

NOTES ON THE LEGEND OF THE JEWISH POPE

by ABRAHAM DAVID

The legend of the Jewish pope is well known in the Jewish martyrological epic of the Middle Ages. The main points of the legend are: a Jewish infant is abducted and baptised; as he grows up he ascends the church hierarchy, eventually being crowned pope at Rome. When he learns of his origins he returns to the faith of his fathers.

I The Various Formulae of the Legend

Until now, versions of this tale have been known in an expanded form¹ (henceforth Version 1) and a shortened form² (henceforth Version 2), with considerable differences between them. Both versions identify the pope with Elhanan,

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אברהם דוד, "בירורים בענינה של אגדת האפיפיור היהודי", נר להימן, ספר זכרון לפרופ' א. מ. הברמן, לד. תשמ"ג.

Translation by Dorothea Shefer-Vanson.

1. This version was published by A. Jellinek in *Bet ha-Midrash*, 5, Jerusalem, 1938, pp. 148-152. It is also to be found in *Mi-Meqor Yisra'el*, ed. M.J. Berdyczewski, Tel Aviv, 1966, No. 182, pp. 145-147 and in M.J. Bin-Gorion, *Mimekor Yisrael* (Eng.), 1, London, 1976, Trans. I.M. Lask, pp. 408-413.

2. This version is found in the Cambridge University Manuscript Collection, Add. 858; in the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the Jewish National Library, Jerusalem, No. 17013, pp. 46a-47a. It was published by S.Z.H. Halberstamm in *Ginzey Nistarot*, ed. J.J. Kobak, 3, Bamberg, 1872, pp. 1-4, and by Jellinek, *op. cit.*, 6: 137-139. It can also be found in Berdyczewski, *op. cit.*, 147-148, and in Bin-Gorion, *op. cit.*, pp. 414-416.

the son of the well-known Ashkenazi liturgical poet, Rabbi Simeon bar Isaac of Mainz (b. ca. 950, who lived in the 10th and early 11th centuries).³ The central idea which is shared by both versions is that Elhanan was abducted in infancy, baptised a Christian and, after several years, appointed pope. It was then that he encountered his father, Rabbi Simeon, who came to Rome to intercede for the Jewish community of Mainz, of which he was the leader. When the pope discovered that he was Jewish he decided to abandon Christianity.⁴ Another tradition in two similar versions identifies the kidnapped child as the son of the *Rashba*, Rabbi Solomon ben Abraham Adret (ca. 1235-1310), one of the greatest sages of Castille in the 13th and early 14th centuries, who lived in Barcelona.⁵

One version is to be found in the book *Shalshet ha-Kabbalah* by Rabbi Gedalya Ibn Yehya, in a manuscript version (henceforth Version 3)⁶ although not in the printed edition; and an expanded version was printed by M. Steinschneider (henceforth Version 4).⁷ An attempt will be made below to compare the principal differences in the motifs of all four versions.

3. His liturgical poems were collected by A.M. Habermann, *Piyutey Rabbi Shim'on be-Rabbi Yishaq*, Berlin-Jerusalem, 1937. On him, see also in Habermann's article about the *paytanim* of Northern Europe and France in *The World History of the Jewish People: The Dark Ages*, ed. C. Roth, Tel Aviv, 1966, pp. 267-270; A. Grossman, *Hakhme Ashkenaz ha-Rishonim*, Jerusalem, 1981, pp. 86-102; A. David, "Sippurey Ma'asiyot 'al ha-gezerot be-Germanya biyeme ha-Benayhim," in *Shay le-Heman* (Habermann Festschrift), Jerusalem, 1977, pp. 70-71, 79.

4. See below for the differences between the two versions.

5. On whom see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, v. 2: 305-308 and S.Z. Havlin, *Mavo le-She'elot u-Teshuvot leha-Rashba*, Jerusalem, 1977.

6. Not in the printed edition, but in the Moscow manuscript version, Ginzburg Collection No. 652, pp. 108b-109a. Rabbi Gedalya Ibn Yahya begins: "And I received from the pupils of Rabbi Leon De-Moriali, of blessed memory, and Rabbi David Ibn Yahya, my grandfather, of blessed memory, and from a wise old man in Salonica, that it is a tradition among them that one of the Rashba's sons was stolen from him . . ." It is not clear why this legend was omitted from the printed version. On the author and his book see A. David, "Mif'alo ha-Historiografi shel Gedalya Ibn Yahya Ba'al *Shalshet ha-Qabbalah* (Doctoral Dissertation)," Jerusalem, 1976; *idem*, "R. Gedalya Ibn Yahya's *Shalshet ha-Kabbalah*: A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Historiography," *Immanuel* 12 (1981), pp. 60-76.

7. M. Steinschneider, "Zum Judenpapst," *Israelitische Letterbode* 7 (1881-82), pp. 170-174. This version is also to be found in Warsaw Manuscript no. 281 (Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, No. 10126), p. 49 a-b. Apart from minor differences in wording, this copy, written in the Italian script, contains many excisions, which may have been the work of the internal censorship, the *Zikkuk*, in order to eliminate any possibility of hostile elements claiming that this text contained insulting references to the Catholic Church. For example, wherever the printed version contains the term *Apifyor* (pope) the manuscript version has *Melekh shelahem* (their king). On the internal censorship in Italy during the second half of the 16th century, see I. Sonne, "The Expurgation of Hebrew Books, the Work of Jewish Scholars," in *Hebrew Printing and Bibliography*, C. Berlin, ed., New York, 1976, pp. 199-241; S. Simenson, *Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Dukhsot Mantuva*, Jerusalem, 1965, v. 2; 500-507; M. Benayahu, *Haskamah u-reshut u-defusey Venesyah*, Jerusalem, 1971, pp. 155ff.

A. The matter of the child's abduction and education in the Church is given in detail in Versions 1 and 4.

<i>Version 1</i>	<i>Version 2</i>	<i>Version 3</i>	<i>Version 4</i>
<p>ר' שמעון... ויהי לו בן קטן ושמו אלחנן. ויהי היום ושבת היה. והנכריה באה להסק את התנור כמשפטה בכל שבת ושבת. ותרא כי אין ר' שמעון ואשתו בבית. כי כבר הלכו לבית ה' להתפלל. רק האמה לבדה נשארה את הנער. ותשא את הנער ברועותיה ותצא עמו. האמה ראתה אשר אשר הנכריה עושה. אך לא עלה על לבה לחשוב כי רעה בלב הנכריה... אולם לא שבה הבוגדת, כי אם נשאה את הנער מזה והלאה, ותכניסהו בבית החדשה.</p>	<p>ולרבינו שמעון הגדול היה לו בפעם הזה בן קטן ושמו היה אלחנן ונגנב ממנו ועשאוהו גלח.</p>	<p>כי קבלה אצלם שגונב מהרשב"א בנו א' קטן בן ה' שנים. והובא הנער בכית שר א' גדול בספרד... ויוליכוהו אל בית מדרשיהם.</p>	<p>כי לה"ר שלמה בן אדרת מברצלונה... היה לו בן... והנער היה הולך ערב ובוקר וצהרים לבית המדרש כמנהג בני ישראל הכשרים והיה עובר על פתח התועבה, והיה שמה כומר א' מגדולי אותו המקום. וראה זה הנער פעם ופעמיים ושלוש, נשא חן בעיניו ונגנב והלבישו בגדי כומרים.</p>

Rabbi Simeon . . . had a young son called Elhanan. One Sabbath the Gentile woman came to light the fire, as she did every Sabbath. She saw that Rabbi Simeon and his wife were not at home, having gone to pray at the synagogue, and only the maid was left with the child. She took him in her arms and went out. The maid saw her, but suspected nothing untoward . . . But the traitress did not return, and took the child away and baptised him as a Christian.

And Rabbi Simeon had a young son called Elhanan who was stolen from him and made a priest.

It is a tradition among them that one of the Rashba's sons was stolen from him when he was five years old. And the child was taken to the house of a great lord in Spain . . . and he sent him to their seminary.

For the great Rabbi Solomon ben Adret of Barcelona . . . had a son . . . and the youngster went every morning and noon to the synagogue, as is the custom of the Jews, and passed by the door of the abomination, and there was a priest, one of the foremost of the place. He saw the youngster two or three times, liked him, and so he stole him and dressed him in priests' garb.

B. In the first two versions he is designated 'pope,' in Version 3 he is called *sar* (dignitary), and in Version 4 'their pope.'

C. In Versions 1 and 3 the pope knew his Jewish origin before he met his father.

Version 1

האפיפיור החדש הזה ידע היטב מכבר כי ממעי
יהודה הוא יצא, ואביו ר' שמעון הגדול במגנצא...
ועתה כאשר התנשא לכל הנוצרים לראש, נכסוף
ונספך לראות את פני אביו.

This new pope had known for a long time that he was of Jewish birth, and that his father was Rabbi Simeon the Great of Mainz... And now that he was head of all the Christians, he greatly longed to see his father.

Version 3

וזה כי הוא היה יודע שמילדי העברים הוא, ושגונב
מבית אביו בקטנותו.

... knowing that he himself was a child of the Hebrews, and had been stolen from his father's house in infancy.

D. In Versions 2 and 4 he desires to find out his origins.

Version 2

קרא לטפלים שלו אותן הגלחים שהם שמונהו להיות
אפיפיור ואמר להם מה זה שכל המלכים ודוכסים
ושלטונים באים אצלי לקבל עצה ממני ואין שום
אחד מהם שהיה אומר לי שהוא אבי או אמי או
קרובי שהוא ממשפחתי. וכי מן האבן נולדתי, שאין
לי שום קרוב בעולם?

He called his attendants, the priests who had appointed him pope, and said, "How is it that all the kings, dukes and rulers come to me for advice, and none of them tells me that he is my father or mother or relative? Was I born of the stone, that I have no relative in the world?"

Version 4

אמר להביא לפניו הכומר אומן שלו, ויבא לחצר
האפיפיור ויאמר לו האפיפיור השם יודע כמה
פעמים שאלתי ממך על אודות משפחתי ובית אבי,
ודחית אותי בדברים. עתה הגיעה השעה שרצוני
לדעת זה העניין בלי שום ספק.

He called for his personal priest, who was brought to the pope's court, and the pope said to him, "God knows how many times I have asked you about my family, and you evaded the issue. Now the time has come, and I wish to know the matter, without any doubt.

E. In Versions 1 and 2 the initiative for the meeting at the pope's residence comes from the son, who wishes to see his father.

Version 1

ויתן אל לבו להביאהו אליו רומה בערמה, ויכתוב
ספר אל ההגמון אשר במגנצא כי כל ההגמונים סרים
למשמעותו, ויצוהו אשר לא יתן את היהודים לשמור
את שבת קדשם ולא ימולו בשר ערלת בניהם...
והאפיפיור ראה על ככה לאמר אם כזאת ישמעו
היהודים, ותפול עליהם אימתה ופחד. אז ימהרו
לשלוח אלי גדוליהם מקרבם להתחנן אלי לבטל
מעליהם גורתי הקשה... ואחרי כן בחרו בשני רבנים
ובר' שמעון הגדול לראש עליהם לשלחם לרומה.

Version 2

אמרו לו אדוננו... כי יהודי היית ובן אדם גדול שבכל
היהודים אתה... הוא דר באלמניא ושמו ר' שמעון
הגדול, אמר להם שלחו אחריו והביאו אלי... ושלחו
גדולי רומי לרבי שמעון באלמניא שיבא לאפיפיור
ביום הנועד שקבעו לו.

Version 1

And he thought how to bring him to Rome by guile, and he wrote to the bishop of Mainz, for all the bishops owed him allegiance, and ordered him to forbid the Jews to keep their holy Sabbath and to circumcise their sons . . . And the pope said, 'If the Jews hear this they will be in fear and trembling. Then they will hasten to send their leaders to me, to beg me to rescind my bitter decree . . . And after this they chose two rabbis and Rabbi Simeon the Great to lead them, and they went to Rome.

Version 2

They said to him, 'Our lord . . . you were a Jew, the son of one of the foremost Jews . . . He lives in Germany and his name is the great Rabbi Simeon. He said to them, send for him and bring him to me . . . And the great men of Rome sent to Rabbi Simeon in Germany that he should come to the pope on the appointed day.

F. In Versions 3 and 4 the meeting between the father and the son-pope in the pope's court is at the initiative of the Jews, who send the father to intercede on behalf of the community.

Version 3

וירבו הימיו והוכרח הרשב"א ללכת לרומה לדבר אל השר על עסקי רבני.

And after some time the Rashba had to go to Rome, to speak to the dignitary about public matters.

Version 4

לימים הלכו בני ברית ברצלונה לשלוח שלוחים אל האפיפיור ולבקש ממנו תן על צרה מה שבאה עליהם... ויפול הגורל על ה"ר שלמה אב האפיפיור, וילך ה"ר שלמה ויפול לפני רגלי האפיפיור בנו.

And the members of the community of Barcelona sent representatives to the pope, to ask him to ease the distress brought upon them . . . And the lot fell to Rabbi Solomon, the father of the pope, and Rabbi Solomon went and fell at the feet of the pope his son.

G. In Versions 2, 3 and 4 a dialogue is described in which the son tries to question his father about his feelings when he realizes that the pope has certain characteristics of his lost son.

Version 2

וכראה אותו האפיפיור אז קרא אותו אל החדר וראה שהיה נרחע בפניו. אמר לו אל תירא רק תגיד לי אמתות מה שאשאל ממך, אמר לו הן. אמר לו כמה בנינים יש לך, אז הזכיר לו בשם כל בניו ובנותיו שהיה לו עתה, אמר לו האפיפיור, עדיין היה לך בן אחר, אז שתק שהיה ירא שמא יאמר לו להביאו לפניו, עד

Version 3

ובהיותו בחדר השר טרם שהחיל לדבר ולשאול דבריו נשתנו פניו. וכמעט שכחה ונאלם ונתעלף. ולא יכול לדבר מאומה... ויאמ' השר אל הרשב"א גש נא אלי ויקרב וישאל מאתו מדוע פניך רעיו, ומה היה לך כי נשתנו פניך ונאלמת דומיה, החשית מדבר. והרשב"א לא ידע מה להשיב כי אם קול דברים, והכלים כי

Version 4

ובדברו עמו ראה בפניו סימן א' שהיה לו קודם שנגנב ממנו, ומיד נזלו עיניו דמעות, לא שהכירו שהוא בנו, אלא שחשב בלבו זה הסימן היה לבני שנגנב ממני, והוא היה סבור שבנו כבר היה מת. והאפיפיור ראהו בוכה ושתק... ויאמר לו רצוני לידע מדוע בכית כדברך עמי, התחיל ה"ר שלמה לדחותו

Version 2

שומר לו האפיפיור למה אתה שוחק תאמר לי האמת. אמר לו ר' שמעון, אדוני בן אחד קטן היה לי ונגנב ממני כשהיה נער קטן ואיני יודע אנה הוא אם הוא חי או מת, כי לא ראיתיו עד הנה. אמר לו האפיפיור זכור אתה מה סימנים היו בגופו, אמר לו אלו סימנים היו לו על גבו ואלו על ידו. אז הבין האפיפיור שהוא בנו, כי אותם סימנים עליו. אמר לו אבי אבי אני הוא בןך, הרי עלי מסימנים שאמרת.

Version 3

על האמת לא ידע הסבה, סוף דבר אחרי רוב הדברי' שהיו ביניהם... גלה לו הרשב"א שגונב מאתו זה ימי' רבים בן א' קטן בן ה' שנים... וחקר דרש מהזקן אם היה לו סימנים מהנער... ויאמ' הרב כי היה לבנו סימן פלו' על כתפו הימני. ויקם תכף השר מעל כסאו ויחבקהו וינשקהו ויאמ' אבי אבי, אני הוא ויפשוט כתנתו ויראהו הסימן.

Version 4

בדברים ולומר שלא היה לדבר סבה... ענהו האפיפיור ואמר דע באמת שכונתי היא לידע האמת. בראות ר' שלמה אמר לו כן וכן המעשה... ובדברי עמך ראיתי לך סימן אחד אשר אותו סימן היה לבני ונוכרתי ממנו, על כן בכיתי... הבן ה[א]פיפיור כי זה הוא אביו, ויפול לפני רגליו ויבך, ויאמר לו אני בןך ואתה אבי.

When the pope saw him he called him into the chamber and saw that he was taken aback by him. He said, "Do not be afraid, just answer my questions truthfully." And he said, "Yes, indeed." The pope asked, "How many sons do you have," and he mentioned all his present sons and daughters by name. The pope said, "Did you have another child?" The rabbi was silent, fearing that he would ask him to bring him before him. Then the pope said, "Why are you silent? Tell me the truth!" Rabbi Simeon said, "Sir, I had a young son, but he was stolen from me as a small child, and I do not know where he is or whether he is alive or dead, for I have not seen him since." The pope said to him, "Do you remember whether he had any marks on his body?" and

When he was at the court, before he began speaking and making his request, his face changed and he almost fainted and was unable to speak... Then the dignitary said to the Rashba, "Come near to me," and he drew near, and he asked him, "Why was your face changed, and why are you unable to speak?" But the Rashba did not know what to reply, and was ashamed, for he really did not know the reason. Finally, after the dignitary persisted with his questions... the Rashba revealed to him that many years before his 5-year-old son had been stolen from him. Then he asked the old man if the boy had had any distinguishing marks... Then the rabbi said that his son had a certain mark on his right shoulder. And the dignitary got down from

And as he spoke to him he saw in his face a mark he had had before he had been stolen from him, and tears flowed from his eyes straightaway — not that he recognized his son, but that he thought, "My son who was stolen from me had such a mark," and he thought that his son was dead. And the pope saw him weeping and kept silent... And he said to him, "I wish to know why you wept when you spoke to me." Rabbi Solomon tried to evade answering and said that there was no reason for it... The pope replied, "Know that I really wish to hear the truth," so Rabbi Solomon, seeing that this was so, told him what had happened... "And as I was talking to you I saw that you had a mark like my son had, and I remembered him, and that is why I cried"... The pope

Version 2

he said, "He had such and such marks on his back and such and such marks on his hand." Then the pope realized that he was his son, for he had those marks on himself. He said, "My father, my father, I am your son, here are the marks you mentioned."

Version 3

Version 3

his throne straightaway, and kissed and embraced him, saying, "My father, my father, I am he!" And he took off his shirt and showed him the mark.

Version 4

Version 4

realized that he was his father, and he fell at his feet and wept and said to him, "I am your son and you are my father!"

When the pope discovered his father, he decided to return to Judaism.

H. Versions 2, 3 and 4 describe the "pope" or "dignitary" as a martyr who, upon returning to Judaism, seeks to atone for his acts of desecration before the God of Israel by dying a martyr's death (*Kiddush ha-Shem*) at his own hand while condemning the Christian religion. These versions emphasize his discussion with his father as to how to sanctify God's name.

Version 2

ואמר אבי אבי מה אעשה
שאהיה בן עוה"ב כי יודע אני
שתורת ישו הבל היא. ואינו
כלום, אמר לו אביו חללת שם
הקב"ה ברבים, קדש שמו
ברבים, ואני מקבלך עלי
ותהיה בן עולם הבא. אמר לו
באיוה ענין אעשה, אמר לו
תזמין כל ממשלתך המלכים
הדוכסים וההגמונים אז תקדש
שמו של הקב"ה, ועשה ושיהר
את עצמו ועלה לראש המגדל
וקרא שמעו לכם למה
נודמנתם, כי עד עתה לא
רציתי לגלות לכם, אך עתה
אני מגלה לכם כי אין ממשות
בישו הנוצרי, כי נולד מן
האשה כאחד האדם, ולכן אין
תקוה לאחריתכם שאתם
מאמינים בו... נתיעצו הגלחים
להרגו פן יסיר העם מתרפותם,
וכשראה כך קפץ מן המגדל
לארץ, ואמר שחלילה
שיהרגוני אותם טמאים, כי
אני מאמין באלהי אבי.

Version 3

וישאל הבן מאביו תרופה
למכתו. ויען הזקן ויאמ' כי
הרפואה מהמים הוא האש,
ולא דברו מזה יותר איש
לאחיו מאומה... ותוך ימים
מועט' הרהר תשובה בלבו,
ויבחר לקבל עליו פדיון נפשו
כל מיתות ב"ד. ונתן סדר
להעשות אש תחת התיבה
שהכין לדרוש עליה. ובאמצע
האש השים חרב חדה ופיה
למעלה. וכרווא קרי בחיל, כי
השר היה דורש ברבי' ביום
פלוי. ויהי היום הנועד ויבא כל
העם מקצה אל הדרש. ויעל
השר לדרוש על הבמה. והפליג
לדבר וכי; ובאמצע הדרש
שם חבל סביב גרונו וישלך
עצמו באש וידקר בחרב
וישרף וימת שם.

Version 4

אמר הבן לאביו מה תקנתי
שהושיע את נפשי, ענהו האב
ואמר, בני אתה יודע כי עד
הנה קיימת ועילית אמונתם
לעין כל, ומעתה תצטרך
לעשות ההפך, ותשא ברכה
מאת ה' וצדקה מאלהי ישעו...
אחרים כן הקהיל את כל העם
אנשים ונשים וטף, וציוה
להדליק כבשן גדול של אש
באמצע השוק והלך בשוק
בזמן הנועד, ועמד ודרש
בחממתו והרחיב לדבר נגד
דתם ובראשית דבריו אמר כך.
ואני בסיבת היותי מחוק
אמונתכם ודתכם בזמן שעבר.
אני דן את עצמי לשרפה,
והפיל עצמו לתוך כבשן האש
ונשרף.

Version 2

And he said, "My father, my father, what shall I do to be eligible for the World to Come, for I know that the faith of Jesus is nothing." And his father said, "You have profaned God's name in public, now sanctify it in public, and I take it upon me that you will merit the World to Come." He said, "How shall I do it?" His father answered, "Summon all your ministers, kings, dukes and bishops, and then hallow God's name." Then he purified himself and went up to the top of the tower, and called, "Hear ye, why I have called you all, for till now I did not wish to tell you, but now I reveal to you that there is no reality in Jesus Christ, for he was born of woman like all men, and so there is no hope that you will be saved as you believe." . . . The priests sought to kill him, lest the people be led astray, and when he saw this he jumped from the tower, saying, "Let not these unclean men kill me, for I believe in the God of my father."

Version 3

Then the son asked his father for a remedy for his affliction. The old man replied that the remedy for fire is water, and neither of them spoke of it again . . . During the next few days, he decided to repent, and to redeem his soul by undergoing all the forms of death decreed by a court of law (*mitot bet din*). He ordered a fire to be made beneath the pulpit from which he preached, and in the middle of the fire he placed a sharp sword, its point uppermost. And the heralds announced that the dignitary would preach in public on a certain day. On the appointed day people came from far and wide to hear him preach. And the dignitary ascended the pulpit, and preached. In the middle of his sermon he would a rope around his neck and threw himself into the fire, and pierced himself with the sword, and was burned and died there.

Version 4

The son said to his father, "How can I redeem my soul?" His father replied, "My son, you know that until now you have exalted their faith publicly. Henceforth you will have to do the opposite, so that the Lord may bless you and lead you on the paths of righteousness . . . After that he assembled all the people — men, women and children — and instructed that a great furnace be built in the market-place at the appointed time, and he stood and preached eloquently, speaking against their faith, saying first of all, "Because I strengthened your religion in the past, I condemn myself to death by burning," and he threw himself into the furnace and was burned.

Version 1 contains a completely different account of what became of the pope, relating that he secretly returned to his father's house in Mainz. Before leaving his throne, however, he left behind him a written condemnation of Christianity.

והאפיפיור חבר ספר דובר סרה על האמונה ויניחהו למשמרת, ויקם מצוה על כל האפיפיורים אחריו לקראת בו. ואחר כן אסף בידו הון רב, וימלט כסתר ויבא אל מגנצא וישב אל אלהי ישראל באמת ובתמים. ויהי לאיש יהודי חשוב מאוד בעיני כל העם, וברומא לא ידע איש אנה בא ומה היה לו.

And the pope wrote a book attacking the faith, and left it as a memorial, commanding all the popes who succeeded him to read it. Then he took a great deal of money and went to Mainz and returned truly and sincerely to the God of Israel, and he became a very important man among the Jews. But in Rome no one knew where he was and what had become of him.

II The Historical Background to this Legend

It would seem that this legend, like many medieval legends, contains a kernel of historical truth. What, then, is its factual background? Does the history of the church contain any record of a pope of Jewish origin? Various scholars have tackled this question. A. Jellinek,⁸ who published the expanded version of the legend in the Ashkenazic version, and S. Baron⁹ claim that in the background of this legend is the figure of the antipope, Anacletus II, scion of a distinguished Roman family, the house of Pierleoni, in the 12th century. This churchman was descended from a converted Jew called Baruch, who took the name Benedictus Christianus upon converting and was active in the political and economic life of Rome. He was one of the money agents at the court of pope Gregory VI and his successors in the fourth decade of the eleventh century (he died before November 1051). This converted Jew married the daughter of a noble Roman family, the house of Gratiano.¹⁰

After the death of Pope Honorius II in February 1130 there was keen rivalry concerning the appointment of his successor. One faction chose Cardinal Gregory Sant Angelo while the other, which included most of the cardinals, chose Petrus Pierleoni. The first group had the upper hand, however, and Gregory was recognized officially as pope Innocent II in 1131, having the support of the kingdoms north of the Alps. His rival, who was the antipope and was known as Anacletus II, gained widespread support in Italy and Western France, and he kept his position until his death in 1138. The dispute concerning the position of pope continued to reverberate for a long time, each side doing its utmost to blacken its rival's name, balking at nothing to do so. The supporters of Innocent II sought to put upon the rival pope a slur which would prevent him from serving as head of the church — namely, that he was of Jewish origin, even though his grandfather had been a Christian by birth, and his great-grandfather was the same Baruch who had converted almost one hundred years previously (as has been noted above).¹¹

8. See Jellinek, *op. cit.*, n. 1, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

9. S.W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, Philadelphia, 1958, v. 7: 304, n. 56.

10. A summary of research about Benedictus Christianus and the members of the Pierleoni family may be found in H. Bloch, in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, v. 11: 349-350, and in A. Grabois, "Mi Sinat Yisra'el 'Te'ologit' le sinat Yisra'el 'Giza'it': Pulmus ha-Apifyor ha-Yehudi bam'e'ah ha-shtem 'esreh," *Zion* 47 (1982), pp. 1-4. See also K. Stowe, "Gishat ha-Yehudim la-Apifyorut veba-Doktrina ha-Apifyorit shel Haganat ha-Yehudim Ba-shanim 1063-1147," in *Meh-qarim be-Toldot 'Am Yisra'el ve-Ereṣ Yisra'el* 5 (1980), pp. 180-181.

11. See Baron, *op. cit.*, 4: 10-11, 237, and more extensively in Grabois, *op. cit.*, 1-4, 11-16. The

Is there, perhaps, another historical basis for this legend, which relates to Pope Gregory VI, known previously as John de Gratiano, who was pope from May 1045 to December 1046. This Pope was related to the converted Jew Benedictus Christianus, who had married a member of his family, Gratiano. Moreover, this converted Jew had also served as a financial agent at his court.¹²

It would appear, therefore, that although there was no Jewish blood in this pope's veins, he was related to the Jew by marriage. There are other biographical details which indicate a closer connection with the details of the legend.

1. Chronology — this pope lived and acted in the first half of the eleventh century. This was close to the time of Rabbi Simon the Great, the father of the pope in the legend, who still lived in Mainz in the second decade of the 11th century.

2. His fate — Gregory VI was deposed by the German Emperor, Henry III when he was suspected of desecrating the church through simony. He was dethroned and exiled to Cologne, in the German Rhineland, in December 1046. The fact of his exile to the Rhineland may have some connection with the point mentioned in the expanded form of the Ashkenazic version of the legend, that when the pope found out who his father was and realized that he was Jewish "he took a great deal of money and left secretly and went to Mainz."¹³ We do not know anything about his attitude to the Jews.

Some details of Rabbi Simeon the Great's character and history may fit the legend. From the little that is known to us about the personality of the Ashkenazic liturgical poet, it is impossible not to be aware of a central aspect of the legend which reflects his personality. From various sources we know that Rabbi Simeon had close ties with the authorities, and that he knew how to utilize these ties for the benefit of his co-religionists in the German communities,¹⁴ since he interceded on their part. The record of the Rhine communities says of him: "he worked on behalf of the communities to teach the law to the diaspora and avert evil decrees."¹⁵

In another version we read: "He worked for the communities and averted evil decrees and taxes,"¹⁶ It seems logical to assume that the intercession hinted at oc-

latter also stresses that the arguments regarding the Jewish origins of Anacletus constitute a powerful expression of racial hatred of the Jews, which had begun to take root in Christian society at that time, reflecting a shift in the development of anti-semitic feeling.

12. See O.J. Blum in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, v. 6: 772. Stowe (*op. cit.*, p. 180) raises the possibility that this legend may reflect a combination of Anacletus II, Gregory VI and Gregory VII.

13. See Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* 5: 152.

14. See Grossman, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

15. Compare L. Zunz, *Literaturgeschichte der synagogalen Poesie*, Berlin, 1865, pp. 111-112, and also A. Berliner, in *Kobez al Yad* 3 (1887), p. 1 and Grossman, *ibid.* Tradition regarding his intercession can be found in another legend about him. See A. David, *op. cit.* (n. 3), pp. 71, 79.

16. See Grossman, *ibid.*

curred at the time when the Jews of the Rhine were persecuted, in 1012, at the time when the Jews were expelled from Mainz, where Rabbi Simeon lived.¹⁷ It is known that he had a son called Elhanan, and it is possible that the son converted at the time of the famous persecution in that year, or in the persecutions which occurred in France at approximately that time.¹⁸

In conclusion, we have here two separate Ashkenazic (German) traditions about the Jewish pope, one expanded and one abbreviated. There is also a Sephardic (Spanish) tradition of this legend in two similar versions, one long and one short. These two versions are similar in their motifs to the shorter Ashkenazic version.

The legend of the Jewish Pope is essentially an anti-Christian allegory written in the Middle Ages, before the fifteenth century, possibly shortly after the period in which Rabbi Simeon lived, i.e. already in the eleventh century. The legend seems to be based upon several authentic historical facts. The Sephardic tradition of the legend appears to be later than the Ashkenazic one, and contains various elements which do not appear in the latter.

APPENDIX

Full Text of the Legend from *Shalshet ha-Kabbalah*, Moscow Manuscript (Ginzburg Collection, No. 652 — Above, Version 3).

[108ב] וקבלתי מתלמידי הרב ר' ליאון דמוריאלי ז"ל ומהרב רבינו דוד נ' יחיאי זקני ז"ל, ומחכם זקן בסלוניקי כי קבלה אצלם שגונב מהרשב"א בנו א' קטן בן ה' שנים, והובא הנער בבית שר א' גדול בספרד לא נודע שמו ויאהבווהו השר ויוליכוהו אל בית מדרשיהם, ויגדלו הנער בחכמות מאד, ויצא טבעו בעולם, ובשערים נודע שמו. ונתגלגלו הדברי, ובא לרומה, ולרוב חכמתו נעשה שר בכבוד גדול, וירבו הימי' והזכרת הרשב"א ללכת לרומה לדבר אל השר על עסקי רבי, ויבא שם, ובהיותו בחצר השר טרם שהחיל לדבר ולשאול דבריו נשתנו פניו, וכמעט שככה ונאלם ונתעלף, ולא יכול לדבר מאומה דאע"ג דאיהו לא חזי מזליה חזי ונתעלף, אח"כ ג"פ בג' שעות חלוקות, והשר שמר את הדבר, ותוך שעה קטנה קרא השר, הוציאו כל איש מעלי וילכו. ויאמ' השר אל הרשב"א, גש נא אלי ויקרב וישאל מאתו מדוע פניך רע, ומה היה לך כי נשתנו פניך ונאלמת דומיה החשית מדבר. והרשב"א לא ידע מה להשיב, כי אם קול דברים והכלים. כי על האמת לא ידע הסבה. סוף דבר אחרי רוב הדברי שהיו ביניהם וחקירות שעשה לו השר גלה לו הרשב"א שגונב מאתו זה ימי רבים בן א' קטן בן ה' שנים ולא ידע ממנו מאומה לעולם, וכי תמיד היה [109א] הנער חקוק בלבו. וכששמע השר דברי הזקן נכמרו רחמיו, וכמעט שככה, וחקר ודרש מהזקן אם היה לו סימנים מהנער, וזה כי הוא היה יודע שמילדי העברי' הוא ושגונב — מבית אביו — בקטנותו. ויאמ' הרב כי היה לבנו סימן פלו' על כתפו הימני, ויקם תחף השר מעל כסאו ויחבקהו וינשקהו, ויאמ' אבי אבי אני הוא ויפשוט כתנתו ויראהו ויסימן. וישאל הבן מאביו תרופה למכתו. ויען הזקן ויאמ' כי הרפואה מהמים הוא האש, ולא דברו מזה יותר איש לאחיו מאומה. ויתן השר לאביו כל משאלות לבו ומגדנות להביא אל ביתו, וילך לו, ותוך ימים מועטי' הרהר תשובה בלבו, ויבחר לקבל עליו פדיון נפשו בכל מיתות ב"ד, ונתן סדר להעשות אש תחת התיבה שהיני' לדרוש עליה, ובאמצע האש השיים חרב חדה ופיה למעלה, וכרווא קרי בחיל כי השר היה דורש ברבי' ביום פלו', ויהי היום הנועד, ויבא כל העם מקצה אל הדרש, ויעל השר לדרוש על הבמה, והפליג לדבר וגו', ובאמצע הדרש שם חבל סביב גרונו וישלך עצמו באש, וידקר בחרב וישרף וימת שם, ויקחוהו אח"כ עבדיו אפרו וישמיהו בכלי של נחשת ויקראוהו אפר האיריטיקו¹⁹ עד היום הזה, ואני ראיתיה ברומי.

17. For these events, see the summary by B. Blumenkranz, "Germany, 843-1096," in *The World History of the Jewish People: The Dark Ages*, ed., C. Roth, Tel Aviv, 1966, pp. 173-174. See also Grossman, *op. cit.*, pp. 95, 162-163.

18. See Grossman, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

19. Eretico, in Italian: sectarian, heretic.

[108b] And I received from the pupils of Rabbi Leon De Moriali of blessed memory, and from Rabbi David Ibn Yahya, my grandfather of blessed memory, and from a wise old man in Salonika, that it is a tradition among them that one of the Rashba's sons was stolen from him when he was five years old. And the child was taken to the house of a great lord in Spain whose name was not known, and the lord loved him and sent him to their seminary, and the lad grew up very learned, and his wisdom was renowned throughout the world. And things turned out in such a way that he went to Rome, and because of his great wisdom was made a great dignitary. And after some time the Rashba had to go to Rome to speak to the dignitary about public matters. When he was at the court, before he began speaking . . . his face changed and he almost fainted and was unable to speak... And the dignitary did not speak of it, and after a while ordered the people around him to leave. Then the dignitary said to the Rashba, "Come near to me," and he drew near and he asked him, "Why was your face changed, and why are you unable to speak?" But the Rashba did not know what to reply, and was ashamed, for he really did not know the reason. Finally, after the dignitary persisted with his questions, the Rashba revealed to him that many years before his five-year-old son had been stolen from him, and he had never found out what had become of him, and that the memory of the lad was always [109a] engraved on his heart. When the dignitary heard the old man he was filled with pity, and asked him if the boy had had any distinguishing marks, knowing that he himself was a child of the Hebrews, and had been stolen from his father's house in infancy. Then the rabbi said that his son had a certain mark on his right shoulder. And the dignitary got down from his throne straightaway, and kissed and embraced him, saying, "My father, my father, I am he!" And he took off his shirt and showed him the mark. Then the son asked his father for a remedy for his affliction. The old man replied that the remedy for water is fire, and neither of them spoke of it again. Then the dignitary fulfilled all his father's wishes, and also gave him delicacies to take home, and he went. During the next few days, he decided to repent, and to redeem his soul by undergoing all the forms of death decreed by a court of law (*mitot bet din*). He ordered a fire to be made beneath the pulpit from which he preached, and in the middle of the fire he placed a sharp sword, its point uppermost. And the heralds announced that the dignitary would preach in public on a certain day. On the appointed day people came from far and wide to hear him preach. And the dignitary ascended the pulpit and preached. In the middle of his sermon he wound a rope around his neck and threw himself into the fire, and pierced himself with the sword, and was burned and died there. Afterwards his servants took his ashes and put them in a copper urn and called it "the Ashes of the Heretic," as it is called to this day; and I saw it in Rome.

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