Jewish Responses to Catastrophe F.D. Muntean
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Complex and Unpredictable Consequences

THE CRUSADER MASSACRES OF 1096 AS AN HISTORICAL WATERSHED

In chapter 3 of his 1984 work, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature,* Alan Mintz represents the Rhineland Crusader massacres of 1096 as a decisive turning point in medieval Jewish history. According to Mintz, the image of the martyr in the literature that was generated by the events of 1096 became the sovereign standard by which all future behaviour was "measured, adapted, or found wanting" (98). He maintains that the norm of response to catastrophe created in Ashkenazic culture by this literature had an enormous effect — not only on the self-image of the survivors, but on Jewish-Christian relations as well — for the next eight hundred years. Robert Chazan, however, in his 1987 book *European Jewry and the First Crusade,* emphasizes the limited impact of Crusader violence on the Ashkenazic communities. He disagrees with the notion that 1096 was an important watershed, calling this idea "a commonplace of modern historiography" (8), and claiming that it reflects "a seriously flawed understanding of the historical process" (199). According to Chazan, the afflicted communities were quickly restored, and Jewish intellectual life revived itself as well, continuing to produce significant works of liturgy and law, mysticism and exegesis (208). Even Mintz would agree that Franco-German Jewish society itself experienced little in the way of long-term discontinuity in the wake of the First Crusade. Trade and commerce were quickly reestablished, and the towns that had been depopulated were resettled within a short period of time (98-99).

In this paper, we shall explore the possibility that the long-term effects of these catastrophes derived less from the actual incidents themselves than from what was written about these events by the survivors, immediately afterwards and during the following generation. Beginning with a comparison of the positions on this issue held by Mintz and Chazan, we shall then look at the Crusader Chronicles, commenting on the image-making capacity of the religious mentality as we do so and in the process, comparing the reputed Ashkenazic standards of behaviour in the face of forced conversion with the differing Sephardic tactics for survival in the face of adversity. We shall then turn our attention to the more dramatic and language of the commemorative poetry, examining the idiosyncratic process by which catastrophe could be fitted into the comforting patterns of the past, and the possible fate of scholarship in an environment given over to the glorification of martyrdom. The notion of a new paradigm of theodicy that effectively excludes sin, and the idea that the conflation of the past and the present can actually break a culture's connection with the past and drain both of their instructive value will then be considered, as will the process of invoking Akedah and Mikdash in order to sacralize the behaviour of the Rhineland martyrs. We shall then discuss several modern theories of the mechanisms by which memory is created and maintained as well as the social and political uses of collective memory, concluding that the importance of the events of 1096 lay not in the behaviour of the martyrs, which could certainly have remained an historical anomaly, but in the transformation of these acts into a future norm of response to catastrophe.

Chazan urges us to consider the behaviour of both the besieged Jews and the attacking Crusaders in the context of the tumultuous social environment of the 11th century. Noting the small cities of the era and their tiny Jewish populations (28), neighborhoods that may have been predominantly Jewish but were certainly not exclusively so (25), and the wide-spread reports of Jews taking refuge in the homes of their Christian neighbors (5-6); he argues convincingly that the Jewish community of this time was fairly well integrated into its environment. This level of integration was further improved by the relationship between Ashkenazic Jewry and the Rhenish Bishops, who saw the Jews not only as useful supporters of urban culture and economic development (20), but also as valuable allies in the balance of power between the authority of the Church and the rising independence of the burghers (24). Even though we may judge the degree of racial tension during the eleventh century by the report, found in the Bar Simson Chronicle, that the bishop of Speyer felt the need to wall the Jewish community for its own protection, Chazan maintains that under normal circumstances the Jews enjoyed a level of safety and security which, although quite minimal by modern standards, was little different from that of their Christian neighbors (37). Unfortunately, the Church's policy of tolerating and even encouraging Jews, while at the same time disputing the validity of Judaism, seems only to have been viable during untroubled times. The disruptive forces that were unleashed by the First Crusade clearly exceeded the intentions of those in authority, and subsequently proved impossible to control. As a result, the early months of 1096 were tumultuous in the extreme, and the fragile security of Ashkenazic Jewry was swept away.

Still, the attacking Crusaders and the besieged Jews may have shared more of a common spiritual environment than they themselves might have believed. Both seem to have possessed a strong sense of cosmic conflict, an absolute certainty in the ultimate victory and vindication of their own religious vision, and an unshakable belief in eternal reward for self-sacrifice and martyrdom (193). According to Chazan, the extreme conduct of both Jews and Christians could therefore be seen as little more than an unfortunate side effect of the 11th century tendency towards radical behaviour, especially in the realm of religious expression: an effective argument against the precedent-setting nature of the causes and motivations for the massacres. He admits that the acts of martyrdom produced a "striking break with earlier patterns" and had a profound short term effect (221), but maintains that much of their radical nature was domesticated and effaced over time and the actual behaviour of the martyrs was noticeably softened in subsequent memorialization by the "confirmation of older styles of Jewish martyrdom" (9). It is, however, these very references to traditional forms of *kidduch ha-Shem,* particularly those involving sacrifice, which appear in both the Chronicles and the *piyyutim* written in the wake of the massacres, upon which we shall base our arguments in favour of 1096 as a decisive turning point in medieval Jewish history.

1. **The Chronicles**

It is to Mintz, as a scholar of Hebrew literature, that we now turn for direction in our evaluation of the events of 1096 as represented in the Crusader Chronicles. Mintz does not disagree with Chazan's position concerning either the

societal arrangements or the martyrological beliefs that preceded the massacres, neither does he question the rapid reconstruction and resettlement which followed. In spite of the tragic and impressive death toll, his evaluation of 1096 as a watershed for Ashkenazic Jewry derives less from what the Crusaders did to the Jews than from what the Jews themselves did in response (86). Mintz maintains that the "image-making capacity of the religious mentality" expressed in those Hebrew Chronicles which were written in response to the massacres caused a genuine and significant divergence in subsequent Jewish history (99). Let us evaluate the importance of the Crusader martyrdoms by examining these documents in terms of these, essentially symbolic, considerations, but first let us look take a close look at Chazan's perspective on these documents.

Chazan refers to the Chronicles as a new kind of historical writing which emerged from the violent events of 1096 and demonstrated "the general pattern of spiritual and intellectual creativity" that characterized the literary activity of late 11th and early 12th century Europe (7). They may appear frankly tendentious to modern sensibilities, but according to Chazan this is understandable, since they were written in the emotionally-charged atmosphere immediately following the catastrophes, in response to the pressing need for theological and spiritual insights as well as the alleviation of gnawing doubts (45). The reports are not histories, per se, and because they chronicle what can only be thought of as a devastating military defeat, they do not covey any expectation of miracles or divine intervention (150). Instead of thanksgiving, they emphasize justification and the fervent hope of future redemption. They present supplications to the Deity, while at the same time placing heavy emphasis on the courage of the martyrs who, under

the most extreme duress, remained heroically steadfast in their commitment to the God of Israel (151). It is because of this relentless portrayal of the martyrs in such a favourable light that, according to Katz, the Ashkenazic Middle Ages are said to "outshine all other periods of Jewish history as an epoch of heroic steadfastness" (85). But even a dramatic improvement in self-image does not a watershed make, nor was steadfast behaviour in the face of death a phenomenon unique to Ashkenazic Jewry.

In fact, it is the self-inflicted nature of the Rhenish martyrdoms that makes these acts unique, not only in the sense of being unprecedented in Jewish history, but also as possibly being unjustified by Jewish law — even to the point of being in violation of its spirit. Although the heroic suicides at Massada may immediately spring to the modern mind as a famous precedent, we should remember that the dramatic story of Massada was available only in Greek during the Middle Ages and was not read by European Jewry until well into the modern era. The same thing is true in regard to the suicides at Jodphata, which are reported in Josephus but were later dismissed in a 10th century Hebrew critique as being misguided and contrary to the teachings of Judaism (Mintz 88). Ashkenazic Jewry's Sephardic coreligionists dealt with their own, not inconsiderable, experiences of enforced conversion in a considerably different manner. According to Mintz, the comparable Sephardic texts "are neither liturgical nor poetic nor focused on concrete historical acts"; rather they emphasize consolation through the contemplation of the meaning of history (85). Whereas the pronouncements of Ashkenazic halakhists seem preconceived and emotionally predetermined, Sephardic writers such as Maimonides give rationally-based answers that limited

the duty to martyrdom to the prescribed minimum. In contrast to the Crusader Chronicles, these texts read much like legal briefs arguing for reasonableness and personal survival in the face of adversary. But, according to Katz, for the Ashkenazic Jews it was completely inconceivable, for instance, that one should refrain from martyrdom merely because there were an insufficient number of witnesses (84). The determination of the Rhenish martyrs had not been enfeebled by what they must have thought of as the subversive forces of philosophy and rationalism (85), and as a result, their speeches read as heart-wrenching pleas, and make use of compelling symbolic language to rouse exceptional acts of self-sacrifice (Chazan 153). If the Ashkenazi can be said to have thus set new standards for behaviour in the face of enforced conversion, that would certainly qualify as a precedent. There are, however, more important issues to be discussed, as an examination of the liturgical poetry written in the wake of 1096 will show.

2. **The Poetry**

Phenomenology, according to Casey, is devoted to discerning that which is obscure or overlooked in everyday experience (xi). Likewise, it may be the business of the historian to isolate idiosyncratic and unique elements from what is otherwise a universal and timeless reaction to violent death (Garland ix). The most unusual representations of the events of 1096 are certainly found in the *piyyutim,* the poetic works, in which elements of these massacres are frequently represented by allusions to biblical stories and classical texts: references direct and indirect which, as we shall shortly see, are often idiosyncratic in the extreme. In the opinion of this reader, Chazan ignores the sometimes startling implications of

these allusions in favour of their ‘universal and timeless’ characteristics. He maintains that, since the *piyyutim* lack the immediate historical impact found in the Chronicles’ gruesome descriptions of bloodshed and endless tales of slaughter, the poems are not as effective at evoking emotional responses as the more artless and direct works of prose (154): we may be shocked by the endless descriptions of bloodshed and slaughter in the Chronicles, but we cannot help but be impressed by the monumental heroism of the victims (163). However, as we have previously noted, if we are to identify 1096 as an important watershed we must look beyond heroic steadfastness or the improvement of self-image.

To Mintz, the poetic works represent just such another level of importance. Rather than working his way back through layers of literary and mythical devices in order to arrive at some kind of historical actuality, his intention is to work forward from the events themselves, focusing on the processes of image-making in the poetry, where they are most intensely at work, in order to discover the ultimate effect of their symbology and style (90). Mintz directs our attention to the Bar Meshullam *piyyut,* a poem which provides a considerable degree of harrowing realism as well as a graphic depiction of particularly violent acts. What makes these descriptions so ‘idiosyncratic and unique’, however, is that they refer to events that did not actually take place during the massacres themselves. While the pious martyrs of Worms and Mainz did slay one other, they certainly did not engage in the picking apart of organs and dismembering of limbs, the images of which so dominate the poem. According to Mintz, these descriptions may be resolutely realistic, but the reality depicted is not that of the events of 1096, but rather of the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem Temple (96).

What we are observing here may be no more than a particularly profound version of a traditional response to historical novelty: the tendency to fit contemporary catastrophe into the comforting patterns of the past. According to Yerushalmi, even the most terrifying events can be less distressing when they are stripped of their bewildering specificity and subsumed to familiar archetypes (36). Still, the radical language of the poem implies a expectation quite different from that of simple comfort, and although the familiar archetype of sacrifice is invoked, it seems to the reader to be strangely transformed. Perhaps the poems, as Yerushalmi suggests, show only a superficial interest in the incidents themselves because the writers are so intent on unraveling the meaning of the events and their place in God's plan (39). There is certainly precedent for this, both in biblical and post-biblical writings. The sages virtually ignored the actual battles of the Maccabees, concentrating instead on the story of the miraculous cruse of oil that burned for eight days (25). But the martyrs dominate these poems much as the Bible is dominated by God, and the biblical stories to which the poem refer seem far less heroic, less epic, than these medieval accounts.

Chazan states that under the circumstance this is understandable, due to what he feels is the necessity of validating the suicidal, even homicidal, behaviour of the martyrs, even if it means granting them an absolutely biblical level of respect (158). The short-term effects of this validation may be comforting, but the reader is forced to wonder what the consequences of this way of thinking would be for Ashkenazic culture. To focus on miracles rather than on feats of arms can perhaps be expected of the writers of canon, but when Chazan informs us that the intellectual giants of the 11th century remain vague and shadowy figures to this

day compared to the hero-martyrs, whose human attributes are given unusually distinct dimension by the poets (153), his observation gives us pause to consider the fate of scholarship in an environment given over to the glorification of martyrdom, particularly considering the degree to which the wisdom of the past, not to mention the often unequivocal counsel of the halakhists themselves, had been contradicted by the behaviour of these martyrs in particular. The use of biblical archetypes in the service of comfort, not to mention as justification for the most violent sort of behaviour imaginable, seems questionable to the reader, especially considering the intrinsic strangeness which the familiar biblical stories seem to assume in the poetry of commemoration.

As we read of the priest slaughtering the victims and placing their dismembered bodies on the woodpile, and of the pleasant smoke rising to God's heaven, the millennium that separates Rhenish Jewry from Jerusalem is suspended, and the alienation imposed between God and Israel by the Diaspora disappears (Mintz 97). But what is unique here also appears to the reader to bear more than a touch of the sinister. The objects of this sacrifice are not sheep or oxen, but the faithful themselves, and more, their children. In the *piyyut* of Bar Meshullam, the author mourns that Israel can no longer rely on the merit of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac and prays that the multiple sacrifices of 1096 will "protect us and call a halt to our miseries!" In the *piyyut* of Ephriam of Bonn, Abraham is portrayed as actually slaying Isaac, and when Isaac is resurrected, preparing with fierce determination to kill him again. In all these reenactments of the drama of the Akedah, the biblical and the contemporary events are compared in such a way as to demonstrate how the latter have

outstripped the former (90). As audacious a boast as this is, it is basically a perverse one as well (91), since the ostensible point of the biblical story was to extend the claim that the people of Israel were, from the time of Abraham on, determined to distinguish themselves not only from those around them who continued to offer human sacrifice, but perhaps from their own more primitive past as well. Would the poets have been so eager to have transformed the images of sacrifice in this way if they had been aware of the dark world that stood (perhaps, according to Dr Mosca, at no great distance) behind the Patriarchs and Temple cult? We shall examine this question in greater detail later, but first let us explore another issue of no less importance which has been raised by our reading of both the *piyyutim* and the Chronicles.

3. **Theodicy**

What stands out to this reader in all the descriptions of these events, especially when compared to the accounts we have of the destruction of the First and Second Temples, is a lack of even the slightest sense of sin on the part of either the victims or the memorializers. Despite the occasional invocation of the sin-punishment pattern, nowhere in the Chronicles or *piyyutim* are any failings on the part of the Jews specified. To the contrary, according to Chazan, the afflicted Jews are never really depicted as sinful; they are unfailingly portrayed only in the most glowing terms (161-62). Free to speculate on the nature of those called to make the supreme sacrifice, the poets unabashedly portrayed the martyrs as the *élite* of all generations, chosen by Heaven to atone for the many former failings of Israel (Katz 87). According to Mintz, this is a unique and unprecedented approach

to the problem of theodicy. If the suffering of exemplary individuals is taken as an indication of divine favour, then suffering can be seen as a sign of righteousness rather than turpitude (91), and a causal link between God's justice and suffering that does not involve sin has been advanced.

In order to more carefully examine the significance of what appears to be a precedent-setting divergence from the norm, let us turn to Steven Knapp's article, "Collective Memory and the Actual Past", in which he discusses the ethical consequences of 'authoritative narratives' and the socially shared dispositions which they shape, particularly in regard to the question of their origins in historical actuality. According to Knapp, the purpose of theodicy, specifically of divine punishment, is to make certain that the recipients identify with their own (actual or inherited) past actions in order that they will anticipate, as they consider performing acts in the present, the disapproval merited by those acts, and that this disapproval will subsequently become a permanent part of their ethical repertoire (139). It seems to the reader that this is a key point that the chroniclers and poets appear to have ignored in their determination of to emphasize the unparalleled perfection of the martyrs' generation. If persecution and suffering are the natural result of being in exile, and if exile itself is the bitter fruit of ancient sins (Yerushalmi 36), then the sins themselves are of great importance. Unfortunately it is not entirely easy to determine the precise nature of these sins. The destruction of both Temples was assumed to be due to the sins of Israel, but the nature of these sins had changed in the centuries that had intervened between 586 and 70. At the time of the First Temple, the operative sin was idolatry, but what sin caused the

destruction of the Second Temple? Our sources are, by and large, strangely silent on this subject: Yerushalmi (113) posits the following as a *locus classicus:*

> Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because of three things which prevailed there: idolatry, immorality, bloodshed. … But why was the Second Temple destroyed, seeing that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, precepts, and the practice of charity? Because therein prevailed hatred without cause. (TB *Yoma* 9b)

'Hatred without cause' certainly seems to the reader to lack specificity, and this may have been an important factor lurking in the periphery of the Ashkenazic consciousness. Any level of contemplation on the already tense dialectic of rebellion and obedience which, as Yerushalmi informs us, is inherent in the paradoxical struggle between the free will of humanity and the divine will of an omnipotent Creator (8), requires at least some degree of specific understanding regarding the instructive intentions of God.

In the face of an active and unavoidable theodicy, expectation of the divine disapproval that is merited by forbidden actions can be expected to become a permanent part of the way a group evaluates its own behaviour only if some sort of consensus concerning the specific nature of those actions can be achieved. The historical consciousness of the Jews, particularly the history of the consciousness of choice, can be seen as an ongoing attempt to achieve at least some level of this theodicic specificity. At best, the contemplation of God's justice is a complex and difficult task, and one that is not made easier when a catastrophe such as the massacres of 1096 is 'stripped of its bewildering specificity' and subsumed to familiar patterns in such a way as to, even unintentionally, encourage the neglect of these issues of theodicy. To whatever extent 1096 can be thought of as a

decisive turning point in medieval Jewish history, at least one new norm of response to catastrophe may to have been created that could have long-term consequences of doubtful value. But the commemorative literature may have effected even more significant cultural divergence, particularly in the way Ashkenazic Jewry came to regard its own history. Resolute as the poets and chroniclers appear in their confident reorganization of complex theological issues, Mintz tells us that they are even more notable for their determination to assimilate their subjects into the rhythms of mythical time (85). In light of this observation, topics that have already been mentioned, such as the historical consciousness of Jewish culture, and the contemporary consequences of the ancient sins of Israel, now require us to engage in an examination of still more complex issues, particularly the mechanics of memory and the meaning of history, and specifically the ways in which these elements are employed in the documents of the Rhineland massacres.

4. **History**

Although Judaism has been traditionally absorbed with the meaning of history, according to Funkenstein, historiography has had virtually no role to play in the sphere of traditional Judaism: “the interest in history was never identical to historical consciousness or historical memory, even though they were close to each other at the time of the Scriptures” (11). Yerushalmi points out that while memory of the past has always been a central component of the Jewish experience, the historian, at least until the beginning of the 19th century, was never its primary custodian. This may be entirely understandable, since suffering

and persecutions, combined with the lack of a state and political power (ordinarily the prime subjects of history), may have dulled the historical consciousness of medieval Jewry (52). According to Yerushalmi, a reason for the Ashkenazic rabbis' disinterest in the cultivation of history *per se,* and one that relates directly to the issues at hand, was that they may have felt that they already knew as much of history as they needed to know. Perhaps they were even wary of history as they knew it (21), and possibly for good reason. Even though, for instance, minute historical details can be reconstructed from Jewish apocryphal writings, we can find no trace of historiography in them, only a search for prophetic clues and signs of the final conclusion to history, simultaneously feared and hoped for, with its conflated past and present and its never-changing scenario (37). On the other hand, this lack of interest may be the result of a level of confidence and self-sufficiency that our own culture no longer possesses (34). We have already seen what strange paths can be embarked on when an inflated sense of self-confidence interacts with a need to be comforted in the face of disaster, so let us now examine in closer detail the problems relating to Yerushalmi's notion of the conflation of past and present.

Ancient Israel had replaced the pagan notion of conflict among the gods with the more poignant relationship of God and humanity, and it was this relationship, as Yerushalmi reminds us, that caused Judaism to first assign a decisive significance to history: 'The Heavens', according to the psalmist, might 'declare the glory of the Lord', but human history revealed God's will and purpose (8). To grant authority to a text written (albeit indirectly) by God, is to assume, as a conservative believer must, that God's intentions have not changed since the text

was set out, and therefore one can simply open the book and read in order to find out what God requires of us in the present. Knapp, however, warns us that the same thing cannot be said, with any sort of casual certainty, about history, unless one supposes that God has been providentially manipulating all the events of the past in order to produce a kind of dramatic or moving-picture tutorial for the benefit of the faithful (129). History may reveal God's will, but only to the diligent and discerning reader, whose autonomy in the face of cultural upheaval must seem to us to be a necessary component in the search for God's message in the 'bewildering specificity' of history. The tendency, even today, of Jewish historic writing to refer to paradigmatic years and places — 586, 1492, Mainz, Auschwitz — as a sort of mnemonic shorthand for what were actually vast and complex catastrophes, may be seen, according to Mintz, as a clear statement of how historical events can be drained of their discreteness and absorbed into larger traditions (102-03).

It appears to the reader that the situation in eleventh century Ashkenazi was certainly more than simply prone to these problems. Medieval interpreters generally felt no need to distinguish between text and commentary nor to develop a systematic method which would enable them to evaluate the way in which life in the past differed from that of the present, and as a result their work suffered from what Connerton terms "an imaginative conflation between the life of antiquity and the life of the contemporary world" (100). This situation was further exacerbated by the medieval use for figurative imagery, a style associated with European Christian influences, as against allegory, which is to the modern reader a more familiar literary structure deriving from as it does from the Classical sources of

antiquity. Figurative imagery identifies events or institutions of the past as prefigurations, unfulfilled images of archetypes that will be more fully revealed in the future. It in this manner that Christians scholars came to regard Old Testament incidents or statements as the prefigurations of parallel images and events that were to find their fulfillment in the more real and significant forms of the New Testament. According to Mintz, the martyrs of 1096 were hailed as having fulfilled their precursor *figura* of Akedah and Mikdash, and this subsequently served to stimulate a new kind of hermeneutic in which the past was evaluated less through exegesis than through figuration (99-100).

We have seen how Ashkenazic Jewry's notion of history prior to the events of 1096 had been marked by a sense of self-sufficiency in the present, a typically medieval propensity to use the past as a source of figurative imagery, and a wariness of history that had been created by the prior use of the past as a source of prophecy and apocryphal portents. All of these factors appear to the reader to have combined to allow the Rhenish memorializers to conflate the events of 1096 with traditions of the past in such a way as to drain both, to an important degree, of much of the instructive value they might otherwise have had to future generations. Modern theories of memory, to which we will now turn, demonstrate the mechanisms by which such acts may be seen to effect the cultures in which they occur.

5. Memory

More than fifty years ago, Maurice Halbwachs argued that we acquire and recall our memories within the mental spaces provided to us by

membership in a social group — particularly, but not necessarily, a religious association (Connerton 36-37). He hypothesized that all memory is structured by social framework, and that collective memory is not a metaphor but "a social reality transmitted and sustained through the conscious efforts and institutions of the group" (Yerushalmi xv). The defining character of memory, as it applies to our inquiry, is that memories are public and shareable; one person's memories are supported by those of others in the same group (Halbwachs 12). Stressing the connection between collective and personal memory, he contrasted them both to historical memory — the reconstruction of the past by historians whose task it is to replace sacred liturgical memory with secular liturgical memory, essentially by conflating the two and by making more-or-less abstract religious symbols concrete, even if it involved creating some of them. This seems, in the opinion of the reader, not an inaccurate description of the activities of the chroniclers of 1096, particularly those of the poets, as they invoked both Akedah and Mikdash in an effort to sacralize the contemporary behaviour of the martyrs. Having noted this possible connection between modern theories of memory and the subject at hand, let us now turn our attention to the long-range effects that the catastrophes of 1096 may have had on the commemorative memory structures of subsequent generations of Ashkenazic Jewry.

We have already noted how cultures lacking a modern sense of historiography may be remarkably oblivious to the differences between period and qualities of time. This may be due to the topocentric nature which Funkenstein attributes to collective memory (9), because of which events and historical institutions of the past merely serve as prototypes and are not recognized for their

uniqueness. According to Yerushalmi, the single most important response to medieval disaster was the composition of *selihot,* penitential prayers which "themselves militated against too literal a concern with specific details" — the poet being able to take it for granted that the community was sufficiently familiar with the 'facts' (45-46). Yerushalmi also tells us that religious memory flows through two channels: ritual and recital (11), likewise Casey suggests that memory is basically as much a function of the human body as it is the human mind (x), and Connerton draws our attention to Durkheim's account of the non-cognitive strategies by which societies celebrate symbols of themselves in commemorative rituals that derive their power from the emotional effects of social interaction (103). In light of these observations, we may believe that whatever memories were invoked by these penitential liturgies were perhaps not matters of intellection alone, but may also be seen as being literally imbedded in the physiological makeup of the participants.

According to James Young, in his recent book on Holocaust monuments and memorials, it is important for us to realize how much our understanding of events depends on this construction of 'historical' memory, how much of the public's memory is intentionally constructed and, most important for the thesis of this paper, to what extent the consequences of this historical understanding match the intention of the constructing agencies (15). The evaluation of the long-term effects of officially cast memory in a given society, to ask not only how people have been moved, but toward what ends they have been moved, has implications which, in the opinion of this reader, bear directly on our topic of 1096 as a

watershed for Ashkenazic Jewry, especially as they apply to the consequences, both short- and long-range, of this kind of activity.

6. Politics

The concept of memory as social is especially important to our evaluation of 1096 as a decisive turning point in Ashkenazic culture, especially when we consider Knapp's observation that religious values take the form of doctrines that are themselves dependent on the remembered patterns of behavior, our own and those of others who have gone before us (145). Yerushalmi tells us that personal memory is among the most fragile and capricious of our faculties (5), and yet the very way in which we employ images of the past, particularly in order to legitimate our current social order, presupposes a significant volume of mutually shared memory (Connerton 3). Historical consciousness and the consciousness of being 'Chosen since the beginning of history' are intertwined in the Scriptures (Funkenstein 13), but we must be aware that the aim of any group, religious or political, is to create a store of common memory as a foundation for unification (Young 6), since official memory of events in a nation's past may be used to affirm the righteousness of a people, even their divine election (2). According to Funkenstein, the historical consciousness of both ancient Israel and ancient Greece was created from the consciousness of historic origins (12), but while sensitivity to the development of civilization and a search for 'reasons' was the mark of Greek historiography, the distinguishing feature of Hebrew Scripture is the emphasis on supreme supervision and the legitimization of the ruler (13). By selecting contemporary secular events, such as battles lost or won, and conflating

them with sacred liturgical memories, the symbolic past is made concrete in the present. Unfortunately, there appear to be several problems with the idea of intentionally creating a ritually unified remembrance of the past, particularly as they relate to the cultural aftermath of the massacres of 1096.

Our experience of the present may very largely depend on our knowledge of the past, but the most important failure of collective memories is that across time they become far too easy to deny (Knapp 142). We are not speaking here of denial in the psychological sense of pathological strategies for dealing with conflicting memories, but rather of a tendency for long-term and often disastrous error to occur when the leaders of cultures whose recorded history is only a small part of their collective memory are required to make decisions in crises which they can not wholly understand and whose consequences they cannot foresee. Religious leader in particular, such as those writers of *selihot,* the penitential prayers we referred to in the preceding section, who resort to rules and beliefs the elements of which 'go without saying' and are taken for granted, may often unintentionally achieve a level of social transformation that is more radical and in an direction different from anything that was originally intended. Casey reminds us that these implicit background narratives contain not only the consistent, the enduring, and the reliable, but also the fragile, the errant, and the confabulated (xii), and it is the ability, particularly in those in religious authority, to shift among domains of reference at will, while denying that any such process is occurring, that has caused many modern thinkers to become uncomfortable with too close an overlap between religion and politics.

7. **Authoritative Narratives**

It is the thesis of this paper that intentional modifications to the structures and symbols of collective memory are capable of producing complex and unpredictable changes in both the content of historical narrative and the ritual elements which depend upon these narratives for their authenticity. Let us therefore examine the role these narratives play in the shaping of a culture's ethical or political dispositions, particularly those of Ashkenazic Jewry. Historical narratives can play what Knapp terms 'normative' roles, and specific narratives possessing this normative status can be said to bear collective 'authority' in so much as they supply criteria which can shape or correct community behaviour.(123). Connerton tells us that although the basic elements of the Jewish prayer-book remain identical throughout the Diaspora, local differences frequently express the various conditions to which the local community has been exposed (45). Thus in both the Old Testament and the prayer-book, 'remembrance' is the narrative process by which the major formative events in the history of the community are recalled and recuperated. **(D)** But Funkenstein reminds us that the development of myths and historical fictions is an unavoidable part of the process of forming these narratives of historical consciousness, and that these historical fictions, like the sacrificial confabulations which we have already noted in the *piyyutim* commemorating the Crusader massacres, are often deliberate historical fictions (18).

Knapp, for one, would disagree with the idea that even deliberate historical fabrication must necessarily be a disqualifying factor. Modern reaction against the notion of fiction or myth as the source of a normative or authoritative narrative, he

tells us, usually involves the claim that historical actuality really matters; that canonical texts ought to be subjected to some sort of “demystified account of the actual historical conditions under which those texts were produced” (132). Likewise, Yerushalmi reminds us that the legendary elements of the Bible or the scriptures of Homer have become part of our collective memory to the point that they are not considered ‘fictions’ in a pejorative sense. Myth and poetry were certainly legitimate, even inevitable, modes of perception and historical interpretation in ancient times, and for a people like the Jews, who, while they have not always rejected history out of hand, at least seem to have been waiting for a new, metahistorical myth, even an unabashedly fictional form of narrative such as the novel may provide at least a temporary surrogate (98). Knapp rejects the notion that a special authority attaches to the actual as against the remembered or the imagined; for if genuine ancestral narratives can express values which may be, as we have seen, remote from any we can now embrace, then we can only truly consider the past as a source of analogies. Thus particular past events may provide us, by analogy, with norms of behaviour, but so may analogies borrowed from other traditions or even from fiction (131-32).

Chazan, as we have seen, states that the post-martyrdom narratives tell a story which is focused entirely on human volition, and is stripped of complex political and doctrinal issues. As a social historian, he views both the savagery of the attacking Crusaders and the remarkable Jewish readiness for martyrdom as resulting from the ‘common spiritual environment’ this frenzied period of history. But Mintz maintains that the importance of the events of 1096 lay not in the form of behaviour, which could have remained an anomaly (89) but in the

transformation of the acts themselves into a future norm of response to catastrophe; into what Knapp terms an 'authoritative' narrative.

Knapp's thesis thus comes to bear directly on our issue of 1096 as a turning point in Ashkenazic history. According to Knapp, a culture identifies itself not only with remembered action, but with actions it does not remember but may be convinced occurred, just as an amnesiac might come to take pride in an unremembered but reliably reported accomplishment (137). However, if the purpose of theodicy is seen, not as justice, but simply as a means of inducing obedience, then any connection to actual past events is clearly irrelevant (135), the only purpose of divine punishment then being to make a people identify with an element of the past in a manner that requires them to take responsibility for it, regardless of its historical actuality (138). On balance, it would appear to this reader that what is in question in the process of determining whether the long-term effects of the Crusader massacres of 1096 represent a significant divergence from tradition is not the actuality of either the recent or the ancient past. What is far more important is rather the religious and cultural quality of the commemorative literature as an authoritative narrative, especially if we agree with Knapp's societal concept of collective punishment as an attempt to cause people to identify with a collective future.

8. The Future

Young reminds us that, once created, memorial narratives are capable of taking on lives of their own that are often stubbornly resistant to the intent of their original makers (3). Of what Mintz calls the "mighty confluence of

factors that had gone into the making of 1096", two stand out to the modern eye: the generation's extraordinary sense of its own righteousness; and the monumental hatred between Christians and Jews (101). The first of these relates to the point taken earlier about the new paradigm of punishment as a sign of righteousness that arose out of the memorial literature. Unlike the encouraging evolution that occurs in Lamentations from the image of God as the enemy, or rather as acting through the enemy (1:12f), to the discovery of meaning and the revival of hope for transformation that develops in 3:21f; after 1096, no transformation from an already attained state of perfection seems to have been deemed necessary. To this reader it appears as if the seemingly endless search for that unknown sin hidden within the ancient Jewish soul, which was believed to have originally caused the Diaspora and henceforth all the woes that followed, had somehow had a more benign effect on Ashkenazic culture than the newly advanced system of theodicy which connected suffering with righteousness without involving any more than the nominal mention of sin.

The most notable effect of this new paradigm, not surprisingly, was the shifting of the burden of anger from God to the enemy. Katz states unequivocally that "In the Ashkenazi Middle Ages, the act of martyrdom was deliberately and pointedly directed at the Christian world" (92), the concept of the Jewish community's religious mission as one of antagonism to Christianity being nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the attitude and behaviour of the Jewish martyrs (90). In their furious indignation, the chroniclers put anti-Christian sentiments in the mouths of the martyrs that are so excessive that later generations have found them to be substantially unrepeatable (89). It is particularly interesting

to note, as Mintz points out, how many of the invectives in the Chronicles against Christianity take the form of the curses in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, “in which the Israelites are told of the horrors awaiting *them* if they fail to uphold the covenant” (93).

We must agree with Chazan’s sense that the creative lines of thought which developed in the late 11th and early 12th centuries not only continued to have a profound effect on subsequent European history, but came to dominate the world scene well into the twentieth century. Unfortunately, the ritualized nature of these self-sacrifices, which the Jewish chroniclers considered to be so sublime, where viewed by their Christian counterparts as barbaric in the extreme (221). The reported Jewish rejection of any form of surrender or any degree of accommodation to the, admittedly violent and frightening, but surely temporary, demands of the besieging hordes, lead to a shattering on the part of the Jews of normal moral and ethical constraints. According to Chazan, “One might easily hypothesize a connection between the 1096 reality of Jewish parents willing to take the lives of their own children rather than submit to conversion and the subsequent image of Jews capable of taking the lives of Christian youngsters out of implacable hostility to the Christian faith” (213). The pervasive nature of the violence which has ever since periodically engulfed European Jews and Christians alike can thus be seen as the offspring, at least in part, of the violence of the open age of the 11th century, accidentally promoted into the future by the myth-making activities of the chroniclers of the Crusader massacres of 1096.

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