

THE PERSECUTION OF FRENCH JEWRY DURING THE SHEPHERDS' CRUSADE OF 1251

by ABRAHAM DAVID*

In the text of *Hagahot Maimoniot* by R. Meir Ha-Kohen of Rothenburg (which was first published together with Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* in the Constantinople edition of 1509, being different in content from that printed in Venice in 1524, as well as later printings¹) at the end of *Hilkhot 'Avel*, a passage appears in the burial laws which presents R. Yedidya b. Israel of Nürenberg's² (who was the pupil of R. Yehiel of Paris) important testimony on the murderous rioting through which the Jews of Paris passed in his time.³ Up until now, this passage has received no

* Dr. Abraham David is Lecturer of Jewish history in the Eretz Israel studies department at the University of Haifa. The above article was translated from Hebrew by Bruce A. Lorence, originally appearing in *Tarbiz* 46:3-4 (April-September 1977), pp. 251-257: א דר, "פרעות ביהודי צרפת בעת מסע הרועים של שנת י"א (1251)", *תרביץ* מ"ז, חוב' ג-ד, ניסן-אלול תשל"ז, עמ' 257-251. An addendum appeared in *Tarbiz* 47:3-4 (April-September 1978), p. 254: א דר, "עוד לענין גזירות הרועים", בצרפת בשנת י"א (1251)", *תרביץ* מ"ח, חוב' ג-ד, ניסן-אלול תשל"ח, עמ' 254. The Editorial Board of *Immanuel* wishes to express its appreciation to Magnes University Press in Jerusalem for its kind permission in allowing Dr. David's article to be republished in an English version.

1. See E.E. Urbach, *Ba'alei Ha-Tosaphot* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1968³, pp. 435-436.
2. A colleague of Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg. He was the author of *tosaphot* to several Talmudic tractates and a *shitah* (commentary) on *Mo'ed Katan*. The last mentioned was printed by Rabbi M.J.L. Sacks, Jerusalem, 1937. See about him the introduction to the above *shitah*, pp. 6-40, and Urbach, *Ibid*, pp. 443-446.
3. This phrase appears almost in the same words as in the collection of excerpts of laws and customs from the sages of Germany and France, written by R. Mordechai de Modena, the grandfather of R. Judah Aryeh Modena. It is to be found in New York-Jewish Theological Seminary of America Ms. Mic. 1602, Adler Collection no. 890, and the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem no. 10700,

attention because of the first edition's rarity.⁴ Therefore neither has its historical interest been discussed, although it is not known from any other source. The passage reads as follows:

“... ושוב ראיתי שהרב ר' יצחק מדורא צוה להלביש בתכריכין להרוג אחד על בגדיו, ואז שלחתי הדבר למוריה"ר ידידיה והשיב לי, וזה לשונו: כל ימי לא ראיתי שהלבישו תכריכין, וראיתי כשיצקתי מים על ידי רבינו יחיאל מפריש שקברוקט"ל נפשות הרוגי' שהרגו הרועים, השם ינקום מהם דמם, והרבה מהם היו נכבדים ועשירים מופלגים, ולא שינו כסותם. כל זה מצאתי בקובץ אחד.”

“...And again I saw that Rabbi Isaac of Düren commanded that a murdered person be dressed in burial shrouds over his clothing. Then I sent word to my mentor R. Yedidya. He responded, saying: 'In all my days I never saw that shrouds were worn, and when I was a pupil of our Rabbi Yehiel of Paris, 139 souls murdered by the Sepherds were buried. God will take revenge on the Shepherds for their blood. Many of them were exceedingly wealthy and respected, and their clothes were not removed.' All of this I have found in one collection.”

It is a wonder that there is such an impressively realistic account of this terrible calamity which befell Parisian Jews of whom 139 undoubtedly represented a considerable percentage of the city's Jewish population. I say this since no contemporary or later chronicles have been preserved, but rather the sole testimony of an individual. From the conclusion one gathers that many of the notables in the Jewish community were among the victims who perished. This information regarding a terrible attack on Parisian Jews is not only interesting in terms of the rioting's scope, but also its very being. Up until now, we have not been so fortunate as to have a concrete piece of information regarding attacks against Parisian Jews prior to the beginning of the 1290's. In that century, Catholic reaction against French Jewry began to rise. However, a thinly veiled hint to an unknown murderous riot in Paris which either proceeded from, or was contemporaneous to the famous disputation of 1240, is given by the scholar and scribe R. Crespia (Cresbia) ben Isaac ha-Naqdan. He was known as a copier of *halakhic* works in the 13th century.⁵

In the preface to Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, which Cresbia copied in 1242-1243, he added a liturgical poem called *Azharot Maimoniot*.⁶ He writes *inter alia*:

“ויהי באחרית הימים בקרית פריש עיר הדמים מינים רבים קמים על דברי חכמים”

folio 14v. Re. the compiler who died at Bologna in 1530, see: Nepi-Ghirondi, *Toldot Gedolei Yisrael Be-Italyah* (Hebrew), Trieste, 1853, pp. 244, 246; S. Simonsohn, ed., Introduction to *Ziknei Yehudah – Responsa of R. Judah Aryeh Modena* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1956, p. 47. He mistakenly notes that the compiler died in 1580.

4. Only a few copies of this printing are preserved, but a photocopy edition of it was published by Makor, Jerusalem, 1973.

5. See E. Kupfer, *Teshuvot u-Pesakim me'et Hakhmei Ashkenaz ve-Zarfat* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1973, pp. 325-326; N. Golb, *Toldot Ha-Yehudim Be-Rouen Bimei Ha-Benayim* (Hebrew), Tel-Aviv, 1976, index, and literature mentioned there; see also H. Schirrmann, in *Kiryat Sefer* 52 (1977), p. 223.

6. Published by Golb, *Ibid*, pp. 210-227, in the appendix.

“And in the end of days in Paris, city of bloodshed, many Christians attacked the precepts of the Jewish sages.”⁷ The appellation “city of bloodshed” for Paris undoubtedly hints to some murderous riot which affected the city’s Jews. Such an appellation appears with even greater significance in the reactions to this rioting. For example there is a lamentation commemorating the massacres of Rindfleisch in 1298 which begins: “אבכה לקשה יום” (I will cry for the poor man). We read *inter alia*: “ברוטינגן ... העיר הארומה מדם רשע... עיר הדמים” , “In Rottingen⁸... the city of blood which is red from its cruel shedding.”⁹ We have been fortunate in having testimony connected with these events in which “ירצבורק עיר הדמים” “Würzburg¹⁰ the city of blood”¹¹ is mentioned. From this we may conclude that the massacre whose nature is unclear occurred in Paris prior to 1242-43.

The question is whether there is a connection between the murderous massacre hinted at by R. Yedidya of Nürnberg to that of R. Crespia? From the standpoint of the figures mentioned it is possible that R. Yehiel of Paris proceeded to take the place of Rabbi Yehuda Sire Leon head of the Paris *yeshiva* (rabbinical academy) after the latter’s death in 1224.¹² It is even possible that in this period, between 1224-42, R. Yedidya studied under R. Yehiel. However, one cannot determine that what we have before us is one event. It seems most likely that the historical identity of R. Yedidya of Nürnberg’s testimony is to be found in a later period. We base this on the circumstances surrounding the massacre as noted by R. Yedidya’s words: “שהרגו הרועים” “that the Shepherds murdered.” It is apparent that he was referring to the Shepherds’ movement of 1251. This same anarchistic mass movement – the crusader movement of the Shepherds (*Pastoureaux*), set as its goal to come to the aid and rescue of the French King Louis IX (St. Louis) in fulfilment of his mission to liberate the Holy Sepulchre. We are referring to the period after he was freed from captivity in Egypt which is related to his military defeat in the Seventh Crusade (1248-1250).

During Easter, 1251 large numbers of Frenchmen and Belgians began to rally around the person of a delirious monk named Jacob who was of Hungarian origin. This monk succeeded in drawing many to his ranks from among the lower strata of society – shepherds, peasants, and even criminals. Such was the case, when he set out on a crushing and unrestrained attack against the moral and religious corruption which engulfed the clergy. He also enflamed the imaginations of his followers through the miracles he was able to cause.

From the beginning this movement was a popular army which numbered more than 60,000 persons. This army began to extend itself throughout the various cities of

7. *Ibid*, p. 223. This sentence was also quoted by Kupfer (above, fn. 5), p. 325, fn. 2.

8. Rottingen – in Bayern in Germany.

9. See S. Bernfeld, *Sefer Ha-D'maot* (Hebrew), II, Berlin, 1924, p. 43.

10. Würzburg – in Bayern in Germany.

11. Appears in the Responsa *Zikhron Yehudah* by R. Judah ben Asher, no. 92, Berlin edition, 1846, p. 46a.

12. See Urbach (above, fn. 1), pp. 276, 371.

central and northern France in order to strengthen its ranks. This was accomplished by a call to join the movement, as well as wiping out pockets of resistance – especially among Church circles. In their journey, the movement’s followers passed through, among others, the cities of Amiens, Rouen, Paris, Tours, Orleans and Bourges. During their expansion they attacked their opponents with a ferocity touching on massacre. In the beginning this movement was accorded legitimacy for its deeds by Queen Blanche. She thought that in this manner she would assist her son King Louis IX in fulfilling his mission to liberate the Holy Sepulchre. Active opposition to this anarchistic movement did not take long in coming. Its leader was murdered on the outskirts of Paris. Jacob’s followers failed to sustain the movement. Indeed, after a short time the movement disappeared as if it had never existed.¹³ This is not unusual in medieval Europe where a mass movement was uniting and crystallizing to realize both social and religious aims. The feelings of anger and hatred for the Jews stirring in the hearts of the masses are expressed on the lowest common denominator. Indeed, we know from non-Jewish sources of a terrible blow against the Jews of Bourges during this period. Jewish religious articles were profaned, the Jews’ property robbed and their women raped. This reality is very fitting in terms of the information provided by R. Yedidya, which even mentions the Shepherds. The movement’s travels occurred at a time when R. Yehiel was still living in Paris. He left that city c. 1260, emigrating to the Holy Land.¹⁴

Reverberations of the Shepherds’ persecutions against French Jewry are to be found in additional Hebrew sources. One Hebrew source is well known, and has been published. We are referring to the words that are to be found in *Shevet Yehuda* by R. Solomon Ibn Verga. They were taken from a chronicle in R. Shem Tov Sanzolo’s hands.¹⁵ It states as follows:

”שנת חמשת אלפים הטיל השם רוח רעה בערלי צרפת, אשר קמו הרועים לאלפים ולרבבות וטעו בעצמם לעבור ים בלימשוט, וגדול שבכולם רוויר שמו, ובהטעותם האומות הרגו מבני עמנו כמה וכמה, גם גזרו רעה על עיר בוניילאש.”

“In the year 5000, the Lord placed an evil spirit in the Gentiles of France. Thereupon arose the Shepherds in the thousands and tens of thousands. They tried to cross the sea without an oar, and the greatest of them all was named Roger. In their errancy the Gentiles killed many sons of our people, and wickedly persecuted the city of בוניילאש

13. Re. this movement, which we do not know much about, see the summaries of: R. Röhrich, “Die Pastorellen (1251),” *Zeitschrift für Kirchenliche Geschichte*, VI (1884), pp. 290-296 (= Röhrich); E. Lavissee, *Histoire de France*, III, Parte 2, 1911, pp. 79-81; N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, London 1957, pp. 82-87 (= Cohn); J. Praver, *Toldot Mamlekheth Ha-Zalbanim be-Eretz Yisrael* (Hebrew), II, Jerusalem, 1963, pp. 323-324; R. Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in Northern France*, Baltimore-London, 1973, p. 137. I wish to thank Dr. B. Albert of Bar-Ilan University who was kind enough to send me a photocopy of the first article.

14. See Urbach (above, fn. 1), pp. 371-378, and B.Z. Kedar, “R. Yehiel of Paris and Palestine” (Hebrew), *Shalem* II (1976), p. 352.

15. *Shebet Yehuda*, A. Shohat edition, Jerusalem, 1947, p. 149.

Graetz¹⁶ clearly determined in his interpretation of this paragraph that the statement is corroborated by the Shepherds' persecutions of 1320. Thus the connection is established with the riots which attended the Jews of southern France. These riots were gradually extended later on to Aragon as well by the *Pastoureux* (Shepherds), and the rabble which accompanied them. They were led by a man who held popular superstitions. Their primary goal was to conquer Granada from the Moslems.¹⁷ Graetz's view is that the year was omitted in the chronological notation, and therefore the year of the persecutions should read ה' אלפים פ (1320 C.E.).¹⁸ Azriel Shohat in his observations on *Shevet Yehuda*¹⁹ accepts this judgement though he adds: "It is possible that Ibn Verga is referring to the Shepherds' movement of 1251." Joshua Praver also considers the words of the author of *Shevet Yehuda*, and reaches the conclusion that the passage refers to the events of 1251.²⁰ It seems that it will not be difficult for us to reject Graetz's unequivocal determination.

In this clause there is no hint of the persecutions of 1320, other than diminutives of the rioters — "shepherds." The chronological notation definitely refers to the year 1240: the year 5000, but it is undoubtedly certain that a detail is missing from the chronological notation. Therefore, let us suppose that the list of events presented in *Shevet Yehuda* and taken from a work which was in Shem Tov Sanzolo's hands, is arranged in a consistently chronological order.²¹ Therefore the event described before this passage relates to the failure of King Louis IX in the Seventh Crusade (1250):

בשנה שנתפש מלך צרפת ביד ישמעאלים, אחר שהותר ושב לארצו.

"In the year that the King of France was captured by the Ishmaelites, and subsequently was released, and returned to his country...."²²

We may conclude that it is necessary to add several years to the missing chronological notation in the above paragraph. We should reject dating it to the time of

16. H. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 6, Leipzig, 1894³, p. 343.

17. To these persecutions many discussions have been dedicated; F. Baer, *Untersuchungen über Quellen und Komposition des Schebet Jehuda*, Berlin, 1936, pp. 2-14; Idem, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, II, Philadelphia, 1966, p. 15-16; S. Grayzel, "The Confession of a Medieval Jewish Convert," *Historia Judaica*, XVII (1955), pp. 89-129; B. Dinur, *Yisrael Be-Golah*, 2nd series, 2nd vol., 2nd book, Jerusalem, 1967, pp. 606-613; B. Albert, *Mishpato shel Baruch* (Hebrew), Ramat-Gan, 1974, 121 p.

18. Graetz (above, fn. 16) *Ibid*. Gross thinks so as well: H. Gross, *Gallia Judaica*, Paris, 1897, p. 94.

19. p. 224.

20. *Ibid*, p. 324.

21. There are some errors in the chronological notations such as on p. 146. After the year 4952 (to the Creation) (1192) there appear events from the years 4935 (1175), and 4927 (1167). Yet it has already been clarified that 4955 (1195), and 4957 (1197) have to be corrected; see Graetz (above, fn. 16), pp. 336-337; see also Shohat's notes, *Shebet Yehuda*, pp. 221-222. On this chronicle, see now, A. David, "Fragments from a Hebrew chronicle," *Alei Sefer* (Hebrew), 6-7 (1979), pp. 198-200.

22. *Shebet Yehuda*, p. 149.

the 1320 massacres since this list contains information primarily concerned with France and Provence. It cannot be assumed that its author would disregard such an impressive event in Franco-Jewish history as the 1306 expulsion of French Jewry. Therefore the above mentioned event should be dated closer in time to that described before it (in 1250). Since we have no information about an additional Shepherds' massacre besides that of 1251, it turns out that *Shevet Yehuda* is referring to this particular persecution. If this is not sufficient, we can substantiate our assumption in another way. In the above section, one can find at least two details which are identical in content to those found in the non-Jewish sources. The author of *Shevet Yehuda* writes:

”וטעו בעצמם לעבור ים בלי משוט, וגדול שבכולם רו״ר שמו.”

“And they erred in crossing the sea without a paddle, the noblest among them was one named Roger.” In the non-Jewish sources it is written that Jacob promised his men who were leaving for the Crusades that they would reach the Holy Land in an unusual manner: upon arriving at the sea, it would be parted, and they would march on dry land.²³ Roger is the name given in non-Jewish sources to Jacob (his Jewish appellation), leader of the Shepherds' movement.²⁴

Further on in *Shevet Yehuda* we read:

”בהטעותם האומות הרגו מבני עמנו כמה וכמה, גם גזרו גזרה רעה על עיר בוניילאש.”

“In their wickedness, the Gentiles killed many of the children of Israel, and persecuted them in the city of בוניילאש.” The Hebrew toponym “בוניילאש” has been identified by Gross²⁵ and Shohat²⁶ as Banōlas in Catalonia. This identification was accepted by them (although Shohat had some doubts) because they assumed that Ibn Verga was referring to the persecution of 1320 which indeed spread to Spain. Since the conclusion has been reached, that we are referring to the persecutions of 1251, an effort should be made at identifying this location in France. Praver thinks that it can be identified as Orleans.²⁷ As mentioned previously, the Shepherds passed through it on their journey. It seems to us, perhaps that this place should be identified as Bourges, which is situated some 150 kilometers south of Paris. According to non-Jewish sources, it is here that Jews were hurt – as we have already alluded to above.²⁸ This fact should not be surprising since there are many changes in the spelling. It is known that when copied or printed, many errors crept into the list. *Shevet Yehuda* does not give us a clear picture as to the extent of persecutions in this city. Nevertheless Ibn Verga makes it clear that the damage done to French

23. Compare Röhricht, p. 292; Cohn, p. 84.

24. Röhricht, p. 295. Praver has already discussed this point (above, fn. 13), p. 324, fn. 39.

25. Gross (above, fn. 18), p. 94.

26. His remarks, *Shebet Yehuda*, p. 224.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Some information on the Jews of this city can be found in: Gross (above, fn. 18), pp. 110-111.

Jewry in these riots was cruel and severe, causing loss of life. Perhaps the author meant that there was also loss of life in "בנוילאש" though he notes rather vaguely: "גזרו גזרה רעה", "they inflicted a terrible persecution."

It is very likely that the echoes of Bourges Jewry's terrible suffering has been preserved in an additional Hebrew source. The penitential prayer (*seliḥa*) "על קדושי" "בנוייש ועל שריפת תורתינו" ("On the Martyrs of Banoish, and the Burning of Our Torah") by the liturgist Solomon ben Joseph²⁹ was published by Salfeld³⁰ on the basis of the Karlsruhe 12 (Reuchlin 7) ms. The toponym "בנוייש" is not identified; the problems involved in doing so are discussed by Salfeld.³¹ It could be that the toponym was erroneously transcribed by one of the copyists. In the archaic text, a spelling very similar in form to the name Bourges can be found. Zunz's reading "באניוש" is based on a different ms.³² Indeed, on the basis of the *seliḥa*'s content it is impossible to determine its source. Yet perhaps this event nevertheless has been referred to, since we find on one of the lines a reference to the Shepherds movement and its actions:

״וועדו רועים מפיצים בחורי ובתולותי זממו להפר מצותי חקתי ותורת׳׳.

"the Shepherds assembled and scattered my sons and daughters; they thought of transgressing my commandments, ordinances and Law." Zunz³³ gave his opinion of this sentence saying that it refers perhaps to the Shepherds' persecutions of 1320; but he does not rule out of hand the possibility that it is the Anjou persecutions of 1236, and the transcription "באניוש" perhaps refers to it.³⁴ Yet since we have found a different transcription for the event's location, there is no reason not to hold the first assumption, namely that this *seliḥa* refers to the first Shepherds' persecution, and not necessarily to the second in 1320.

Perhaps the 1251 persecution was referred to in the opening sentence of this *seliḥa*: "אביעה מקרה קראנו ברביעי החדש", ("I will recount an event which occurred in the fourth month"), in other words the fourth month *Tammuz*. Indeed, we know from non-Hebrew sources that the Shepherds's journey throughout France was carried out in the summer months. Moreover, before the Shepherds came to Bourges, they entered the city of Orleans on the 11th of June,³⁵ eleven days before at the beginning of the month of *Tammuz*. There, they persecuted the Jews of Bourges.³⁶ Perhaps this fact strengthens our assumption that we are talking about

29. Zunz notes six of his liturgical poems including this *seliḥa*, see his book: *Literaturgeschichte der Synagogalen Poesie*, Berlin, 1865, pp. 349-350.

30. S. Salfeld, *Das Martyrologium des Nürnberger Memorbuches*, Berlin, 1898, pp. 352-355.

31. *Ibid*, p. 352.

32. *Ibid*, p. 349.

33. *Ibid*, p. 350.

34. The letter Beth does not belong to the name at all but rather is used as בלם

35. See Röhrich, p. 294.

36. Though the Shepherds' journey of 1320 (on which we have a relatively large amount of information) indeed occurred during the summer months (i.e. the Hebrew month of *Tammuz* which began on the 8th of June, 1320), in the south of France, and Spain, during which they sojourned on French soil. But there is not a single toponym on the list of locations through which the Shepherds passed which can be equated with "בנוייש" or "באניוש".

the persecution of 1251. If indeed this same *seliha* is concerned with the event discussed here then at least tens of Jews perished:

“פרחי בחורי... החביאו במערה טבעו ארבעים ושמונה.”

“My youths... hide in a cave, forty-eight of whom were drown.”³⁷

An additional Hebrew source which refers to these events is to be found in Vienna-Jewish community ms. no. 258 now located at Bar-Ilan University, ms. no. 286³⁸ which consists of various Kabbalistic works. One of these works is apparently a fourteenth century kabbalistic interpretation on the Creation. In it appears the following phrase:³⁹

“ובתחילת אלף ששיתגורשו ישראל ממלכות צרפת שנת ויגרשהו וילך, תוך אלף ששי, שנת טו לפרט. וקודם לכן כמו רועי בשנת ב'י ואח"כ בשנת פ...”

“At the beginning of the sixth millenium, the Jews were expelled from the kingdom of France, which is the year וילך within the sixth millenium (1306) which is the year 5066 of the Creation.⁴⁰ And before this, the Shepherds rose up in the year ב'י (1252), and afterwards in the year פ (1320).”⁴¹ It has already been mentioned above⁴² that from the non-Hebrew sources it appears that these persecutions occurred in the summer months of 1251. From this Hebrew source it appears that they took place a year or several months later. It is possible that the source's author was not precise in indicating the year in which the persecutions took place – or perhaps the persecutions against French Jewry continued for another few months. But there is no confirmation of this possibility from another source – and we know very little about these events in any case.

It seems that our suggestions for an historical identification of the above mentioned sources can contribute to understanding one of the links in a chain of terrible events which overtook French Jewry in the second half of the thirteenth century.

Immanuel 10 (Spring 1980)

37. Salfeld (above, fn. 30), p. 354.

38. A microfilm of this source can be found in the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, the Jewish National and University Library, no. 36569. I would like to thank my colleague Dr. Moshe Idel who turned my attention to this source.

39. Folio 99r.

40. In other words, the year 5012 (1251-1252).

41. See above p. 93.

42. pp.91-92, 95.