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Contents

Foreword	vii
JOSÉ RAMÓN MAGDALENA NOM DE DÉU, Yom Tov Assis, maestro, amigo y hermano	1
<i>English and Spanish Section</i>	
HARVEY J. HAMES, “Fear God, my Son, and King”: Relations between Nahmanides and King Jaime I at the Barcelona Disputation	5
JOSÉ HINOJOSA MONTALVO, Orfebres judíos en el Reino de Valencia	21
BENJAMIN R. GAMPEL, Royal Priorities: Duke Martí, the Riots against the Jews of the Crown of Aragon and the “Blessed Passage to Sicily” (1391-1392)	35
RAM BEN-SHALOM, <i>The Innocent Converso</i> : Identity and Rhetoric in the <i>Igeret Orhit</i> Genre Following the Persecution of 1391	55
MIGUEL ÁNGEL MOTIS DOLADER, Los judíos de Mallén (Zaragoza) en el siglo 15: Una aljama de realengo en la Encomienda de la Orden del Hospital	75
MOISÉS ORFALI, Provisions Relating to Jewish Moneylenders in the Medieval <i>Cortes</i> of Castile-León	93
ELEAZAR GUTWIRTH, Town and Country in Medieval Spain	109
NAHEM ILAN, “Do Not Talk Excessively With Women”: A Study of Selected Medieval Sefardic Commentaries	127
MOSHE IDEL, Mongol Invasions and Astrology: Two Sources of Apocalyptic Elements in 13th Century Kabbalah	145

ERIC LAWEE, The Omnisignificant Imperative in Rashi Supercommentary in Late Medieval Spain	169
JAMES W. NELSON NOVOA, Seneca in Sefarad on the Eve of the Expulsion: A Fifteenth Century Senecan <i>Florilegium</i> in Aljamiado	193
VICTORIA ATLAS PRILUTSKY, Los <i>Proverbios morales</i> de Shem Tov de Carrión, ¿para el rey o para el pueblo?	209
EDWIN SEROUSSI, Which Romance Songs did Iberian Jews Sing in 1492?	225
CYRIL ASLANOV, <i>Səfārad</i> as an Alternative Name for <i>Hispania</i> : A Tentative Etymology	239
IDAN PÉREZ, Nuevo fragmento de las <i>Siete Partidas</i> descubierto en la Biblioteca Nacional de Israel	251
MERITXELL BLASCO ORELLANA, La <i>Genizah</i> Catalana. Relaciones entre algunos documentos hebraicos de Barcelona, Gerona y Perpiñán	273
MAURO PERANI, Manuscripts Brought to Italy by the Jews Exiled in 1492: The Evidence of the “Italian <i>Genizah</i> ”	287
<i>Authors</i>	311
<i>Author’s Guidelines and Transliteration</i>	312

Hebrew Section

YOSEF KAPLAN, Yom Tov Assis in memoriam	⌘
AVRAHAM GROSSMAN, The Struggle against Abandonment of Wives in Muslim Spain	Ⓜ

JOSEPH RAPOPORT, The Royal Administration and its Relations with the Jewish Minority in the Kingdom of Navarre (1350-1425)	כא
JOSEPH R. HACKER, From Northern Italy to Spain: The Correspondence of the Sark Family in the 15th Century	לב
HANNAH DAVIDSON, Wise Women and Male Problems: The Ribash on Medical Efficacy	סה
ELIE ASSIS, Nahmanides' Approach to <i>Song of Songs</i>	פג
WARREN ZEV HARVEY, Hasdai Crescas' Relation to Nissim of Girona	צט
YOSEF YAHALOM, A Romance Maqāma: The Place of the "Speech of Tuvia Ben Zedeqiah" in the History of the Hebrew Maqāma	קיג
YEHOSHUA GRANAT, The Voice of a Hebrew Poetess in Christian Spain: On a Poem by Tolosana de la Caballería	קכט

Mongol Invasions and Astrology Two Sources of Apocalyptic Elements in 13th Century Kabbalah

Moshe Idel

The present study deals with two main “proofs” offered by some Kabbalists in the 13th century for the beginning of redemption: the conquests of the Land of Israel in 1260 by the Mongol hords on the one hand, and the astrological calculations of the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn conceived of as presiding changes in religion, on the other. In some cases the two topics are presented as connected to each other. The authors under scrutiny are R. Meshulam Dapiera of Barcelona, R. Yehudah ben Nisim ibn Malka, R. Abraham Abulafia, and a passage in the book of the Zohar. Ibn Malka’s testimony is compared to the widespread Tripoli prophecy, a 13th century Christian apocalypse. Thus, a greater concern with messianism is displayed by Kabbalah in the second half of the 13th century than presented in scholarship.

Early Kabbalah prior to 1240, and many forms of early medieval Jewish philosophy,¹ were only marginally interested in messianic apocalypticism.² The few occurrences of the terms Messiah and redemption in the first decades of the history of Kabbalah are quite modest, and indeed they do not touch upon

- 1 For some of the important surveys dealing mainly with the 13th century see Y. Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, B. Stein, tr., Albany 1993; D. Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought*, Ramat Gan 1997 (Hebrew), and A. Hyman, *Eschatological Themes in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 2002, and the texts adduced by S.M. Stern, *Aristotle on the World State*, Columbia, S.C. 1968, and S.O. Heller-Willensky, ‘Messianism, Eschatology and Utopia in the Philosophical-Mystical Trend of Kabbalah of the 13th Century’, *Messianism and Eschatology*, Z. Baras, ed., Jerusalem 1984, pp. 221-238 (Hebrew).
- 2 On the history and meanings of apocalypticism, which is not necessarily identical to messianism, see B. McGinn, *Visions of the End*, New York 1979, pp. 1-36; J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination, An Introduction in the Jewish Matrix of Christianity*, New York 1987, pp. 1-17; A. Saldarini, ‘Apocalyptic and Rabbinic Literature’, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37, 3 (1975), pp. 348-358; Idem, ‘Uses of Apocalyptic in the Mishnah and Tosefta’, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39, 3 (1977), pp. 396-409; P. Schäfer, *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie des rabbinischen Judentums*, Leiden 1978, pp. 37-43; M. Steinschneider, ‘Apocalypsen mit polemischer Tendenz’,

the core topics of the first Provencal and Catalan Kabbalistic writings. In this respect, Gershom Scholem's diagnosis of the indifference of early Kabbalists to apocalypticism is correct, but only insofar as the decades prior to 1240 are concerned.³ This, however, is not really a case of indifference toward eschatology and messianism in general in this period.⁴ Interestingly enough, the potential apocalyptic significance of the year 1240, which corresponds to the Jewish year 5000 – a real millennium – was not exploited by Kabbalists, though it appears in eschatological discussions of Ashkenazic writers during the first part of the 13th century.⁵

However, in addition to the special status of the Christian year 1240 in the Jewish calendar, this year is also connected to an historical event which had a profound impact in Europe: the invasion of Mongol tribes in Eastern Europe. This means that for some Jews, the beginning of the sixth millennium was

Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgaenlaendischen Gesellschaft 28 (1874), pp. 627-659; 29 (1875), pp. 162-166; S. Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic. A Sociological Analysis of Jewish Religious Movements*, Chapel Hill 1982, pp. 9-26, 45-60; J. Bloch, *On the Apocalyptic in Judaism*, Philadelphia 1952; M. Goldish and R.H. Popkin, eds., *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, vol. 1: Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World, Dordrecht 2001; J. Dan, *Apocalypse Then and Now*, Tel Aviv 2000, pp. 253-263 (Hebrew), and M. Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets*, Cambridge 2004, especially pp. 12-13, 79-80; J.B. Agus, 'The Messianic Ideal and the Apocalyptic Vision', *Judaism* 32 (1983), pp. 205-214. See also the bibliography adduced by M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, New Haven 1998, p. 328 notes 3 and 10, and Idem, 'Jewish Apocalypticism: 670-1670', *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 2, J. J. Collins et al., eds., New York, London 1998, pp. 204-237, and 'On Apocalypticism in Judaism', *Progress, Apocalypse, and Completion of History and Life After Death of the Human Person in the World Religions*, P. Koslowski, ed., Dordrecht, Boston, London 2002, pp. 40-74.

3 G. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, New York 1972, pp. 38-39, Idem, *Sabbatai Sevi, the Mystical Messiah*, tr. R.J.Z. Werblowsky, Princeton 1973, p. 15.

4 See, e.g., H. Pedaya, *Name and Sanctuary in the Teaching of R. Isaac the Blind*, Jerusalem 2001 (Hebrew) and M. Idel, 'Commentaries on the *Secret of Ibbur* in 13th Century Kabbalah and their Significance for the Understanding of the Kabbalah at its Inception and its Development', *Daat* 73 (2012), pp. 13-14 (Hebrew).

5 For the apocalyptic nature of the expectations in Ashkenaz in the first part of the 13th century and the various reasons for such intensified expectations, including the rumors concerning the Mongols, see I.J. Yuval, 'Jewish Messianic Expectations towards 1240 and Christian Reactions', *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, P. Schäfer and M.R. Cohen, eds., Leiden 1998, pp. 105-122, and his *"Two Nations in Your Womb": Perceptions of Jews and Christians*, Tel Aviv 2000, pp. 293-297 (Hebrew). There the reader will also find a comprehensive bibliography dealing with the Mongols and the Jews in this period, namely before 1240, which will not be repeated here, since it does not deal with Kabbalistic material and concerns basically Ashkenazic Judaism.

Mongol Invasions and Astrology

accompanied by apocalyptic rumors as to the end of Christianity.⁶ The belief that global military conflagrations were the Gog and Magog apocalyptic battles was the “natural” conclusion from a reading of the traditional apocalyptic literature that was produced in the period between the 6th and the 10th centuries.

The arrival of hordes of Mongols – other than those that had arrived in Eastern Europe and so terrified Christian Europe before 1240 – some few years later, prior to 1260, in Iraq, Syria and the Land of Israel and their conquest of great parts of the Land of Israel, including Jerusalem, made a great impression upon the Jews in Spain. It should therefore be considered as one of the major catalysts of the renewed interest in a more active attitude to apocalyptic messianism among Jews there,⁷ especially some of the Kabbalists active in the second part of the 13th century. The first scholar who pointed out the surge of messianic aspirations during a single generation in the second part of the 13th century was the historian Heinrich Graetz.⁸ However, he did not address the issue of the rumors about the Mongols and the development of Kabbalah. Indeed, from the phenomenological point of view, the situation changes rather drastically after the middle of the 13th century, and we witness several short apocalypses in the few decades before 1300, written by Kabbalists of Spanish origin, unlike what happened earlier in the case of the Ashkenazic writers. Below I shall try to point out the possible impact of the rumors on some Kabbalists of the second part of the 13th century.

R. Meshulam ben Shelomo Dapiera

The poet R. Meshulam ben Shelomo Dapiera, an inhabitant of Gerona⁹ and

6 For the Tripoli prophecy see the comprehensive monograph of R.E. Lerner, *The Power of Prophecy: The Cedar of Lebanon Vision from the Mongol Onslaught to the Dawn of the Enlightenment*, Berkeley, Los Angeles 1983.

7 On fears and expectations provoked by the Mongolian invasion see, especially, A.Z. Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, Y. Even Shmuel, ed., 2nd ed., Jerusalem 1987, pp. 167, 212-215. See also the introduction of M. Idel to this edition, p. 15, and in Idem, *Messianic Mystics*, New Haven 1998, pp. 8, 363-364, note 11.

8 See H. Graetz, ‘The Stages in the Evolution of the Messianic Belief’, *Heinrich Graetz, The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*, I. Schorsch, ed., New York 1975, p. 166, without however attempting to offer any explanation of this phenomenon. See also Harkabbi’s appendix 7 to H. Graetz, *Divrei Yimei Israel*, tr. Sh.P. Rabinovich, vol. 5, Warsaw 1897, pp. 373-375 (Hebrew), who attempts to describe some of the apocalyptic treatises attributed to R. Shim’on bar Yohai – written in fact earlier – against the eschatological ambiance of the middle 13th century Mongol invasions.

9 On this poet and his other poems see H. Brody, ‘Poems of R. Meshulam ben Shelomo da Piera’, *Studies of the Research Institute for Jewish Poetry in Jerusalem* 4 (1938), pp. 1-118 (Hebrew); E. Fleischer, ‘“The Gerona School” of Hebrew Poetry’, *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*,

someone who was close to three major Kabbalists active in that city,¹⁰ knew that “at the limit of Ashkenaz, cities are terrified, some of them being afraid of the sword”.¹¹ Writing in the summer of 1260 this author was aware of the panic that prevailed among Christians in Germany due to the invasion of the Mongols in Eastern Europe and also, as we shall see below, due to their victories in the Middle East. An example of the nexus between the rumors regarding the Mongols and the heightening of the eschatological expectations finds expression in R. Meshulam Dapiera’s poem:

There is a witness to Redemption / and vision [*we-hezyon*] and legends
widespread,¹²
And the kingdom will be renewed in our days / for the lost nation and the
dispersed communities,
And an offering will be brought to the son of David and Ishai / and
donations, to My secretaries and My officers,
And My Temple will be built up and consolidated...
The tribes that were dispersed in the ancient days / Now they have left the
country of their sojourn,¹³
And the sign that they were sent by God is / that many princes are afraid.
And their [the tribes’] time has come / to [perform] an act of great
redemption and they have [already] passed the passages.

I. Twersky, ed., Cambridge, Mass. 1982, pp. 35-49, especially p. 37, and M. Kriegel, ‘The Reckonings of Nahmanides and Arnold of Villanova: On the Early Contacts between Christian Millenarianism and Jewish Messianism’, *Jewish History* 26 (2012), pp. 17-40, especially p. 25 and the accompanying endnotes.

10 See G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, tr. A. Arkush, R.Z.J. Werblowsky, ed., Philadelphia, Princeton 1987, pp. 408-410; M. Idel, “‘In a Whisper’: On Transmission of *Shi’ur Qomah* and Kabbalistic Secrets in Jewish Mysticism’, *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 47, 3 (2011), pp. 462-464. On da Piera and the Geronese Kabbalists see also M. Idel, ‘Nahmanides: Kabbalah, Halakhah and Spiritual Leadership’, *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership*, M. Idel and M. Ostow, eds., Northvale 1998, pp. 21-23.

11 See the text, originally printed by Chaim Schirmann in 1940 in the newspaper *Ha-Aretz*, and reproduced in his *Hebrew Poetry in Sefarad and in Provence*, vol. 2, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv 1956, pp. 317-318 (Hebrew), and in A.Z. Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, p. 214. For a discussion of it see J. Schirmann, *The History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, E. Fleischer, ed., Jerusalem 1997, pp. 317-319 (Hebrew).

12 The Hebrew is *be-fi rabim shegurot* that may be translated literally: “found commonly in the mouth of many people”.

13 This is a hint at the common misunderstanding of the Mongols as the ten lost Jewish tribes, who allegedly left the region beyond the mythical river of Sambatyon, as part of the messianic redemption.

Mongol Invasions and Astrology

See how

Babylonia¹⁴ was seized, and Aleppo/ and Damascus, and the towns were devastated.¹⁵

There can be no doubt that in mentioning the seizing of “Babylonia” and Syrian towns and the devastation of their cities, the poet is referring to the invasion of the Mongols between 1258 and March 1260. Moreover, this event is explicitly envisioned as part of an eschatological scheme, which mentions explicitly both the coming of the Messiah and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem in the imminent future. The poet writes that “My redeemer [*goali*] broke the mountains that separate”, in a context that refers to the legendary river Sambatyon.¹⁶ The Mongols are conceived of as the Ten Lost Tribes, and are designated the “hidden ones” – *ha-Genuzim*.¹⁷ As we learn from the first-cited verse, the rumors concerning the Tribes were quite “widespread”. The vision mentioned there may reflect some revelation related to these rumors and legends. The poet explicitly indicates that the Temple will be rebuilt and the sacrifices renewed, and the belief in the imminent construction of the Temple is expressed again later on in the same poem. It would seem to be no exaggeration to describe R. Meshulam’s tone in this poem as that of acute messianism. The Tribes are depicted as the messengers of God, who is the speaker through out these verses.

Before turning to the revelatory – one of the meanings of apocalypse – tone, note should be made of the Hebrew term translated here as “passages” – *ma’abarot* – which means passages over a river. Indeed a river is mentioned shortly afterwards in the poem, and it seems quite plausible that the poet is hinting at the Sambatyon river, which allegedly surrounds the Ten Lost Tribes and does not allow them to return to the “civilised” world. The Tribes’ arrival at the passages over the river is an implicit hint of the imminent redemption. The poem from which the above lines were quoted was composed, so scholars assume, not before the summer of 1260 in Catalonia.

This is unequivocal evidence of the messianic excitation that the rumors provoked among Jews in Northern Spain. Dapiera’s testimony refers to rumors and aspirations without connecting them to broader speculative systems – astrological, philosophical or Kabbalistic. However, it should be pointed out that the discussions of the messianic role of the Mongols do not constitute a topic in themselves, but are part of a larger poem dealing with religious topics, and just before the occurrence of the passages adduced above, Dapiera writes that “All my

14 I assume that the fall of Baghdad is mentioned here.

15 A.Z. Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, p. 214.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., p. 215. See also R.E. Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy*, pp. 21-23.

desire is to teach the secret of resurrection – and I learned hidden things about it”.¹⁸ This means that he concatenated the apocalyptic understanding of the Mongol invasion with a traditional eschatological theme – the resurrection of the body – though it is not clear how exactly he understood the latter concept. In general, as mentioned above, the poet claims that he inherited secret traditions, some of them from Kabbalists.

The poet gave expression to what may be called a more popular vision of imagohistory, namely the understanding of the present by means of images found in the traditional eschatological reservoir. Much of the crucial images here – the redeemer, the Tribes and the river – are impositions that have nothing to do with the historical events they attempt to understand or explain.

R. Yehudah ben Nisim ibn Malka's Mongols and the Tripoli-Prophecy

Dapiera's somewhat younger contemporary, R. Yehudah ben Nisim ibn Malka,¹⁹ was a Kabbalist with a strong penchant to astrology who was most probably active in the 1260s, perhaps in Northern Africa, and was also aware of the Mongol invasions. He, too, conceived of them as part of the eschatological scenario to be actualized already in his lifetime.²⁰ In an interesting passage he wrote:

When the rumor of the nation that dwells over the sea, which is called the Tatars, increases with us the expectations of our nation as to what God

- 18 H. Shirman, *Hebrew Poetry in Sefarad and in Provence*, Jerusalem 1954, p. 317 (Hebrew). The mentioning of resurrection may well be connected to the famous controversy on resurrection related to Maimonides, as Dapiera was one of the critiques of the Jewish philosopher.
- 19 On this author and his views on astrology see G. Vajda, *Juda ben Nissim ibn Malka, philosophe juif marocain*, Paris 1954, pp. 45-46, 136-141, 143, and his 'La Doctrine Astrologique de Juda ben Nissim ibn Malka', *Homenaje a Millás Vallicrosa*, vol. 2, Barcelona 1956, pp. 483-500. On Kabbalah and astrology in general see J. Halbronn, *Le Monde juif et l'Astrologie*, Milano 1985, pp. 289-334; R. Kiener, 'Astrology in Jewish Mysticism from the *Sefer Yesira* to the *Zohar*', *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987), pp. 1-42; on the importance of astrological-magical terminology for the better understanding of Kabbalah and Hasidism in general see also M. Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, Albany 1995, index s.v. *Astrology*.
- 20 See the manuscript document extant in a unique manuscript in the Jewish Theological Seminary of America Library in New York, part of which has been printed and analyzed in M. Idel, 'The Beginnings of the Kabbalah in North Africa? The Forgotten Document of R. Yehudah ben Nissim ibn Malka', *Pe'amim* 43 (1990), pp. 8-12 (Hebrew). For more on debates related to the time of ibn Malka see A. Afterman, *The Intentions of Prayers in Early Ecstatic Kabbalah: A Study and Critical Edition of an Anonymous Commentary to the Prayers*, Los Angeles 2004, pp. 23-34 (Hebrew).

Mongol Invasions and Astrology

intended,²¹ by His mercy, to see that many people speak on the topic of religions, saying that the time is close, all these motivated me to search and inquire into the path of the stars to whom power was given, and they are innovating things in our world in accordance to the will of the Creator, blessed be He. And the desire of the ancient ones was to search and inquire, before anything else, into the conjunction of the heavy planets, namely Saturn and Jupiter.²²

The texts and the events referred to above relate to the early sixties of the 13th century. The apocalyptic dimensions are represented by the great conjunction of the two planets, which was seen as related to a profound change in religion, a well-known topos in the Middle Ages.²³ The conjunction would take place over a period of eleven years, between 1265-1276, and ibn Malka mentions eleven years explicitly; and it would be accompanied by wars, which would be followed by a messianic age,²⁴ and the author explicitly mentions that at that time, the religion of Israel will prevail.²⁵ What is especially important in the above passages is the connection between the historical event, the astrological speculations and the messianic hopes. Interestingly enough, ibn Malka mentions that he was asked by some of his friends to inquire how the astrological data point in favor of the Jews, and elsewhere he claims that what he wrote he had grasped through his intellect; in other cases too he claimed that he had “seen”, i.e., understood.²⁶ Thus, we have an insight into the emergence of some aspects of the document. Unfortunately, we do not know where it was composed, but given the fact that the document contains dates referring to the Christian calendar and names of months in a Roman language, I assume it was written in Spain.

21 The word in the manuscript is not so clear here.

22 M. Idel, ‘The Beginnings’, p. 8.

23 A. Marx, ‘An Article on the Year of Redemption’, *Ha-Tzofeh le-Hokhmat Yisrael* 5 (1921), p. 198 (Hebrew), mentioning the *coniunctio maxima* between Saturn and Jupiter. G. Vajda, *Recherches sur la philosophie et la Kabbale dans la pensée juive du Moyen Age* (Études Juives 3), Paris 1962, p. 264; J. Halbronn, *Le Monde juif et l’Astrologie*, pp. 139-142, 156-159; R. Abraham bar Hiyya, *Sefer Megilat ha-Megaleh*, A. Poznanski and J. Guttmann, eds., Berlin 1924, pp. 119, 128, 153-154, and M. Beit-Arié and M. Idel, ‘An Essay on the End and Astrology by R. Abraham Zacut’, *Kiryat Sefer* 54 (1979), pp. 174-194 (Hebrew); *Ibid.* pp. 825-826, and M. Idel, *Saturn’s Jews: On the Witches’ Sabbath and Sabbateanism*, New York 2011, *passim*. On the origin of religions as linked to the great conjunctions of Saturn and Jupiter see O. Loth, ‘Al-Kindi als Astrolog’, *Morgenländische Studien, Festschrift für Dr. Fleischer*, Leipzig 1875, pp. 263-309; F.A. de Armas, ‘Saturn in Conjunction: From Albumasar to Lope de Vega’, in *Saturn from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Ottawa 1992, pp. 151-171.

24 M. Idel, ‘The Beginnings’, p. 11.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 11.

Ibn Malka's connection between the Mongols, astrology and the change in religion is very reminiscent of the view found in a contemporary apocalypse known as the "Cedars of Lebanon" or according to a somewhat later version, although still in the late 13th century, known as the Tripoli Prophecy:

The tall Cedar of Lebanon will be felled. Mars will prevail over Saturn and Jupiter. Saturn will waylay Jupiter in all things. Within eleven years there will be one God and one monarchy. The second god has gone. The sons of Israel will be liberated from captivity [*a captivitate*]. A certain people called "without a head" or reputed to be wanderers, will come. Woe to the clergy. A new order thrives: if it should fall, woe to the Church. There will be many battles in the world. There will be mutations of faith, of laws, and of kingdoms. The land of the Saracens will be destroyed.²⁷

I discern in this short passage a linkage between changes in religion, namely, the mutations of faith and of law, and more than implicitly, an astrological vision, as found also in Ibn Malka. Moreover, in both cases "eleven years" is mentioned explicitly. The mention of the "captivity" of the sons of Israel may refer to the Ten Lost Tribes imagined to be imprisoned behind the Sambatyon River. It may well be that here we have some form of Jewish influence on the Christian apocalypse, since the redemption of the Jews is explicitly mentioned. If I am correct in this conjecture, the Mongol-astrological connection was known in more than one continent. Again, if my proposal that a significant affinity be seen between the text of Ibn Malka and the Christian apocalypse is accepted, we have an example of an impact of Jewish apocalypticism on a major Christian apocalyptic document.²⁸

In any case, the messianic expectations were also related to astrological calculations in the same period. R. Moshe ben Yehudah, the fairly unknown author of *Commentary on the Hebrew Alphabet* – a treatise widespread in manuscripts – wrote that "all [the data] amount to five thousands and twenty years, [=1260] and [then] the rule of Saturn [Shabatai] will commence and during it our redemption will be with the help of Shaday, blessed be His Name".²⁹ It should be mentioned that precisely in this period, the middle of the 13th century, another testimony predicted the advent of the Messiah in the year 1260.³⁰ There can be no doubt as

27 According to the translation of R.E. Lerner, *The Power of Prophecy*, pp. 16, 200-202.

28 See also the possible impact of Judaism on Joachim da Fiore, cf. R.E. Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham, Medieval Millenarians and the Jews*, Philadelphia 2001, and M. Idel, *R. Abraham Abulafia's Writings and Doctrine*, Ph. D. Thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1976, p. 134 (Hebrew).

29 Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 71, fol. 66b and see also *Ibid.*, fol. 66a.

30 See A. Toaff, 'Hints at a Messianic Movement in Rome in the Year 1260/61', *Bar Ilan, Sefer ha-Shanah* 14,15 (1977), pp. 114-121 (Hebrew).

Mongol Invasions and Astrology

to the existence of a significant cluster of messianic and apocalyptic discussions in some parts of the Jewish world connected to 1260; let me turn now to another of these.

R. Abraham ben Shemuel Abulafia

R. Abraham Abulafia [1240- c.1291], the author of *Sefer ha-Ot*, the *Book of the Sign* was a Kabbalist who claimed that he was both a prophet and a Messiah, and he composed one of the few and most important Jewish apocalypses in the Middle Ages.³¹ Unlike other authors active in Europe who were acquainted with the Mongols from hearsay and vague rumors, Abulafia was intrigued by these rumors and went in search of the Mongolian hordes, which had invaded the Middle East and conquered Jerusalem. At the age of twenty, presumably inspired by a divine revelation, he went from Tudela to seek the Sambatyon River, and for this purpose he made a trip to the Land of Israel in 1260,³² when the Mongols were already occupying a substantial part of it. He presumably believed, in a manner reminiscent of his older Catalan contemporary Dapiera, that these newly-arrived armies were none other than the Ten Lost Tribes. Since he arrived in Acre in 1260, we may assume that the rumors that inspired him were already in circulation in 1258, triggered by the fall of the towns in the Middle East at the hands of the Mongols, as mentioned above. However, he did not go beyond Acre, and we may assume that some demystification of his apocalyptic belief took place. He presumably tried to establish some form of contact with the Mongols, and even learned a word in what he calls Tatar language, and had recourse to it in his numerical calculations.³³ Nevertheless, we have what seems to me to be an important clue to his apocalyptic interest, as he mentions the war, perhaps that between the Mongols and the Mameluks in 'Ein Jhalud – today the kibbutz 'Ein

31 A. Jellinek, ed., '*Sefer ha-Ot. Apokalypse des Pseudo-Propheten und Pseudo-Messias Abraham Abulafia*', *Jubelschrift zum siebzigsten Geburtstage des Prof. Dr. H. Graetz*, Breslau 1887, pp. 65-85. On this book see 'Three in One or One that is Three: On the Dating of Abraham Abulafia's *Sefer ha-Ot*', *Revue des études juives* 165 (2006), pp. 179-189. On Abulafia's Messianism see A. Berger, 'The Messianic Self-Consciousness of Abraham Abulafia: A Tentative Evaluation', *Essays on Jewish Life and Thought: Presented in Honor of Salo Wittmayer Baron*, J.L. Blau et al., eds., New York 1959, pp. 55-61 and M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 58-100. For an English translation of part of the passages under scrutiny below see R. Patai, *Messiah Texts*, Detroit 1979, pp. 178-180.

32 *Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, A. Gross, ed., Jerusalem 2000, p. 368.

33 See, e.g., his *Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, p. 182. There he refers also to the language of Togarma, presumably Turkish, as a distinct language. See also Z. Ben-Dor Benite, *The Ten Lost Tribes: A World History*, New York 2013, pp. 110-111.

Harod – in September of 1260, which ended with the defeat of the Mongols – a final defeat that terminated their presence in the Land of Israel.³⁴

Against this background, replete with rumors, misunderstandings and aspirations, though perhaps not them alone,³⁵ we may understand the apocalyptic tone of the most complex and daunting apocalypse in medieval Kabbalah, Abulafia's *Sefer ha-Ot*. This book recounts a vision he received, consisting of a description of apocalyptic wars in which different figures participated. Most prominent are the wars between three kings. The first is conceived of as the Southern king, or warrior, designated by the name of his angelic power, whom Abulafia calls Qedariel.³⁶ No doubt this is a reference to the Arab Mameluks, who were related to Egypt, as in many medieval Jewish sources the term Qedar refers to Islam.³⁷ The second is the Northern king or warrior, designated by Abulafia as Magdiel, a biblical name that was conceived in the Middle Ages as referring to Christianity.³⁸ The third one is the king or the warrior of the East, designated as Alfiel: I have not found any reference to such an angel or a religion in the Middle Ages. The fourth is described as Toriel, which should be quite plausibly identified with Judaism – because of the association with Torah – and probably with Abulafia himself. And, last but not least, the angelic figure of Yahoel, which

34 On this war see R. Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhanid War, 1260-1281*, Cambridge 1995.

35 Compare the proposal of H.J. Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder: Abraham Abulafia, the Franciscans, and Joachimism*, Albany 2008, that Abulafia was influenced by Christian spiritualists. Those tentative proposals have been followed, uncritically, by some scholars. In my opinion, much if not all of the spiritualist visions of Abulafia can be understood as derived from an extreme spiritualist understanding of Maimonides, upon whose book's alleged secrets Abulafia wrote no less than three commentaries, as well as other earlier sources. See, e.g., M. Idel, 'Abraham Abulafia: A Kabbalist "Son of God" on Jesus and Christianity', *Jesus Among the Jews*, N. Stahl, ed., London, New York 2012, pp. 60-93, and Idem, 'Inner Peace Through Inner Struggle in Abraham Abulafia's Ecstatic Kabbalah', *Journal for the Study of Sephardic & Mizrahi Jewry* 2, 1 (2009), pp. 62-96, or Idem, 'Abulafia's Secrets of the Guide: A Linguistic Turn', *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, A.L. Ivri, E.R. Wolfson, and A. Arkush, eds., Amsterdam 1998, pp. 289-329. On the other hand, for much more plausible influences of Christian thought on Abulafia see M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 295-302, and for the possibility of hesychastic practices see M. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, tr. J. Chipman, Albany 1987, pp. 13, 24, 35, 40, 52, 80, 122, 177.

36 This part of the apocalypse is not vocalized in the extant manuscripts. R. Patai, *Messiah Texts*, p. 180, reads here Qadriel, which does not make sense. Also his vocalization of what I decode as Toriel, as if Turiel, does not make sense.

37 See, e.g., R. David Qimhi's commentary on Jeremy 49:28.

38 See, e.g., the commentary of Rashi and Nahmanides on Genesis 36:43 or R. Bahya ben Asher's commentary on Genesis 36:39.

Mongol Invasions and Astrology

reveals itself to Abulafia.³⁹ In the imaginary wars described in this medieval apocalypse, the first king kills the second, which in my opinion means that Islam kills Christianity, while the third king kills the first, which means that a third nation will eradicate Islam. I assume that this third figure, a king coming from the East and governed by the angel Alfiel, points to the Mongols. The presumed representative of the Mongols is described as being non-Jewish, although sent by God to fight for the Jews.⁴⁰

It seems that war between the three super-powers took place, at the same time, only in the Land of Israel during the 13th century, when Crusaders, Mameluks and Mongols confronted each other. Unlike the allegory of *Sefer ha-Ot*, in historical reality the Mameluks defeated the Mongols: at that time Abulafia was in the immediate vicinity of the place where the war was waged. However, in the vision, the Kabbalist describes an eschatological war, not a specific historical one, and he envisioned a battle that would take place in the future. This battle would end differently from the victory of the Mameluks in September of 1260, for now the Mongols would prevail. In my opinion, Abulafia resorted to elements found in his eschatological aspirations and the historical experience he had in 1260, when the Christians were defeated by the Mameluks, and the latter also defeated the Mongol army, and he tries to “correct” the course of history in his apocalyptic vision, which culminated with the fourth kingdom, following the book of Daniel, and the coming of the fifth figure, the Messiah, based on the pun *Meshihi-Hamishi*. There is some form of apocalyptic counter-history here, which uses some historical material in a manner that subverts or reinterprets the past. As to the possibility of the return of the Mongols in Abulafia’s *imaginaire*, we should recall that in an apocalypse written twenty-eight years after their defeat at ‘Ein Jalud, they were designated, as mentioned above, the hidden ones – *ha-Genuzim* – i.e., as tribes which, despite being hidden at present, may return at a later stage.

In Abulafia’s apocalypse, however, the war described above was not a matter of a remote eschatological future. As mentioned, one figure participating in the apocalyptic drama represents Abulafia himself. The warrior who appeared to him in a vision before the three others, and identified as Toriel, is described as having at his disposition twenty-two thousands letters, an explicit reference, in my opinion, to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.⁴¹ Abulafia’s own

39 See M. Idel, *Ben, Sonship and Jewish Mysticism*, London, New York 2007, pp. 276-294, especially p. 290, and *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 90-91. The fourth and the fifth kings may stand for two out of Abulafia’s three types of Messiah – the human and the cosmic one.

40 *Sefer ha-Ot*, p. 84. See also above in the poem of R. Meshulam Dapiera. On the Mongols as having been sent by God see R.E. Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy*, p. 24.

41 See R. Abraham of Cologne’s *Keter Shem Tov*, a short Kabbalistic treatise written sometime in the sixties of the 13th century, which has some affinity to ecstatic

Moshe Idel

involvement with letters is quintessential for his special brand of Kabbalah. In fact I assume that the names Alfiel and Toriel point to the letters *aleph* and *tav*, namely the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet, some version of alpha and omega in the *Apocalypse of John* 1:8.

Completed in 1288, Abulafia's apocalypse claims in quite explicit terms that a major upheaval is about to take place in the near future:

The coming day is the day of Judgment
And it is called the day of remembrance
And the time of the trial has arrived
And the time of the end has been accomplished.
The heaven will become earth
And earth will become celestial
Because the Lord of the trial is called by the name YHWH
And His judgment is one of truth,
And His trial is upright.⁴²

In this apocalyptic scenario, Abulafia perceived himself to be playing an important role as a new shepherd:

Until the passage of the time of wrath and of the moment of fury
When the new shepherd has slept
Then YHWH, the Lord of Israel
Has aroused the heart of the shepherd
And he will wake from his sleep
And he will arouse the hearts of the sleepers of dust.⁴³
And the dead will live.⁴⁴

Abulafia was fond of the imagery of the shepherd as a leader, as we learn from other discussions in his writings. After all, Moses too, who was held to be the leader par excellence and the first redeemer, was a shepherd. There, however,

Kabbalah: "The Messiah will reveal the rationales of the Torah and the secret of 22 letters, which are the ground for all speech and all creature and this is the reason why also these three *sefirot* are like *segulah*, and then the kingdom of Israel will return and the kingdom of God, blessed be He, to its place, and the *'Atarah* will return to its primal place, as it has been said: "And God will be the King over the entire earth, and that day, He will be one, and His name will be one". (Printed in A. Jellinek, *Auswahl kabbalistischer Mystik*, Erstes Heft, Leipzig 1853, p. 43, corrected according to manuscripts.)

42 *Sefer ha-Ot*, p. 69. See also M. Idel, 'Inner Peace through Inner Struggle', pp. 68-71.

43 Daniel 12:2.

44 *Sefer ha-Ot*, p. 78.

Mongol Invasions and Astrology

leadership was less a matter of external events and much more a matter of inner speech.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the imagery of the shepherd is related to the biblical prophet Zekhariah, whose name Abulafia adopts in this apocalypse.⁴⁶ Likewise, though using widespread images from the stock of Jewish apocalypticism that deals, for example, with corporeal resurrection, the plain sense of these statements is far from reflecting Abulafia's own thought. He points to spiritual awakening as the real form of resurrection, namely the opening of the heart to a spiritual message, rather than the resurrection of the body.⁴⁷ This is no doubt an attempt to subvert the popular understanding of the eschatological terms by means of a strong philosophical interpretation. The manipulation of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, in either the oral or written form, is considered to be a main tool of awakening, but manipulation of the letters of the divine names in Hebrew even more so:

He did not do this to every people and nation
As He did to Israel His servant and His nation
For the sake of His Name
And the end of delivery and the day of redemption have arrived
But no one is paying attention to this issue today to know it.
There is no redemption but by means of the name of YHWH
And His redemption is not for those who do not request it
In accordance with His Name.
This is why I, Zekharyahu⁴⁸
The destroyer of the building
And the builder of the destruction
Have written this small book,
By [means of] the name of ADONAY the small,
In order to disclose in it the secret of YHWH the great.⁴⁹

According to Abulafia, divine names are both part of the technique for achieving an experience of the divine, and instruments for producing miracles.⁵⁰ Abulafia

45 See *Sefer Hayei ha-'Olam ha-Ba*, Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1582, fol. 45b and his *Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, A. Gross, ed., Jerusalem 2000, pp. 169-170. See also M. Idel, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, tr. Menachem Kallus, Albany 1989, pp. 3-11.

46 See Zachariah 1:4, 10:3, 11:3, 8. On the advent of the shepherd in the eschaton see also R.E. Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy*, pp. 20-21.

47 *Sefer ha-Ot*, pp. 68, 79.

48 On Abulafia and theophoric names see M. Idel, *Ben, Sonship and Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 306-307.

49 *Sefer ha-Ot*, p. 76. See also M. Idel, *Ibid.*, p. 312.

50 See Abulafia's epistle *Ve-Zot Li-Yhudah, Auswahl kabbalistischer Mystik*, Erstes

employed apocalyptic, concrete language in the plain sense of his visions, in order to transmit a much more spiritual message, gravitating around the concept of spiritual redemption as caused by the recourse to linguistic techniques. Based on my reading of Abulafia's writings, I hardly imagine that an external catastrophe – unlike the call for an internal, spiritual *metanoia* – is what he intended to communicate, even in the most apocalyptic of his extant writings. In my opinion, the apocalyptic imagery, whether interpreted metaphorically or not, served as an important form of mediation between messianic elites and popular circles, but in Abulafia's case it was much more a matter of rhetoric, or of an exoteric discourse, than of belief in the centrality of apocalyptic ruptures. In my opinion, in addition to the religious significance of the above-mentioned warriors/angels, there is also an anthropocentric significance, namely, one relating to an inner battle between the human powers within the body, though this issue does not concern us here. These samples from a much longer apocalypse, as well as my perusal of other apocalyptic writings of Abulafia, do not betray traces of Christian spirituality in the first part of the 13th century.

Let me turn to astrological aspects of Abulafia's thought. The impact of this set of imagery in his thought requires a much more detailed analysis than can be undertaken here, and when completed it will attest to the absorption of astrology in some of Abulafia's prophetic visions as well as in unidentified material found in manuscripts, some of them conceptually close to the Kabbalistic writings of R. Barukh Togarmi or the early Yosef Gikatilla. Let us adduce just two examples from Abulafia's known writings, out of the many that I hope to deal with in a separate study:

The end of the change of the times has arrived, and so has the end of the order of the stars, in accordance with the [divine] attributes, and the attributes and names will change, and the languages will be mixed, and the nations and the beliefs will be distorted, and the diadem of the Israelite [nation] will return to its former state,⁵¹ and the rank of Jews will be related to the name of the essence [of God], not to the name of [His] attribute. [Then]the revealed will become concealed, and the concealed will become revealed, and the rank of the gentiles – men and women – will be lowered and they will be vanquished, and the rank of the Jews – men and women – will ascend and rise.⁵²

Heft, pp. 18-19, corrected according to Ms. New York, JTS 1887. On the messianic awareness of Abulafia in general see the useful study of A. Berger, 'The Messianic Self-Consciousness of Abraham Abulafia', pp. 55-61, and M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 58-100.

51 See above note 41.

52 *Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1580, fol. 41a, Gross, ed., p. 83.

Mongol Invasions and Astrology

The order of the stars, and perhaps of the planets as well, refers explicitly to an astrological event. However, this event is concatenated in a larger hierarchy, which also includes divine names, divine attributes – presumably on high – and the human languages and national changes below. Unlike the earlier passages from the apocalypse *Sefer ha-Ot*, which is not an astrological text, this text is astrological, though less apocalyptic, as is the next one:

Among the stars, the power of Saturn corresponds to it⁵³ because it⁵⁴ is the highest among its companions, and behold, the supernal is appropriate to the supernal, and the nation of Israel is superior to all the nations, “for there is a high one who watches over him that is high, and that there are yet higher ones”.⁵⁵ And “the high” is the dust⁵⁶ of the Land of Israel, and higher than it, which is appointed on it, is Saturn, and Israel are higher than them.⁵⁷

I propose that the discussions here be understood as relating to a threefold hierarchy: the Land of Israel, which is the highest of the lands, Saturn – the astral power appointed over it – which was considered to be the highest of the planets, and finally Israel, which in many cases represents the cosmic Agent Intellect.⁵⁸ This hierarchy is related in a way to Abulafia’s national hierarchy, which sees in the people of Israel, understood metaphorically as those persons who deal with intellectual issues, as constituting the highest nation, as well as to his hierarchy between three types of Messiah, which includes the national savior as the lower

53 To the Land of Israel. On the nexus between the Land of Israel and Saturn later on see D. Schwartz, ‘The Land of Israel in the Fourteenth Century Jewish Neoplatonic School’, *The Land of Israel in Medieval Jewish Thought*, M. Hallamish and A. Ravitzky, eds., Jerusalem 1991, p. 148 and note 40 (Hebrew).

54 The planet Saturn.

55 Ecclesiastes 5:7.

56 On the relation between “the power of dust” and Saturn see also Abulafia’s *Commentary on Sefer Yetsirah*, I. Weinstock, ed., Jerusalem 1984, p. 34.

57 *Sefer Gan Na’ul*, Ms. München 58, fol. 327a. This passage is copied verbatim in *Sefer ha-Peliah*, Premislany 1883, part I, fol. 76c, a book studied by Sabatai Tzevi in his youth. On this book see M. Kushnir-Oron, *The Sefer ha-Peli’ah and the Sefer ha-Kanah: Their Kabbalistic Principles, Social and Religious Criticism and Literary Composition*, Ph.D. Thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1980 (Hebrew), especially on pp. 75-76, where Abulafia’s influence on this book is discussed. On another issue, the pronunciation of the divine name by a messianic figure, as shared by both Abulafia and Sabatai Tzevi, see M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 185-187.

58 See M. Idel, ‘Definitions of Prophecy: Maimonides and Abulafia’, *Maimonides and Mysticism: Presented to Moshe Hallamish on the Occasion of his Retirement (Daat 64-66)*, A. Elkayam and D. Schwartz, eds., Ramat Gan 2009, pp. 9-11 (Hebrew).

redeemer, the inner intellect in man as an individual redeemer, and the universal Agent Intellect, which informs the other two, as the cosmic redeemer.⁵⁹

Unlike ibn Malka, Abulafia did not integrate astrological reflections and imagery with rumors regarding Mongols.

Mongols in a Zoharic Passage?

The most important body of Kabbalistic literature, known as the *Zohar*, which was composed in Castile beginning in the early eighties of the 13th century, includes a particular apocalypse, following some early medieval Jewish treatises dealing with the eschatological events. This literature adds an important dimension through its emphasis on the importance of the theurgical activity that the Kabbalist is requested to enact by his intentional performance of the commandments.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, it seems that the existence of a common background of the messianic expectations connected to the imminent arrival of the Lost Tribes may be considered a reason for the renewed concern with messianism and apocalypticism among Kabbalists. In one of the Zoharic passages we read:

The Holy One blessed be He [...] gave to the sons of Ishmael an inheritance below, in the Land of Israel [...] and they [the Muslims] delay the return of the sons of Israel to their place [...] The sons of Ishmael are destined to cause fierce wars in the world, and the sons of Edom will gather and wage battles against them, one on the sea, the other on the land, and one near Jerusalem. And each of them will rule over the other. And the Land of Israel will not be given to the sons of Edom. At that time, a nation [*'am ehad*] [coming] from the end of the world [*seifei 'alma*] will awake against the sinful Rome, and will fight there for three months. And [other] nations will gather there and it will fall in their hands, until all the sons of Rome will gather together from all the corners of the world and then the Holy One Blessed Be He, will arise on it, as it is written [Isaiah 34:6] "The Lord will offer a sacrifice in the city of Bazrah" [...] and God will destroy the sons of Ishma'el.⁶¹

59 More on the connection between Saturn, the image of the Jew, and the land of Israel, see Abulafia's *Sefer Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1580, fols. 95b, 102a. On three meanings of the Messiah see M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 65-71.

60 See Y. Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, trs. A. Schwartz, S. Nakache, and P. Peli, Albany 1993, pp. 52-74, and M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 106-109, 121-124.

61 *Zohar* II, fol. 32a. For an apocalypse where the final battle includes only Christians and Muslims, without mentioning a third nation, see the 13th century apocalypse entitled "Tefilat R. Shim'on bar Yohai", published by Y. Even Shmuel, ed, *Midrashei Geulah*,

Mongol Invasions and Astrology

First, let me point out that the contents of this passage are not paralleled by any other discussions in the Zoharic literature. The gathering of the Christian nations and the wars in the Holy Land are indubitably reminiscent of the wars related to the Crusades. The historical alternation of the rule of Christians and Muslims in the Land of Israel in the 13th century, too, is well reflected in the above passage. However, while the Muslims and the Christians are obviously alluded to by the terms “sons of Ishmael” and “Edom”, the third nation – described as the victorious one – which will arrive from “the end of the world” and will fight both Christianity and Islam, remains unidentified. It seems that this enigmatic reference fits the conquests of the Mongols, who arrived “from the end of the world”, though this event has been reworked and propelled into the future, as was also the case with Abulafia’s apocalypticism. Rome here is certainly a city, although not necessarily the specific city alone but also the place of the Holy See and as such, an allegory for Christianity. From the context of the above quotation, it is obvious that the author, or the editor, of the *Zohar* conceived of the wars of that third nation as part of more complex eschatological processes, which involve divine intervention, as mentioned in the sentence immediately following the quoted passage. In the vein of my discussion of imago-history, important images in the past, belonging to history or its reception, are rearranged in order to generate a future apocalyptic history.

Let me quote in its entirety the verse from Isaiah 34:6 – part of which was cited in the Zoharic passage – on the assumption that the Zoharic author knew it all by heart, and not only the quoted part: “The sword of the Lord is drenched with blood and covered with fat – with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of rams prepared for sacrifice. The Lord will offer a sacrifice in [the city of] Bazrah. He will make a mighty slaughter in Edom”. The verse had been part of the apocalyptic scenario since late antiquity and it also recurs elsewhere in the *Zohar*.⁶² Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that Bazrah did indeed fall into the hands of the Mongols around 1258. Moreover, the fat mentioned in the verse, in Hebrew *helev*, can be easily decoded as Haleb, namely Aleppo, which also fell to the Mongols in 1260. In view of the end of the quote, where Edom is mentioned, I imagine that the author of the Zoharic text decoded the consonants HLV as Haleb, and in the situation at the end of the first decade of the second half of the 13th century, the rumors about the capture of Bazrah, and the fall of Haleb namely, Aleppo, and that of Edom, i.e., the Christian Crusaders, inspired the reading of HLB as Aleppo, reinforcing my point as to the identity of the third nation as Mongols. Moreover, as Aharon Jelinek already pointed out, another

Jerusalem, Tel Aviv 1954, pp. 281-282 (Hebrew), and Yuval, ‘Jewish Messianic Expectations’, pp. 107-108.

62 See, *Zohar* I, fol. 238b, where there is a theosophical interpretation of a part of the verse, II, fol. 40b, and III, fol. 89a.

Zoharic passage that may be understood as an apocalypse may be the result of the impact of Abraham Abulafia's attempt to meet the Pope in 1280, and the latter's sudden death.⁶³ In both cases, the eschaton is related to events that will happen in connection with Rome.

The common denominator of the Zoharic passage and in Abulafia's attributing a decisive role to an unspecified, third nation in the apocalyptic scenario constitutes a new dimension added to the traditional constellation of apocalyptic ideas, which rotated in Jewish circles around events related to Christianity and Islam alone. This addition depends on both images regarding historical events and their specifically Jewish understandings. In Abulafia, like in the passage of the *Zohar* translated above, it is the third nation that will prevail over the two other, before the redemption of the Jews will take place.

In my opinion, the two main late-13th century Kabbalists – the *Zohar* and Abraham Abulafia – as well as some other earlier minor figures such as R. Meshulam Dapiera and R. Yehudah ibn Malka, were acquainted with rumors and facts related to the Mongols, and they integrated them into their eschatological writings projecting into the future. Consequently, scholars should pay much more attention to the apocalyptic attitudes to these tribes invading first Eastern Europe and then the Middle East, and the subsequent expectations, though only as part of many other triggers for the emergence of some aspects of the Kabbalistic literatures, which flowered in an unprecedented manner in the second part of the 13th century, providing, at base, exposures of topics considered to be secrets of the Torah.⁶⁴

63 *Zohar*, III, fol. 212b. On this issue, see A. Jellinek, 'Ein historisches Datum in Buche Sohar?', *Bet ha-Midrash* 3, Leipzig 1853, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii, M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 121-124, and Idem, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, Albany 1989, p. 46. See also Idem, 'Abraham Abulafia and the Pope: The Meaning and the Metamorphosis of an Aborted Attempt', *AJS Review* 7-8 (1982-1983), pp. 1-17 (Hebrew). It should be mentioned that the intention was to send Abulafia's *Sefer ha-Ot* to Spain, though it is hard to know if this indeed happened. See his *Sefer ha-Ot*, p. 85. For another suggestion about seeing a reflection of a medieval event in another passage in the *Zohar* dealing with apocalypse, see R. Meroz, 'Is the Taking of Damietta Alluded to in a Zoharic Story?', *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 20 (2013), pp. 33-60.

64 Among those triggers I propose to include also the Alfonsine Renaissance in Toledo, the Ashkenazi esoteric impact in that period, and the possible arrival of earlier material that could inspire the Zoharic corpus. See M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven 1988, pp. 211-213, Idem, 'Incantations, Lists, and 'Gates of Sermons' in the Circle of R. Nehemiah ben Shelomo the Prophet – and their Impact', *Tarbiz* 77 (2008), pp. 475-555 (Hebrew), and 'R. Nehemiah ben Shelomo on the Star of David and the Name *Taftafia*: From Jewish Magic to Practical and Theoretical Kabbalah', *Ta-Shma: Studies in Judaica in Memory of Israel M. Ta-Shma*, vol. 1, A. Reiner et al., eds., Alon Shvut 2011, pp. 1-76 (Hebrew), where references to many other studies are found, as

However, many major points sharply separate the two types of Kabbalah on this issue, as on many others. The acute messianism of Abulafia, expressed by his self-description as a messiah, and the imminent date of redemption that he suggested would take place in 1290, was coupled with his public propagandistic activity, on the one hand, and his interiorized version of intellectual forms of messianism⁶⁵ – which is not found in the Zoharic literature – on the other. The Zoharic text discussed above operates with traditional imagohistory, without interpreting it through the use of another exegetical register, either astrological or philosophical, and in my opinion, not even a theosophical one. This means that the most important layer in Abulafia's eschatology, the individual redemption as a noetic process understood in Maimonidean terms, is missing in the Zoharic worldview, which is, basically, anti-Maimonidean. In other words, if Abulafia's eschatology indeed influenced the above Zoharic passage, which is possible though not certain, it is only the exoteric, i.e., apocalyptic, layer that has an echo in the main bulk of the *Zohar*; not Abulafia's most important, esoteric dimension

well as M. Idel, *Ben, Sonship and Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 410-417, and A. Goldreich, *Automatic Writing in Zoharic and Modernism*, Los Angeles 2010 (Hebrew).

65 See M. Idel, "'The Time of the End': Apocalypticism and its Spiritualization in Abraham Abulafia's Eschatology', *Apocalyptic Time*, A. Baumgarten, ed., Leiden 2000, pp. 155-186, Idem, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 102-103. Unaware of several of Abulafia's views discussed in these two studies, some of them printed for the first time from a manuscript in this article, as well as of much of what I wrote on Abulafia's messianism – including explicit discussions on affinities between Zoharic and Abulafia's eschatology, not to mention Jellinek's views on the topic – Haviva Pedaya too emphasized the affinity between the two *corpora* by resorting to common though isolated themes. See H. Pedaya, 'The Sixth Millenium: Millenarism and Messianism in the Zohar', *Daat* 72 (2012), pp. 51-98 (Hebrew), where she ignores the common background of the apocalyptic perceptions of the Mongol invasion, which had already been discussed on several occasions. See also the bibliography adduced by M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, p. 328 notes 3 and 10, and Idem, 'Jewish Apocalypticism: 670-1670', vol. 2, pp. 204-237, and 'On Apocalypticism in Judaism', pp. 40-74; Idem, 'Multiple Forms of Redemption in Kabbalah and Hasidism', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 101 (2011), pp. 27-70; Idem, 'Mystical Redemption and Messianism in R. Israel Baal Shem Tov's Teachings', *Kabbalah* 24 (2011), pp. 7-121 as well as Idem, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 17, 272-273. Serious knowledge never emerges out of ignorance, nor from mixing different eschatological views as if they are identical, without a proper discussion. An examination of Abulafian material found in manuscripts alone, as done for example in my article mentioned above in this footnote, may also help, especially insofar as a better understanding of Abulafia's specific, spiritualistic type of eschatology is concerned. For serious methodological and factual problems related to recent studies of Abulafia's thought, of which Pedaya was not aware of but in the steps of which she followed uncritically, see more in various footnotes in M. Idel, '*Sefer Yetzirah* and its Commentaries in Abraham Abulafia's Writings and the Remnants of the Commentary of R. Isaac of Bedershe', *Tarbiz* 79 (2011), pp. 471-556 (Hebrew). Those issues deserve a more detailed analysis.

of eschatology. It would therefore be better to embrace an approach that I called synchronic polychromatism,⁶⁶ namely, allowing for the concomitant existence of a variety of forms of Kabbalistic messianism which were articulated at the same time, and also for inconsistencies in the writings of the same author, especially where topics such as apocalypticism and messianism are concerned.⁶⁷

Some Conclusions

What may we learn from the above discussions regarding Kabbalistic apocalypticism and messianism? First and foremost, that two elements that did not play a significant role in traditional Jewish apocalypticism and in the first two stages of Kabbalah in Provence and Gerona, nevertheless appeared on the scene subsequent to 1240 with early apocalyptic themes, like the theme of the Sambatyon River, and offered an “actual” interpretation of history. This means that new elements – the Mongol invasion and astrological calculations – entered the pool of images of earlier Judaism and charged some of its apocalyptic themes with new valences. This is not only a matter of apocalypticism but also of messianism, as both the texts of Dapiera and Abulafia adduced above deal with messianic events as well. In view of such an explanation one may ask how Gershom Scholem’s following description of his opus may be understood:

If I have demonstrated something [at all] in my writings, is that I have shown that the same ancient apocalypse has accepted some forms and replaced them, but it is one [=the same] under its metamorphoses after the destruction of the second temple, and one is it in its first metamorphoses.⁶⁸

By emphasizing the importance of the rumors about the Mongolians for the emergence of a series of discussions about imminent redemption, sometimes having a clear apocalyptic tone, Gershom Scholem’s claim as to the persistence of the “messianic idea”⁶⁹ or the apocalyptic one over centuries becomes somewhat

66 M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, p. 17.

67 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 412–413 note 6.

68 G. Scholem, *‘Od Davar, Explications and Implications*, Tel Aviv 1989, p. 240 (Hebrew). See also Scholem’s concluding remarks printed in *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, S. Re’em, ed., Jerusalem 1982, p. 256 (Hebrew). On continuity in Jewish apocalypticism see also his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York 1968, p. 43, and his *Sabbatai Sevi*, p. 9, as well as Bloch, *On the Apocalyptic in Judaism*, p. 82. See also M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 8, 32.

69 On the problems related to the resort to “messianic idea” see M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 17, 32, and compare Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, passim, or

Mongol Invasions and Astrology

questionable. How exactly have the ancient apocalypses or the “messianic idea” remained still one, or the same, despite their metamorphoses? As pointed out, above, the historical specifics of the Mongolian rumors and even some historical facts about them revived some earlier apocalyptic images, but much was also added to these traditions, which were consequently profoundly transformed. Thus, new elements are always grafted onto earlier traditions, in order both to adopt and adapt the more authoritative traditions as some form of apocalyptic prophecy, but also to dramatically interpret them. Were ancient images adapted to new elements, or simply adopted? In my opinion, the emergence of the Mongols as a third nation, in addition to Christians and Muslims, is one such dramatic change, as it introduces a new super-power that is considered to be less antagonistic to Judaism, and plays a paramount and positive role in the eschatological scenario. Though the role of the divine power in the ultimate act of redemption did not disappear, a positive role is attributed to a human non-Jewish power. This is a new concatenation, as was the nexus created between astrology and the Mongol invasion.

Interestingly enough, Scholem’s historiography of Jewish mysticism is based on a series of ruptures, but his vision of apocalypse places greater emphasis on continuity. My assumption is that in this case, the changes were so great that they dramatically affected the meaning of the traditional apocalyptic themes by identifying them with historical events and the atmosphere created by imago-history, or by their new and strong conceptual interpretations. This charged apocalyptic atmosphere may have had an impact beyond the persons who were acquainted with the rumors about Mongols.⁷⁰ The question is, what is more dominant: the

I. Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and its Branches*, vol. 2, Jerusalem 1993, pp. 475-519 (Hebrew).

70 The theory aired by Joseph Dan, regarding the messianic discussions of a mid-13th century Kabbalist, R. Yitshaq ben Ya’aqov ha-Cohen, as if emerging solely from the pure figments of this Kabbalist’s imagination, without any historical background, fails to take into account the atmosphere generated by the repercussions of the Mongolian invasions on Jews, who were, at the time of R. Yitshaq ha-Cohen, well-acquainted with the impact that the advent of the Mongols had on their Christian neighbors. See J. Dan, ‘The Emergence of Messianic Mythology in 13th Century Kabbalah in Spain’, *Occident and Orient: A Tribute to the Memory of Alexander Schreiber*, R. Dán, ed., Budapest, Leiden 1988, pp. 57-68. His claim ignores the existence of messianic discussions found in R. Ya’aqov ben Ya’aqov ha-Kohen, the older brother of R. Yitshaq, in passages printed and discussed in D. Abrams, “*The Book of Illumination*” of R. Jacob ben Jacob ha-Kohen: *A Synoptic Edition*, Ph. D. Thesis, New York University, New York 1993, pp. 245, 263, 279, 297, 365 386, 399, and see his analyses *Ibid.*, p. 67 (Hebrew). Whether or not these brief messianic discussions may have something to do with the Mongol rumors is a matter that deserves a separate discussion. It seems to me, however, that the confrontation between good and evil powers in R. Yitshaq ha-Kohen may stem also from the influence of Manichaean eschatology in this period

traditional apocalyptic images, i.e., the stasis of early Jewish apocalypses, or the new contents infused into those images by interpretations, which are based on new conceptual frameworks? In my opinion, the second alternative is more plausible.⁷¹

Therefore personal mystical experiences as in the case of Abraham Abulafia, national myths, beliefs in magic and astrology, and philosophies of different types, were associated with messianic and apocalyptic images and concepts, and defined them in a variety of ways. Messianic constellations of ideas become part of complex syntaxes which both modifies and enriches them, as part of cultural encounters between Jews and alien forms of knowledge. It is for this reason that I resort to the concept of a constellation of messianic ideas, or to synchronic and diachronic polychromatism, as there is no one single understanding of messianism that is dominant – not only in the same generation, but in many cases, even in the writings of the same author.⁷² Abraham Abulafia combines, in different forms and proportions, ancient apocalypticism, its Maimonidean spiritual interpretations, astrological calculations, and also rumors related to the Mongols. Comparison between the messianic constellations of ideas found in Kabbalistic corpora should be made by taking into consideration the basic conceptual structures that inform each of these corpora or schools, not simply by focusing on small themes individually, but rather, by doing so when they are conjugated in similar types of more comprehensive structures. Meaning does not emerge from isolated themes but from the structures in which they are imbedded.

These two sources of apocalyptic speculations, namely the Mongol invasions and “historical” astrology, which were conceptually independent, also influenced 13th century Christianity. As pointed out, the above material is reminiscent of a Christian apocalypse, the short text so-called the “Tripoli Prophecy”, which also includes references to the salvation of the Jews and to apocalyptic battles. Though its core was probably composed around 1240, this apocalypse could have been influenced by Jewish elements but could also have had an impact on other Jewish texts; and indeed, a Hebrew translation of it whose period cannot

of the development of Kabbalah. See M. Idel, ‘The Kabbalistic Interpretations of the Secret of Incest in Early Kabbalah’, *Kabbalah* 12 (2004), pp. 149-154 (Hebrew). The polychromatic panorama of messianism in this period requires a much more incisive approach that should take into consideration additional manuscript material.

71 For discussion of questions of continuities and discontinuities in Judaism see A.I. Baumgarten and M. Rustow, ‘Judaism and Tradition: Continuity, Change, and Innovation’, *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History, Authority, Diaspora, Tradition*, R.S. Boustán et al., eds., Philadelphia 2011, pp. 207-237.

72 See M. Idel, ‘Multiple Forms of Redemption in Kabbalah and Hasidism’, pp. 27-70; Idem, ‘Mystical Redemption and Messianism in R. Israel Baal Shem Tov’s Teachings’, pp. 7-121 as well as M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 17, 272-273.

Mongol Invasions and Astrology

be established is found in an anonymous, unidentified manuscript.⁷³ Therefore, by the scholarly restriction of the wider horizon to questions related solely to the impact of Joachimite or Franciscan sources – whose impact is hardly evident from any of the Kabbalistic sources presented so far in Abulafia's writings – the neglect of much more widespread and explicit discussions regarding the impact of the rumors of the Mongol invasions as the eschatological return of the Ten Lost Tribes becomes evident, creating easy speculations about possibilities and probabilities, accepted as concrete facts. Much more hard historical work is required, including conceptual analyses of the impact of Maimonidean forms of spirituality⁷⁴ or of the widespread astrological imagery, as pertinent for the understanding of some developments of Kabbalistic eschatology, especially those of Abulafia. The main problem is not what sort of sources a medieval figure could know – and the conceptual panorama was indeed quite rich; what is more important is what he actually did know, and the above-mentioned sources, astrology and rumors about the Mongols should be considered much more seriously before speculating on other more remote sources. This is especially the case in the second part of the 13th century; some parts of European Jewry had the impression that the emergence of an unexpected super power of obscure extraction, namely the Mongols, and the change of the military status of the Christians in the Holy Land, were portents with messianic overtones.⁷⁵

It seems, therefore, that already in the second part of the 13th century, facts and rumors as to the defeat of their enemies the Christians, more than their own suffering, sometimes nourished messianic expectations among some of the Jews, including Kabbalists.⁷⁶ Above I attempted to invoke explicit messianic-apocalyptic discussions without addressing the texts in a psycho-historical manner, i.e., by assuming that every Kabbalist was affected by the Mongol rumors,⁷⁷ but rather, by restricting my analyses to specific instances alone. At precisely the same time, other Kabbalists wrote without being influenced by apocalyptic or

73 See *Ibid.*, *Messianic Mystics*, p. 377 note 46.

74 See also my discussions of a similar methodological problem regarding omissions of Maimonides' thought from a serious discussion of Abulafia's sources in M. Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 33-44 and more recently in Idem, 'Abraham Abulafia: A Kabbalist "Son of God" on Jesus and Christianity', pp. 74-75.

75 It should be mentioned that an apocalyptic vision of Mongol was articulated in the early seventies of the 13th century by a Franciscan monk. See J. Fried, 'Awaiting the Last Days... Myth and Disenchantment', *Apocalyptic Time* (Studies in the History of Religions 86), A.I. Baumgarten, ed., Leiden, Boston, Köln 2000, p. 301.

76 Compare with Scholem's view that messianism and Kabbalah fused only after the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula. Cf. M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 126-136.

77 Thus, for example, Nahmanides' eschatology and that of his followers seems to be free of reverberations of both the Mongol rumors and astrology.

Moshe Idel

even eschatological views, and it is not my intention to infuse their writings with a hidden eschatological agenda, beyond the passages they actually wrote.

Some of the patterns of messianic and apocalyptic thought found in 13th century Kabbalah, including an important one which was not discussed here, reverberated in later Kabbalistic texts, especially *Sefer ha-Peliah*,⁷⁸ and had a longstanding impact on some of the developments in Jewish forms of Messianism in both Sabateanism and East-European Hasidism.

78 This is R. Yosef Ashkenazi's linkage between Saturnism and messianism, which has been discussed at length in M. Idel, *Saturn's Jews*, passim.