, sits well with other medieval Sephardic scholars' statements regarding the nonphilosophical character of European-Jewish cultural creativity.

The scientific mind-set of the Jews living in Qedar stimulated efforts to offer allegorical, rationalistic interpretations of biblical and aggadic passages, particularly of texts conveying an anthropomorphic conception of God. Although this exegetical tendency appeared briefly in twelfth-century France, ultimately it did not displace the traditional literalist interpretation of the images and texts that exercised the Andalusians so vigorously. Thus a Maimunist writes that the Jews of France (i.e., northern Europe) "appear to know the blessed Creator only when they eat boiled beef dipped in vinegar and garlic, in the dip known in their language as *salsa*: the fumes of the vinegar and garlic ascend to their brain, and then they think that these enable them to perceive the blessed Creator at any time." Here we have a satirical characterization

of northern European Jewry as believing that God can be visualized, which is a fundamentally anthropomorphic notion. This writer also portrays the Europeans' conception of God as radically immanent; they allegedly believe that God is close to them when they pray and when they study Talmud and other texts, as well as when they speak freely about him, as they often do.[12] The anthropomorphic and immanent conception of God imputed to Ashkenazic Jewry in this text differs significantly from that of the Jews of Islam, whose theology was framed by their rationalist *paidaea*.[13]

Further testimony to the nonphilosophical image of Ashkenazic Jewry is found in the Bible commentary of Zerahiah ben She'altiel Hen of Barcelona, who lived in thirteenth-century Rome. Zerahiah records a conversation with a student who was unable to grasp the esoteric meaning of a verse in Ecclesiastes (10:1) and then notes that he realized that the student "was a disciple of the Ashkenazim." Zerahiah may have meant that the student was literally an Ashkenazic Jew, and hence that he was untrained in allegorical interpretation, or else perhaps that the student merely preferred literalist exegesis, for which the northern Europeans had gained renown.[14]

Beginning in the twelfth century, the Jews of medieval Ashkenaz left abundant evidence about how they evaluated their own culture. Self-evaluations are supremely important, although they pose different methodological problems than do the impressions of outsiders. The Ashkenazic sources require sensitive and thorough treatment, and I therefore discuss them at length in later chapters. The next cluster of non-Ashkenazic texts about Ashkenazic Jewry dates from the sixteenth century, when a series of Sephardic writers wrote litanies of persecution, shifting our attention from intellectual to political activity.[15] Gedalya ibn Yahya's *Shalshelet ha-Qabbalah* ("Chain of Tradition") devotes a section to the chain-of-tradition genre as well, but most of the other histories of this period do not. These litanies include tales from Ashkenaz and offer a variety of approaches to the behavior and fate of various Jewish ethnic groups under adverse circumstances.

The most famous and influential of these works is Solomon ibn Verga's *Shevet Yehudah* ("Staff of Judah"), first published in Adrianople in 1553 and frequently thereafter. *Shevet Yehudah* contains different types

of narrative materials, and our particular concern is with the tales of persecution, in which typically the Jews must either convert to Christianity or choose between death and expulsion. There are dozens of such stories, involving the Jews of many lands, including Ashkenaz, which in Ibn Verga's work refers specifically to Germany, as Ibn Verga also offers stories about France and Provence.

Ibn Verga has relatively little to say about Ashkenaz, and he explains that this is partly because these Jews have recorded their own legacy and partly because they are simply too distant for him to know much about them. "Those of Ashkenaz and their leaders wrote a scroll about their troubles, and made a great big book about their matters in those lands, and because they were already written, I have not seen fit to write them here, especially when the truth of the matters did not reach us, for we are far away."[16] All the same, Ibn Verga offers three Ashkenaz tales, and they are quite revealing. He writes that in 1300 the Jews of Ashkenaz were accused of poisoning the rivers, and the king ordered them converted or killed. There were "decrees," that is, persecution, "throughout the lands of Ashkenaz and Provence," and "everywhere the Ashkenazim sanctified the name of the great God and his Torah and did not exchange their honor," namely apostatize.[17] The text does not spell out how the Jews of Provence behaved on this trying occasion, and this silence might be interpreted to mean that they exhibited lesser fortitude.

A second tale also has an Ashkenazic community facing the choice of conversion or death, this time with a three-day waiting period in which to make their decision. At the end of the waiting period, we read, because salvation did not miraculously materialize, "they all agreed to die."[18] However, Ibn Verga records that this time "the young men of the community decided to avenge themselves on their persecutors before dying for the sanctification of the [divine] name," and so they stabbed all the townsmen, and their wives set the town ablaze (at their husbands' instruction), and thus the Jews perished with the Christians in the fire.[19] This account adds the element of active resistance to the victims' willingness to suffer martyrdom, indicating that passivity was not part of Ibn Verga's image of Ashkenazic Jewry.

Ibn Verga also reports another case in which German Jews were given three days to convert or die. These Jews agreed among themselves "to

slaughter each other, rather than [die] at the hands of the gentiles, and that whoever is not sufficiently brave would beg the beadle to kill him. And so it was."[20] Here, too, the Jews of Ashkenaz do not suffer martyrdom passively—they slaughter each other and themselves, a behavior famously associated with the First Crusade, an episode to be discussed at length in later chapters.

The historicity of these stories is not our concern. Unfortunately, most of Ibn Verga's sources have not been identified, and therefore it is impossible to identify any subtle changes he might have introduced and thereby obtain a better grasp of how he understood the tales. In any case, what matters most is the stories' inclusion in *Shevet Yehudah*, which indicates that they reflect Ibn Verga's image of Ashkenazic Jewry.

Ibn Verga's Ashkenaz tales mark German Jewry as steadfast in the face of persecution. Ibn Verga also narrates the martyrological acts of Jews from other lands. In the Spanish persecution of 1391, we read that "many were killed in sanctification of the name of God," although Ibn Verga admits that most Jews apostatized.[21] There is also a story of self-slaughter from France: Ibn Verga reports that in 179, namely 1219,[22] the Jews of Anjou, Poitiers, and Bretagne faced forced conversion and that more than 3,000 were martyred "and many slaughtered themselves," and that more than 500 apostatized. Elsewhere in France, Ibn Verga writes, "all the Jews sanctified the [divine] name, and were burned with their children."[23] The Jews of France and Germany are not the only ones to prefer martyrdom to apostasy in *Shevet Yehudah*; in a persecution in Greece, says Ibn Verga, "all the Romaniote Jews, big and small, sanctified the name [of God]."[24]

Nevertheless, it appears that Ibn Verga thought that the Jews of Ashkenaz had a more marked martyrological propensity than did their co-religionists from other lands. In a broad statement about the reduction in the number of Jews worldwide, he observed that, whereas one in a thousand remain of those who settled in Spain, among Franco-German Jewry "many sanctified the [divine] name, were killed in the thousands, and only one in five thousand of the original settlers remain."[25] The reference to martyrdom in this sentence leaves no room for the suggestion that Ibn Verga attributed the greater decimation of French and German Jewry to apostasy; in his mind, martyrdom was especially prevalent in

northern Europe, and the Jews were persecuted more severely there than in Spain.[26]

Ibn Verga's view of the medieval persecution of European Jewry differs markedly from that of Samuel Usque, a Portuguese ex-Marrano, whose *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel* serves up a broad assortment of Jewish suffering, including libels of various sorts and their fatal consequences. In an effort to convince the Marranos of Portugal to return to Judaism, Usque argues that the Jews' suffering represents divine retribution for their shortcomings, and he often tags the tales of woe with particular transgressions. Usque's "explanation" of a tragic, violent episode is never the Jews' failure to recognize Jesus, and thus he implicitly justifies the rejection of Christianity while also assuring his reader that divine redemption is as certain as divine punishment.

Usque's pattern of recording both punishment and sin sheds light on his perception of Jewish life in northern Europe. Unlike Ibn Verga, Usque conflates France and Germany. Usque's narrative highlights the economic success of the Jews and the tension supposedly created by the economic gap between them and their Christian neighbors, and in this he also differs from Ibn Verga. For Germany, he records, "In Torti, a province of Germany, where my children were thriving in number and riches, I saw envy breed such a hatred in the populace that they sought any means to plunder and destroy them."[27] Usque sometimes adds that the Jews' usury habitually engendered gentile hatred, as in the following: "Because the Christians in France hated the Jewish usurers, the poor Israelite people living in Paris were charged with having killed a Christian youth in order to celebrate the Passover with his blood."[28] Yet Usque does not differentiate between European countries; the pattern of crisis and response is basically the same in Germany, France, Spain, and elsewhere. Nor does Usque depict the Jews of Franco-Germany as more steadfast or pious than their Iberian confreres, and in his account they do not appear as martyrs in greater numbers or percentages.

Joseph ha-Kohen's *Emek ha-Bakha* ("Vale of Tears") also fails to distinguish between ethnic groups. This sits well with the fact that, although ha-Kohen carefully records the incident that sparked a particular

anti-Jewish act, he does not search for root causes. There is, however, an exception: "The Jews of Paris and environs grew in number, wealth and property, and took slaves and maidservants, the daughters of alien gods [Mal. 2:11], whereupon the French envied them greatly" and accused them of desecrating Christian chalices.[29] As in Usque's *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, this passage highlights the envy aroused among the gentile population by Jewish prosperity, but here the reference to the verse from Malachi discloses that the Jews' misfortunes were the product of their own sexual malfeasance.

How widespread this social ill was among the Jews of northern Europe cannot be determined, but the vice of sexual relations with "the daughters of alien gods" is documented in a penitential manual by Eleʿazar of Worms, a leading thirteenth-century pietist, who records the corporeal mortification to be self-inflicted as penance for transgressions of various sorts, including sexual malfeasance.[30] However, the issue of sex with the daughters of alien gods is not particular to Ashkenaz, for it occupied a prominent position in the image of Iberian Jewry and consequently in the perception of Spanish-Jewish history. In the thirteenth century, it is the subject of homiletical exhortation by Moses of Coucy and Moses Nahmanides, and it appears in Zoharic literature as well.[31] In 1281 the Toledo community enacted a set of penitential measures, including a ban on Jewish-Christian sexual activity.[32] This proscription crops up again in a penitential text by Judah ben Asher of Toledo in the mid-fourteenth century.[33] Abraham Zacut, whose history, *Sefer Yuhasin* (Book of Lineage), antedates the other sixteenth-century historical works mentioned, suggests that this vice was responsible for the Spanish riots of 1391.[34] Joseph ha-Kohen's use of the phrase from Malachi may therefore reflect the particularly Sephardic resonance of this socioreligious issue rather than—or more than—the sexual mores of Parisian Jews.

The sixteenth century also marked a new, large-scale social and cultural encounter between Iberian and Ashkenazic Jewry, as immigrants from these regions relocated in Italy and the Ottoman empire and established multiethnic Jewish communities. Conflict was inevitable, and its literary expressions include generalizations about the qualities of the ethnic rivals, chiefly the Ashkenazic and Sephardic blocs. One of

the themes of this discourse was the northern Europeans' tendency to adopt stringent positions on halakhic issues.[35] This reputation is attributable, at least in part, to the historical development of Franco-German halakhah, which was less wedded to the institutional chain of tradition than its counterpart in the Islamic realm and hence more easily disposed to break new ground.[36]

Stringency in Jewish law has always been equated with piety, and thus the Sephardic communities were perceived by some as more worldly and less pious than the French and Germans. David Messer Leon, an Italian Jew living in sixteenth-century Albania, contrasts the spiritual purity of the northern Europeans to the Sephardim, "most of whose great men and authors were always with the kings and lords of the gentiles, in their courts."[37] The courtly culture of Spain was a time-honored target of homiletical criticism, long before the Expulsion, and Messer Leon's comment reflects the symmetric link between Sephardic worldliness and halakhic laxity on the one hand and Ashkenazic insularity and scrupulous observance on the other.

The Ashkenazic image did not change perceptibly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, although the large-scale destruction during the so-called Chmielnicki massacres in eastern Europe in the mid-seventeenth century reinforced the impression that the Jews of northern Europe suffered greatly and frequently from religious persecution and violence. This feature was already laden with the connotations that Ashkenazic Jewry was faithful unto death, that Jewish-Christian relations in northern Europe were tense and polarized, and hence also that the society and culture of this ethnic bloc were insular and parochial. The obverse of this caricature was a society in which Jews were acculturated, relations with gentiles were cordial, and Jewish culture included the arts and sciences. This was also obviously a caricature, the caricature of Sepharad. The *paidaea* of Jewish culture and the nature of Jew-gentile interaction were the core issues of premodern Jewish life, which is why they are the subtext of medieval and early modern Jewish historiography, dictating the image of both Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jewry. As we will see, the same issues exercised the first modern historians, despite the enormous difference in historical context between the ages.

Haskalah and *Wissenschaft des Judentums*

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the Maskilim, or proponents of Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), urged their contemporaries to acquire a general education and attain proficiency in the vernacular and emphasized the novelty of their enterprise by contrasting their ethos and their achievements in these areas with those of their benighted ancestors. These writers characterized the premodern period as a Dark Age, and as a rule they affixed this label to the entire period separating their age from late antiquity. For example, Saul Ascher, in *Leviathan*, identified the beginnings of decline in the Second Temple period, and Solomon Maimon and Lazarus Ben-David posited a similar chronological scheme.[38] David Friedländer argued that the decision to record the Oral Law drove the Jews to pay excessive attention to halakhah and messianism rather than to science, signaling a decline in the quality of Jewish creative thought.[39] Enlightenment writing also associated the culture of premodern Europe with mysticism and magic, which were antithetical to the rationalistic ideal and hence dismissed as superstition. Beshtian Hasidism, with which the Maskilim associate these vices, was often the implied target of this veiled but pointed criticism.[40]

More common in Maskilic writing is the distinction between the ignorant and parochial Ashkenazic Jew and his educated and cultivated Iberian cousin. The record of Andalusian involvement and achievement in the humanities, philosophy, and science and the conspicuous absence of such activity among the Jews of northern Europe for most of the Middle Ages invited the invidious comparison between the two blocs. The Maskilim associated their own society with that of medieval Ashkenaz, which they perceived as backward and introverted, and as the obverse of Sephardic culture, which they praised and with which they identified. Solomon Maimon, a child of traditional Lithuania who became a Berlin intellectual, heaped praise on the enlightened state of Andalusian Jewry and bemoaned the state of medieval France, which he said was characterized by "unparalleled political upheaval, ignorance and vulgarity."[41]

The ethnic slant of the Maskilim is mostly expressed by the silence in which they gloss over, in their historical writings, the record of intellectual achievement in medieval France and Germany. This is particularly striking

in the series of biographical essays published in *Ha-Me'assef*, the Maskilic periodical first published in Königsburg in 1784. In the preface to the first issue, the Hebrew Language Society announces that the journal will offer a column on "the Greats of Israel," including scholars in Torah and in science (*hokhmah*) as well as laymen who aided Israel financially and politically.[42] The list of biographical subjects includes Spanish-Jewish figures, who are portrayed as broadly educated, rationalistic thinkers. Naturally, Maimonides is the model and hero of this kind of historical narrative, and other subjects, from other lands and later centuries, include Isaac Abarbanel, Azariah de' Rossi, Joseph Solomon Delmedigo, and Menasseh ben Israel, as well as lesser known figures, among them Isaac Orobio de Castro, Moses Raphael D'Aguilar, and Jacob Judah Leon. Not one biography was devoted to a personage from medieval France or Germany.[43] Similarly, *Ha-Me'assef* published an article on the Spanish Expulsion, but none about the fate of northern European Jewry.

The biographical essay on Delmedigo illustrates the didactic, Maskilic purpose of this type of writing. The statement that Delmedigo's father was a great talmudist and a great scholar in philosophy in Padua is followed by the following footnote:

> Remembering this, my heart is saddened within me when I see many of our people's teachers heaping scorn on every branch of wisdom and science; and they do not even understand the language of the people among whom they live, and nevertheless they do not hesitate to heap scorn on those who seek after it in order to confound them, saying that they have acted against God and despised his Torah. Look at the family of great, godfearing individuals, who taught Torah but also chose to walk in the path of wisdom and clung to science. Would that they would take this to heart, and it would serve for the greater dignity and fame of the pride of Israel.[44]

The writers of these biographical articles cast the medieval past in terms of their own struggle for enlightenment. Thus Shimon Baraz, author of the Maimonides essay, depicts the Maimonidean controversy as a struggle between the forces of reason and ignorance.[45] Solomon Maimon also sees in the medieval conflict a reflection of the divide between Spain, which he considers enlightened, and France, which he equates with ignorance and rigid orthodoxy.[46]

But the emphasis on Sephardic figures did not just reflect internal, curricular considerations. Tsemah Tsamriyon writes, "As usual, in *Hameassef* the criterion of 'what will they [the gentiles] say' carried a certain amount of weight. . . . Thus it comes as no surprise that Rashi . . . and his like, who were only active in the Jewish realm and who were of no interest to the gentiles, did not merit biographical treatment in *Hameassef*."[47] From this perspective it would seem that Andalusian talmudists, such as Joseph ibn Migash, would have been no more likely to receive biographical treatment than Rashi or Rabbenu Tam.

The lofty praise for Sephardic culture and corresponding criticism of and disdain for Ashkenaz is also evident in the writings of Enlightenment thinkers from Galicia, such as Joseph Perl and Solomon Rapoport. Rapoport also wrote biographical essays, which appeared in the Maskilic periodical *Bikurei ha-'Itim*, and again his subjects are all from either the Islamic realm or the Mediterranean basin. Rapoport praises medieval thinkers for their ability to blend Judaic and general culture; those praised include Saadia Gaon, Abraham ibn Ezra, Maimonides, and Ovadiah Sforno, but no native of France or Germany.[48] Similarly, Zvi Hirsch Chajes applies the term *scholars* to Sherira Gaon, Maimonides, Abraham Zacut, Azariah de' Rossi, and Hayyim Joseph David Azulay, although he also lists in this category Moses Isserles, David Gans, and Yehiel Heilperin, who hailed from Ashkenazic lands.[49] The proponents of Haskalah in Prague exhibit the same historical bias. In their contributions to *Sulamith*, the Maskilic periodical first printed in Dessau in 1806, Ignaz Jeitteles and Markus Fischer express interest in the Middle Ages but never in Ashkenaz.[50]

The biographical efforts of the Enlightenment writers represent the beginning of a new Jewish interest in Jewish history, notwithstanding the blatantly tendentious character of these writings. The image of medieval Ashkenaz was an important theme in the early works of modern Jewish historiography and began appearing in print in the first half of the nineteenth century. Although perspectives on the image of medieval Ashkenaz have continually evolved from the nineteenth century to the present, there is a literary continuity in the treatment of our theme from that day to this.

For the writing of history, nineteenth-century historians had at their disposal a few medieval historiographical texts, especially *Yosiphon*, the chain-of-tradition literature, and the sixteenth-century historiographical corpus. However, the early historians also made use of non-Jewish writings, prominent among which was the first comprehensive history of the Jews, by the Huguenot divine, Jacques Basnage, which the Maskil Solomon Maimon began translating into Hebrew.[51] Basnage views all of Jewish history as "but a continual series of calamities" (*une enchainure de maux*)[52] and devotes a great deal of space to the historical record of religious persecution. He maintains that in their campaign against the Jews, the secular authorities used legislation as well as violence, and he debunks both the blood and host libels.[53] Basnage proceeds to discuss the anti-Jewish legislation of the medieval Church, which he depicts as inhumane. Subsequently, Basnage describes in detail the expulsions from France and England as well as the persecution of the Jews of Germany and Hungary.

This history echoes the sixteenth-century litanies of persecution, such as Joseph ha-Kohen's *Emek ha-Bakha*, but with the significant difference that the writer is Christian. Basnage intended his severe critique of the manhandling of medieval Jewry as a polemic against the Catholic Church rather than as an expression of philosemitic compassion, for he associated Protestantism with tolerance and Catholicism with persecution. Thus, also, Basnage has little patience for talmudic literature and thought; he deems the Sages ignorant, and he dismisses their ideas as corrupt distortions of the Bible and their customs as superstition. Sympathetic to their medieval plight, Basnage admits that his purpose is to bring about the Jews' conversion.

A less noted feature of Basnage's history, of particular interest here, is his balanced treatment of the creative efforts of medieval rabbis. Abraham ibn Ezra, Maimonides, and David Kimhi are among the thinkers Basnage surveys, but he expresses no preference for Sephardic scholars and is equally interested in Rashi and Rabbenu Tam. Similarly, although he lists Alharizi as an example of the Jews' poets and Abraham Bar Hiyya as a Jewish astronomer, side by side with them appear "the celebrated professors" Isaac of Dampierre and his student, Judah Sir Leon of Paris.[54] After describing the travails of German Jewry in the

high Middle Ages, Basnage notes that despite persecution, the Jews not only remained in Germany but also continued to produce "illustrious and wise" scholars, including Barukh of Worms, Ele'azar of Worms ("one of the great kabbalists of his age"), Isaac of Vienna, his disciple Meir of Rothenburg, and his student Asher ben Yehiel ("who surpassed his teacher").[55] Basnage says nothing about Ashkenazic Jewry's ignorance of the sciences and does not spotlight either their superiority or inferiority to the Jews of the Iberian peninsula, singling them out neither for their piety nor for their martyrdom.

Basnage's *Histoire et la réligion des Juifs* served as an important source for the early efforts of modern Jewish historians. The leap into the age of modern Jewish historiography was taken by Isaac Marcus Jost, whose *History of the Jews from the Time of the Maccabees to the Present*, published in Berlin (in German) in the 1820s, represents not only a return to the writing of Jewish history but also the expression of the new notion that the study of history is a valuable tool for charting the course of the individual and the collective. Jost was one of the young intellectuals who founded the Society for Culture and Science of Judaism (Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden) in Berlin in 1819. These thinkers and this organization maintained that the scholarly study of history could provide direction for the future development of Judaism.[56]

Jost's history of medieval Jewry has been characterized as a history of "suffering and scholars" (*Leidens- und Gelehrtengeschichte*),[57] and this is a particularly apt assessment of his perception of Jewish history in northern Europe. Yet it requires refinement, for within the Middle Ages Jost saw distinctions and development rather than a monochromatic, homogeneous whole. Specifically, he describes the political and economic status of the Jews under the Carolingians in positive terms, writing not only that "the Jews were then no longer the most unfortunate of peoples"[58] but also that "commercial prosperity, which benefitted both the Jews and the State, caused people to ignore the obstacles placed by religion on social intercourse, and Christians and Jews lived in friendship with one another."[59] The downturn, in Jost's presentation, came in the next phase of Ashkenazic history, after 1000 CE, when "in spite of outer appearances, [the Jews] were the most unfortunate of people,"[60] and it lasted until 1320.[61]

The caveat that the Jews did not appear to suffer probably refers to their affluence. Jost echoes the sixteenth-century theme of the deleterious impact of Jewish prosperity, particularly money lending. Unlike Usque and the others, who hold that money stimulated gentile jealousy, Jost stresses the harm that money and business did to the Jewish soul. He describes the Ashkenazic Jew as utterly devoted to the accumulation of lucre: "The Jew as moneylender was concerned only with making money, squeezing the poor terribly, and mercilessly driving them into hardship."[62] Jost deplores the Jewish community's failure to act against the unscrupulous conduct of business, which he contrasts with its intervention in other types of sinful behavior.

Jost offers a psychological explanation for the importance that money attained in the Ashkenazic scale of values. He suggests that "for the Jews, money became a pathetic antidote for ignominy and neglect."[63] This idea, and the theme of Jewish greed generally, both familiar from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, is part of the Pauline portrait of the Jew as carnal rather than spiritual and has its roots in the New Testament condemnation of the Pharisees. Jost is therefore internalizing a Christian anti-Jewish stereotype and integrating it into his image of medieval Ashkenazic Jewry.

The foil for Ashkenaz is, once again, Spain, and Jost portrays the Spaniards as totally divorced from the financial industry, owing to their more worldly and scientific upbringing.[64] In northern Europe, he explains, the Jews did not engage in agriculture and artisanry, and it was left for them to choose between the pursuit of science or commerce. They opted for commerce because in their geocultural sphere "theology was predominant," and as a result Ashkenaz produced no scientists, jurists, or doctors.[65]

The theme of Jewish economic activity thus links up with the Ashkenazic Jews' reputation for ignorance: "While the Spanish Jews educated themselves in the higher sciences . . . those over here [in Germany] stuck to theology, to its allies jurisprudence and polemic, soon to the elevation of perspicacity and insight, also the kabbalah, and they seldom chose one of the medical sciences."[66] Jost returns to this theme in his exposition on Rashi, who, we are told, "knew nothing about nature, geography, world history, mathematics, languages, but everything

about the earlier sources of Jewish study: Bible, Talmud and other, later, works."[67] Jost characterizes Rashi's work as naïve and unoriginal with respect to the nature of reality: "He arrived at no substantial perception of things, [but rather] devoted himself entirely to perceiving the sense of the thoughts of his predecessors."[68] This approach, he believes, became the intellectual posture of Rashi's students and of northern European Jewry in general. It is obviously one that Jost considered inferior to the Spanish pursuit of substantive knowledge, which requires the acquisition of scientific training.

The French method of Talmud study pioneered by Rashi comes under fire for another reason as well. Jost describes the tosafist project of completing and homogenizing Rashi's Talmud commentary and maintains that the keen dialectic of these scholars sparked an insatiable passion for intellectual combat: "They [the tosafists] imprinted as a character trait on these same Jews the search for conflict over anything which is not absolutely established as holy."[69] Ultimately, we read, French Jews abandoned all other intellectual pursuits and earthly values and became estranged from their non-Jewish neighbors, except for the conduct of usurious transactions.[70] As a result of the focus on Talmud, Rashi's commentary, and the tosafist glosses and as a result of the taste for disputatious reasoning, the Jews of northern Europe lost sight of the actual knowledge preserved in the Talmud in various disciplines.[71] Here, again, Ashkenazic Jewry is held inferior to that of the Iberian peninsula, where the goal was knowledge, not perspicacity. According to Jost, this taste for cleverness and subtleties also manifested itself in the poetry of the two lands. The liturgical poetry of Spain embodies the goal of clarity and plain language, but that of France and Germany strives for obscure references and allusions to biblical and postbiblical formulations.[72]

Jost also holds the northern European mode of thought responsible for the growth of kabbalah, which he thinks was transplanted to Europe during the Crusades. According to Jost, kabbalah could not have flourished in Spain because of its incompatibility with Aristotelian philosophy. However, the Jews of Ashkenaz, on account of their curriculum and intellectual tastes, were receptive to the new superstition, with its magical formulas and wonder working, all rooted in the world of aggadah, or legend.[73]