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SUMMARIES

THE JEWS OF ANCIENT PALESTINE AND THE ROMAN GAMES: RABBINIC DICTA vs. COMMUNAL PRACTICE

by Zeev Weiss (pp. 427–450)

It is well known that games and spectacles held a prominent place in Roman life. This is noted not only by the continuous increase in the number of festival days during the Roman period, but also by the massive building of theatres, circuses and amphitheatres. Herod the Great was the first to introduce games and spectacles to the Roman east, dramatically changing the leisure habits of its population. Various performances took place in the cities of Roman Palestine in order to entertain the masses during religious festivals and other special occasions.

Jews constituted an important sector of the local population during the Roman period. No doubt, the Jewish community was conscious of the new institutions introduced by Herod, which flourished mostly during the first centuries of the Common Era. It is usually accepted that most Jews followed the Rabbis' prohibitions, condemning and avoiding, games and spectacles. Based on the limited historical sources at our disposal, it is difficult to determine whether Jews attended the games during the Herodian period. However, it is clear, from Talmudic and other literary evidence that the Jews did frequent games and spectacles from the second century onwards. Urbanization during this period, as well as the massive construction of buildings of entertainment, apparently influenced the behavior of Jewish society and changed its attitudes towards games. Henceforth, the Jews frequented games as passive onlookers, and in some cases, even participated as actors, athletes, charioteers and gladiators.

The Rabbis, both *Tannaim* and *Amoraim*, based their objections to games and spectacles on moral and religious grounds. But while the *Tannaim* completely prohibited Jewish participation in games, the *Amoraim* voiced a different tone. They refrained from harsh condemnation and tried to persuade their communities in a non-confrontational way. The shift in the strategy of the *Amoraim* reflects the reality they faced. As the Jews now frequented the games both as viewers and participants, the Rabbis realized that if they did not change their tactics, they would lose their audience. This new reality is also reflected in the Rabbis' sermons and academic teachings. During this period, many *Amoraim* used parables and terminology borrowed from games in order to explain an incomprehensible word from the Bible, a difficult verse or a special point in a story.

The gap between the preaching of the religious leadership and the behaviour of the

population was characteristic not only of the Jewish community. It was also prevalent in the Christian community during the third to fifth centuries C.E. Both the Rabbis and the church fathers presented games and spectacles as religiously and morally reprehensible, but this did not change the life style of their people. The church fathers, like the Rabbis, are also noted to have referred to games in their homilies, despite their principled objection to these forms of entertainment.

MYTH AND CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY IN THE HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF MEDIEVAL SPANISH JEWRY

by Ram Ben-Shalom (pp. 451–494)

There was no discernible Jewish interest in classical mythology during much of the Middle Ages. In contrast to the relative openness characteristic of Jewish society in the early centuries of the Christian era, Jewish thought in the Middle Ages was dominated by a talmudic proclivity that categorically disqualified the study of mythology. Nevertheless, there were various traces of myths that found unorganized and dispersed expression within the Spanish Jewish world, both orally and in writing. Greek and Roman mythology were accorded a meaningful place for the first time in the work of both Abraham Zacut and Isaac Abravanel. These two scholars adopted the Euhemeristic view then dominant in Spanish historiography, which led them, and eventually Jewish thought in general, to assimilate rejected pagan myth into the matrix of normative cultural values. Zacut and Abravanel applied mythology in various ways in constructing a Jewish-Spanish identity and engaging in a learned dialogue with Iberian culture.

The explanation for this ‘eruption’ of mythology in the Jewish historical consciousness is to be found in the important place assigned to classical mythology in Medieval Christian culture, and particularly in the universalist historiography that integrated the ancient mythical history of Greece and Rome with biblical narrative. Zacut’s and Abravanel’s intellectual curiosity in the history of the world also brought them to the study of mythology. They belonged to an ongoing phenomenon, dating back to the twelfth century, of Jewish scholars in Spain who actively pursued secular history. This phenomenon also had roots in the Renaissance, which reached Spain at the end of the fourteenth century. Jewish interest in mythology was principally an expression of a wider cultural curiosity that did not specifically accord mythology a special role. But mythical-historical knowledge helped the Jews to respond to the developing nature of the Jewish-Christian dialogue in such areas as biblical interpretation, religious, polemic, and an emerging Jewish-Spanish identity.

The growing scholarly interest in mythology on the part of Abraham Zacut and Isaac Abravanel at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century created a new semi-corpus of myth in Hebrew. This served the majority of Jewish historians

during the sixteenth century, continuing even into the seventeenth century. As a result of the work of Zacut and Abravanel, mythology became a legitimate historical subject. No one had to apologize or make excuses for undertaking its study. A new understanding of mythology acquired from direct acquaintance with the classical literature or from Christian sources was added to earlier knowledge, consequently enriching the Hebrew mythological materials available to Jews.

Alongside the Jewish-Spanish path by which mythology found its way into Jewish life, an Italian route also existed. It was in evidence at the end of the fifteenth century among Jews associated with the circle around Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. With the arrival of Spanish exiles to Italy the connection between these two paths was strengthened. In the course of the seventeenth century, the study of mythology was renewed, developing principally amongst the former *anusim* (*Conversos*) and their descendants who had migrated to Jewish centers in western Europe and effectively integrated their 'new' Jewish world with the humanistic education brought from Iberian culture. In several instances there was a meeting, if not even a union, between the two mythographic traditions of the Iberian peninsula: an older one originating from before the expulsion from Spain, maintained principally in the writings of exiles; and the latter one, adopted from Spanish Baroque culture. It may even be possible to speculate that the older mythographic tradition made it possible for the new tradition to establish itself within the culture of the former *anusim*.

This essay examines the manner in which classical mythology penetrated Jewish thought in the Middle Ages and the early modern era. It offers a reexamination of the ways and means of influence that characterized mythology's penetration (or, alternatively, its wane and later renewal) in Jewish thought and literature during the era of the Enlightenment (*Haskalah*).

THE 'PATRIA' AFFAIR

by Meir Chazan (pp. 495–530)

On 25 November 1940, the 'Haganah' planted a bomb on the 'Patria', a ship anchored in Haifa harbor. The British Mandate authorities had ordered that the ship, carrying thousands of Jewish illegal immigrants, who had escaped the Nazi regime, set sail for Mauritius. Contrary to the intention of the 'Haganah', the ship sank and about two hundred and sixty-seven people died. This act of sabotage was followed by the deportation of some of the remaining illegal immigrants. These events gave rise to a series of bitter political, moral and educational arguments in the Yishuv and in particular in Mapai. The arguments centered on the action that needed to be taken in response to Britain's withdrawal from its promise to establish a Jewish national home in Palestine, an indication

of which appeared in the stringent restrictions on Jewish immigration as published in the 'White Paper' of May 1939.

At that time, two major factions emerged in Mapai concerning the use of force – the 'Moderates' and 'Activists'. The 'Activists' called for intensive combat against the British orientation while the 'Moderates' advocated a policy of utmost restraint as a means of realizing the aims of the Zionist movement in its struggle for a homeland. In the heated and sometimes stormy confrontation between 'Activists' and 'Moderates', which accompanied the Labor movement through the 40s, the 'Patria' disaster loomed as a dark shadow. The 'Moderates' claimed that sabotaging the 'Patria' had left an indelible stain on the Zionist enterprise, whereas the 'Activists' insisted that the less than vigorous campaign against the deportation of the refugees rendered the 'Patria' incident the 'blackest day' in their political lives.

At the heart of the raging debate lay the call by Moshe Sharett, the head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, to draw a distinction between the initial intention of the act of sabotage and its tragic results. This article reveals, for the first time, that Sharett later admitted that he himself stood at the head of the committee that decided to sabotage 'Patria'. The article also reveals the circumstances that led to an incident that rocked the leaders of Mapai. Ben-Gurion's son slapped the face of Yitzhak Lofban, the moderate editor of Mapai's weekly newspaper, in response to an article which appeared in the newspaper accusing the planners of the sabotage with malicious intent.

The 'Activists' tried to exploit the unconscionable human price paid in the 'Patria' incident by refusing to let the story die, and linked it to the centuries-old heritage of Jewish martyrdom. Berl Katznelson even compared the 'Patria' affair to the battle at Tel Hai. However this attempt was aborted, due to pressure by the 'Moderates', who opposed the glorification of the bloody action. The 'Patria' disaster put into relief the disastrous consequences that emerged from the failure to foresee the possible negative outcome when planning military operations as a means to achieve political goals.