

God, Humanity, and History

*The Hebrew
First Crusade Narratives*

Robert Chazan

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Berkeley · Los Angeles · London

Contents

Preface	ix
Prologue: The Time-Bound and the Timeless in Medieval Ashkenazic Narrative	I
1. The Hebrew First Crusade Narratives	19
2. The <i>Mainz Anonymous</i> : Structure, Authorship, Dating, and Objectives	28
3. The <i>Solomon bar Simson Chronicle</i> : The Editorial Prologue and Epilogue	52
4. The <i>Solomon bar Simson Chronicle</i> : The Speyer-Worms-Mainz Unit	70
5. The <i>Solomon bar Simson Chronicle</i> : The Trier and Cologne Units	83
6. The <i>Eliezer bar Nathan Chronicle</i>	100
7. The Hebrew First Crusade Narratives: Time-Bound Objectives	112
8. The Historicity of the Hebrew Narratives	124
9. The Hebrew First Crusade Narratives: The Timeless	140
10. God, Humanity, and History	157
11. Comparative Dimensions: The 1096 Narratives and Classical Jewish Tradition	175
12. Comparative Dimensions: The 1096 Narratives and Their Medieval Setting	191
Epilogue	211
Appendix: The Hebrew First Crusade Narratives: Prior Studies on Relationships and Dating	217
Abbreviations	223
Notes	225
Bibliography	257
Index	263

The Time-Bound and the Timeless in Medieval Ashkenazic Narrative

Medieval Ashkenazic (northern European) Jews were relatively recent immigrants. Beginning in the late tenth century, southern European Jews moved northward, settling in the towns that were at the heart of the remarkable efflorescence of northern European civilization. These immigrant Jews made their way into an environment that was simultaneously supportive of and resistant to their settlement. The support came largely from far-sighted political leaders, who were convinced that the Jewish immigrants would provide useful stimulation to the economy of their domains. The resistance was widespread, rooted in both the realities of Jewish life and the legacy of Christian tradition. The Jews were newcomers and had to endure the hostility and suspicion that is the normal lot of immigrants. They were, moreover, newcomers to an area in which they constituted the only dissenting religious minority and were hence viewed with special concern and animosity. The fact that the immigrants were Jewish and the host society was Christian added further complications. The Jewish immigrants were seen as the descendants of ancestors who had rejected Jesus, the promised Messiah, and had indeed done him to death. This negative legacy much intensified the normal societal distaste for newcomers and dissidents so widely attested in all eras. The resistance to Jewish immigration, based on both tenth- and eleventh-century realities and preexistent tradition, erected barriers to socialization, imposed limits on economic activity, and created the potential for occasional violence.¹

The Christian environment of northern Europe limited and challenged its Jewish immigrants on the material plane, and it posed a profound spiritual challenge as well. Christianity represented an assault on the basic belief structure of these Jews (just as Judaism represented a parallel challenge to the basic belief structure of the Christian majority). Particularly troubling were the obvious signs of Christian ascendancy and Jewish degradation. For Christians living in a rapidly developing and increasingly powerful society, the indices of Jewish weakness—exile, minority status, and difficult circumstances—constituted decisive proof of the truth of Christianity and the nullity of Judaism.² A potent and proud northern European Christendom at once attracted adventuresome Jews, limited them, and raised troubling questions for Jewish faith. The immigrant Jews had, at one and the same time, to remain vigilant in the protection of their material interests and creative in their response to the spiritual challenge posed by the Christian environment.

Since the social, economic, and political circumstances of early Ashkenazic Jewry coupled with the powerful anti-Jewish themes of traditional Christian teaching exposed the Jewish newcomers to considerable hostility and danger, these immigrants could hardly afford to remain oblivious to developments in majority society and to their potential impact on Jewish life. Of necessity, the early Ashkenazic Jews had to communicate regularly among themselves with respect to these developments. Not surprisingly, these time-bound communications have only rarely survived. Given their association with evanescent circumstances, such communications were not intended to be preserved and in fact rarely were. They were written for the present and quickly relegated to the scrap heap. Occasionally—but only occasionally—happenstance has resulted in the preservation of such materials.

Let us look briefly at one set of such time-bound communications, three letters composed in the wake of the Blois tragedy of 1171. The incident was connected to one of a series of late-twelfth-century accusations that Jews groundlessly murder their Christian neighbors.³ Events were set in motion by an allegation that a Jew had been seen disposing of the body of a Christian youngster in the Loire River. This claim was quickly picked up by a number of Christians profoundly resentful of the amorous relationship between their ruler and a Blois Jewess. Although the accusation that Jews murder Christian youngsters had been circulating for a number of decades by 1171, events in Blois diverged from

the normal pattern, deeply threatening northern European Jewry in its entirety. While the authorities regularly repudiated the groundless murder charge, the special constellation of circumstances in Blois resulted in comital support for the murder allegation, eventuating in the death of more than thirty Jewish residents of the town. Given the stature of Count Theobald of Blois, his decision to execute these Jews by burning represented a potentially disastrous blow to northern European Jewry: it was a powerful reinforcement for the growing popular perception that the Jews were internal enemies, lodged within Christian society.⁴

The Blois incident was sufficiently significant to leave numerous traces in both the Christian and Jewish literature of the time.⁵ The most significant of these sources was an epistle written in the neighboring Jewish community of Orléans that was intended to depict the Blois tragedy in some detail, to honor the memory of the Jewish martyrs, and to offer a compelling message with respect to the tragedy—all of which it did most effectively. It was written for both the moment and posterity.⁶ While its contents were in many ways time-bound, there was enough of the timeless in it to insure its preservation and, simultaneously, the preservation of three other time-bound letters that on their own would not have survived the vicissitudes of time.⁷

For the moment, let us focus on the three time-bound letters. These three communications—a letter by the leadership of Paris Jewry, a letter by the leadership of Troyes Jewry, and a private letter by Nathan ben Meshullam—all transmit information that was critical in the post-Blois ambience.⁸ Let us note the most striking of the three letters, the communal letter composed by the leaders of the Jewish community of Paris.

Today is a day of glad tidings, to be broadcast to his people Israel by the Great King, who has inclined the heart of flesh and blood in our favor. We journeyed to the king at Poissy to fall before his feet concerning this matter. When we saw that he extended greetings, we indicated that we would like to speak to him privately. He responded: “To the contrary, speak openly!” Then he himself called forth all his ministers stationed in the fortress and said to them: “Listen all of you to what Count Theobald has done—may he and his descendants be uprooted for the entire year! If he has acted properly, then well and good; but if he has behaved improperly, may he be punished. For I too am frightened over what he has done. Now then, you Jews of my land, you have no cause for alarm over what that oppressor has done in his domain. For the folk have alleged against those [Jews] in the town of Pontoise and those in the town of Janville that they did this thing [murder a Christian youngster]. However, when the matter was brought before me, it [the allegation] was found utterly false. . . .⁹ Therefore be assured, all you Jews in

my land, that I harbor no such suspicions in this regard. Even if Christians find a slain Christian in the city or in the countryside, I shall say nothing to the Jews as a result. Therefore be not frightened over this matter."¹⁰

This letter reports a major development in the post-Blois effort of northern French Jewry to protect itself. The letter is suffused with a strong sense of the importance of the meeting with King Louis VII. Yet despite this sense of significance and despite the vividness of the portrayal, there remains here a failure to project this event onto the broader canvas of Jewish history, a failure to make this an occasion for rumination on the historic fate of the Jewish people. Significant, intense, and vivid though it clearly is, this letter remains in the domain of time-bound dissemination of valuable information. Without its connection to the elegy written by the Jewish community of Orléans over the martyrs of Blois, which is a different kind of composition, the Paris letter—along with those of Troyes Jewry and Nathan ben Meshullam—would surely have been consigned to oblivion.¹¹

It seems perfectly obvious that we have at our disposal only the merest fraction of the informational narratives composed by medieval Ashkenazic Jews.¹² While in all medieval cultures the survival of such time-bound communications was minimal, the recurring upheavals in Jewish life and the attendant uprooting of large segments of medieval Ashkenazic Jewry diminished the already limited likelihood that such materials would be preserved.¹³ The lack of such written narratives should certainly not be read as indicative of Jewish estrangement from historical circumstances, as a sign of Jewish denigration of the immediate and the worldly.¹⁴ Jews were profoundly immersed in the real world in which they lived. As an endangered minority community, the Jews would not have been able to survive without exquisite sensitivity to that real world, its economic opportunities, and its political entanglements. The immersion of the Jews in their constantly shifting environment means that communication of important information, largely in prose narrative, had to be a staple of Jewish existence.¹⁵

The Paris letter of 1171, the Troyes letter of 1171, and the personal letter of Nathan bar Meshullam all provide indispensable information on Jewish negotiations in the wake of the Blois episode. As already noted, however, Christian society did more than threaten its Jewish minority in physical terms: it profoundly challenged its Jews spiritually as well. One of the central thrusts of Christian doctrine concerning the Jews involved the hoary conviction that Jewish behavior toward Jesus had

constituted a breathtaking historic sin and that divine punishment was swift. Defeat in the war against Rome, loss of political independence, destruction of the Second Temple, and exile to the four corners of the world were all viewed by Christians as elements of the punishment that the Jews richly deserved. Indeed, Christians explained all subsequent persecutions suffered by Jews as further marks of divine opprobrium.¹⁶ For the Jews themselves, this Christian doctrine heightened significantly the challenge normally presented by catastrophe. While human communities are regularly moved by tragedy to intense self-scrutiny, Jews in the Christian orbit were particularly sensitive to disaster since their neighbors were so certain of the meaning of such events. Jews thus had to wrestle incessantly with persecution and suffering, so as to erect strong barriers against absorbing the negative conclusions of their Christian neighbors. Little wonder then that Jews recurrently struggled with the meaning of setbacks both large and small.

Since we have begun this discussion with the Blois incident of 1171 and have seen post-Blois materials that address only time-bound aspects of the event, let us note that the destruction of much of Blois Jewry gave rise also to a number of poems that are utterly timeless in their concerns. Were these the only materials available, we would be unable to reconstruct accurately the events of 1171, since the Jewish poets were hardly interested in the immediate outlines of the happenings that so badly shook twelfth-century Ashkenazic Jewry. Their eyes were focused rather on the timeless meaning of the Blois incident—on the import of the death of thirty-some Jews, not on its details. Let us note a portion of one of these poetic dirges.¹⁷

Woe unto us, for we have been despoiled!
 The comeliest and most delicate—the lovely community of Blois,
 destined for prominence in both Torah and authority—has been
 delivered to the flames.
 How has burning conferred distinction—and destruction!¹⁸
 Enemies disseminated calumnies deceitfully.
 “You have killed a Christian in the river and drowned him.”
 They [the Christians] brought them [the Jews] into confinement and
 chains to torture them.
 They tormented them and beat them, that they might surrender their
 faith and their deity.
 They [the Jews], however, withstood the trial, the test, and the
 burning flames.
 This is the ritual for the burnt offering, the burnt offering on the site
 of immolation.

Woe unto the wicked one, may his memory be effaced.
 He schemed evilly, his plot was the plot of the wicked, by immersing a
 man in water in order to clarify the matter.
 Thus they exonerated the wicked and convicted the innocent, in order
 to uproot him.
 Then the ruler Theobald—may his soul rot and his curse render him
 accursed¹⁹—heeding the lie, refused ransom, prohibiting any
 mention of it.
 No amount of wealth could annul the day of wrath.
 He ordered that the children of the bound one [Isaac] be brought for
 binding.
 This is the ritual of the burnt offering, the burnt offering on the site of
 immolation.
 Woe unto me for my tragedy! My wound is fatal!
 When the wicked one—may his name be blotted out from the earth—
 ordered the burning of the pious of the Lord, so full of wisdom,
 He brought them to the place of burning, to be burned there.
 They [the Christians] said: “Exchange the Divine Glory for one who
 effects nothing!”
 The righteous spoke out in defiance, to put dust in their [the
 Christians’] mouths:
 “Burning and boiling are not convincing argument against
 proclaiming the unity of the Awesome and Pure.”
 They sang out the prayer ‘*Alenu le-shabeah*,²⁰ in order to declare the
 unity of the one Lord.
 This is the ritual of the burnt offering, the burnt offering on the site of
 immolation.
 Woe unto me, mother, that you bore me for such pain.
 It’s as though the people of Sodom were gathered about the place to
 encompass it,
 Those poisonous serpents with their bundles of twigs to fan [the blaze].
 Thirty-two burnt offerings were consumed as a sacrificial gift.
 New mothers ran about, exceeding one another in defiance.
 They offered up their children as a free-will burnt offering,
 As a suckling lamb intended as a free-will burnt offering,
 Denoted on the fourth day of the week, on the twentieth of Sivan.
 Profound was the shame of that day, to be recalled eternally as a day
 of fast and shock by a suffering people.
 O God! Recall it on my behalf as a blessing,
 For death does separate me from you.
 This is the ritual of the burnt offering, the burnt offering on the site of
 immolation.²¹

The differences between this poem and the informational letters cited
 above are patent. Perhaps the most important is the contrasting audi-
 ences to which these pieces were directed. In the three Blois letters, the

audience was contemporary Jews for whom the data included in the missives were critical. These contemporary Jews needed to know, for example, that the king of France had repudiated the allegation of malicious murder and that such a charge would not be accepted in a royal court. In the poem, the audience was God, the present generation of Jews, and future generations of Jews as well. Crucial to this poem and others like it was its meaning, not the relatively irrelevant details of the event in question. This event was one more link in the chain of persecution suffered by the Jewish people; it represented the willingness of this martyred people to offer themselves up voluntarily to the God of Israel: "This is the ritual of the burnt offering, the very burnt offering on the site of immolation."

The time-bound letters addressed themselves to the immediate problems of the 1170s, to the physical challenge posed by Christian society; the timeless poems addressed themselves to the spiritual challenge posed by the Christian majority. The timeless poems rebutted the notion that such persecutions as that of 1171 represented yet one more manifestation of divine wrath with the errant people of Israel; to the contrary, the poets argued, such persecutions represented Israel's heroic reaction to the divine demand for sacrifice.

That the vehicle for time-bound messages would be prose while the vehicle for the timeless would be poetry is hardly surprising. There is of course something inherently prosaic about prose, just as the medium of poetry has its intrinsic appropriateness for the timeless. On occasion, however, the time-bound and the timeless could be fused in prose narrative, so that both sets of audiences were simultaneously addressed and both sets of objectives were simultaneously pursued. I have already noted the Orléans letter that provided the occasion for the preservation of the three post-Blois informational communications. This Orléans letter provides a superb example of the time-bound and the timeless integrated into one composition.²²

The Orléans letter is a complex composition that in effect moves from the exalted to the increasingly mundane. It begins with a prologue that spells out the reluctance of Orléans Jewry to shoulder the burden of memorializing the heroic martyrs of neighboring Blois. As painful as the task is, there can be no avoiding it, for it has been enjoined upon Orléans Jewry by the king and the distinguished leader of northern French Jewry, Rabbi Jacob Tam.²³ The epistle opens with a focus on the death of the Blois martyrs. This depiction is, at one and the same time, poetic in tone and rich in detail. Midway through the letter, the focus shifts strikingly

to the background of the catastrophe. Here the tone becomes thoroughly prosaic, with an emphasis on the precise details of the allegation, the trial, and the complex circumstances in the town of Blois, thus providing the requisite background for understanding the strange and distressing events that transpired there.

We have noted already the emergence of the accusation of malicious and baseless murder leveled against the Jews of northern Europe during the middle decades of the twelfth century and the importance of the post-Blois negotiations in combating the potentially disastrous impact of the Blois executions on that burgeoning allegation. That a political figure of the stature of Count Theobald of Blois would dignify the slander by bringing Jews to trial and then by executing so many of them represented a shattering precedent. We have seen the effort of the leadership of Paris Jewry to counteract the danger by approaching the king of France and the success of this effort, of which all northern European Jews had to be made aware. Beyond this, of course, northern European Jews had to be informed of the details of the events in Blois, so that they might effectively counter any suggestion that the Blois incident proved the truth of the new calumny. It is for this reason that the Orléans letter had to be so thorough, detailed, and trustworthy.

The first objective of much of the detail in the Orléans letter was to provide Jewish readers with requisite information for refuting the groundless murder allegation. Thus, for example, it was important for Jews to know that the witness who set in motion the whole chain of events really saw nothing: it was merely his horse that had bolted at the sight and smell of a Jew washing animal pelts in the Loire River. Similarly, it was important to know that the witness's nonevidence was brought into an environment seething with anti-Jewish hostility brought on by the romantic liaison between the count and a Jewess named Polcelina.²⁴ It was the cooling of this relationship that encouraged many of the townsmen to strike at the overbearing Jewess—and her coreligionists. Moreover, it was useful for Jews to be aware that an Augustinian canon had played a harmful role in proposing the strange trial method utilized by Count Theobald of Blois, a trial method based on long-outdated notions of ferreting out the truth by ordeal.²⁵ Finally, the Jews of Blois made a fatal miscalculation, offering the count far too small a bribe. Yet one further factor played a role in the complex chain of events that led to the execution of utterly innocent Jews, and that was an incident in neighboring Loches, where a marriage dispute led to denunciation of the Jews by a distressed coreligionist. Precisely what

the denunciation was we do not know, only that it may have further fanned the flames of the count's antipathy. Thus, the Orléans letter amassed considerable detail to show that thoroughly innocent Jews were declared guilty of murder through a concatenation of unfortunate circumstances. Almost incredibly, thirty-some Jews were burned alive as a result of this unhappy chain of events. Anyone provided with the details of this set of developments, however, could clearly see that the execution of these Jews could by no means be taken to prove the new allegation of murder.

Beyond the very important objective of providing requisite data for rebutting the malicious-murder allegation, the Orléans epistle set itself a second task—giving its Jewish readers a sense of the complications of the incident. Among the factors that led to the Blois tragedy were the amorous liaison between Polcelina and Count Theobald, dangerously offensive in its own right; the arrogant behavior of the Jewess, which further embittered many Christians in the town; the incitement of the Augustinian canon; the harshness of Count Theobald; and the misassessment of the level of danger by the Jews of Blois. Clarification of these elements in the tragedy was intended to provide Jewish readers with an understanding that would enable them to behave more intelligently in the future. While some of these factors—like the incitement of the Augustinian canon and the harshness of Count Theobald—could hardly be controlled by the Jews, a better grasp of circumstances could result in earlier and more effective defensive steps.

In addition to providing enough information to rebut the groundless murder accusation and to guide Jewish readers in their behavior, the Orléans letter was intended to memorialize properly a group of Jews that its author (or authors) viewed as martyrs. The key element in this Jewish martyrdom involved the Christian effort to exploit the threat of death as a vehicle for bringing the convicted Jews to baptism and the resolute refusal of these Jews to submit. The letter's depiction of Jewish resoluteness proceeds through a number of stages. Early on, Count Theobald is portrayed as urging conversion, which the convicted Jews unanimously reject. The Christians are then depicted as hoping that a few Jewish victims might weaken on the way to execution, but this hope quickly evaporates. The Jews of Blois are portrayed as greeting the flames with joyous chanting of the *'Alenu* prayer, a prayer that highlights the distinction between Jews and others and between Judaism and other faiths. This prayer calls upon Jews to “bend the knee, bow, and offer thanks to the King who reigns over all kings, who

spread forth the heavens and established the earth. . . . It is he who is God; there is none other. Our King is the true one; there is none other beside him.”²⁶ Armed with that conviction, the Jews of Blois meet their death as a group, with enthusiasm. Indeed, after the description of group martyrdom, the author provides a more personalized sense of heroism by focusing on three individual Jews who escaped the blaze and might have yet saved themselves through conversion, but who rejected that option and chose—a second time, as it were—death as martyrs.

While the crown of martyrdom was often awarded rather haphazardly, the Orléans letter is highly detailed in its depiction so as to convince all readers that these particular Jews truly deserved the title of martyr, for they had steadfastly chosen death over conversion. The author is anxious to provide the sources of his evidence in order to quell all doubts. Thus, in depicting the joyous acceptance of death with the chanting of the ‘*Alenu*, he tells us:

The gentiles came and told us, saying to us: “What is that song of yours, which was so sweet? We have never heard anything so sweet.” For at the outset the sound was low, but at the conclusion they [the Jewish martyrs] raised their voices mightily and called out together “ ‘*Alenu le-shabeah?*.” Then the fire raged.²⁷

The concern of the author to cite his sources is yet more strikingly repeated shortly thereafter, at the close of his extensive description of the martyrdom of Blois Jewry.

Our fellow townsmen and acquaintances [Christian burghers from Orléans], who were there at the event, told us these things. But we are not dependent upon them for verification of all these things.²⁸ For Baruch ben R. David *hacohen* was there at the time of the conflagration. With his own eyes he saw and with his own ears he heard. Only the conflagration itself he did not see, lest he be swallowed up by the mob that gathered there, outside the town, at the place of the fire. Subsequently, when the folk had calmed from its excitement,²⁹ when the fire had been quelled, on that day he immediately fled to Orléans.³⁰

The Jews of Blois were true martyrs, as proven by the evidence of both Christian and Jewish observers of their execution.

There was yet a further proof of their martyrdom, the fact that their bodies remained intact, with only their souls expiring. Once more, this assertion is grounded in firm testimony.

They wickedly burned the pious of the Almighty by scorching the soul, leaving the body intact. Indeed, all the uncircumcised testify that their bodies were not consumed. Only their detractors said that their bodies were burned, and it seems that they said this only out of their hostility.³¹

Multiple accounts evidenced the genuine martyrdom of the thirty-some Jews of Blois.

The three objectives upon which we have focused are all in the realm of the time-bound, although the establishment of the martyrdom of the Jews of Blois in and of itself offered elements of meaning and consolation to Jewish readers. In a striking way, however, the Orléans letter managed to provide both time-bound information and a timeless perspective on the events it depicted.

How was this timelessness achieved? What was the meaning of the Blois tragedy to the author of the Orléans letter? The Orléans letter clearly projects the Jewish martyrs of Blois onto the stage of “real” Jewish history, that set of great events that mark the distinctive trajectory of Jewish experience. The author of the Orléans letter, so caught up in the historical realities of Count Theobald, the Jewess Polcelina, and the witness and his horse by the river’s edge, proclaims at the same time that the event he must depict extends far beyond the town or principality of Blois, far beyond the immediacy of Count Theobald or Polcelina. The martyrs of Blois are elevated to the level of the historic, associated with the great events and institutions of the Jewish past. A timeline is created that stretches back from Blois in 1171 through peak moments of the Jewish past, indeed back into critical junctures of pre-Israelite universal human history.

Immediately at the outset of the narrative, the burning at Blois is linked to the destruction of the Second Temple: “From the time he [the Lord] gave over his people to destruction and set fire to our Temple, holy ones such as these have not been offered up on the pyre.”³² The Blois incident is thus linked to the destruction of the Second Temple; indeed, since that conflagration (over a thousand years earlier), there have been no greater martyrs at the pyre than the thirty-one (or thirty-two) Jews of Blois.

At the end of the passage noted, a second decisive event from the past, this one linked to the destruction of the First Temple, is introduced: “The significance of this fast will exceed that of the fast of Gedaliah ben Ahikam.”³³ Now, Gedaliah ben Ahikam’s murder represents, as it were, the last death throes of the First Commonwealth, the final act in the

drama that saw the end of the Judean polity, the exile of the people from their land, and the destruction of the First Temple.³⁴ Indeed, the fast instituted in memory of this otherwise obscure figure was one of the four minor fast days specified in rabbinic law.³⁵ For the author of the Orléans letter, the new fast on the twentieth of Sivan, proclaimed in recollection of the Blois martyrs, exceeds in religious significance the earlier fast, which had been observed by Jews for a millennium or more. This is a rather audacious claim, but one that reinforces the historic significance of the Blois event.³⁶

Continuing to move backward through the Jewish past, we note the following potent words at the outset of the Orléans letter: “The Lord is sanctified by those near to him.”³⁷ For readers of the Hebrew text, this brief sentence is highly evocative. It calls to mind a tragic and opaque incident that befell the Israelites, or more precisely the Aaronide family, during the wilderness sojourn. The sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, “offered before the Lord alien fire, which he had not enjoined upon them” and, as a result, were themselves consumed by fire. The basis for the tragic deaths is not at all clear. The uncertainty is compounded by the effort of Moses to console his grieving brother with the following:

“This is what the Lord meant when he said:
‘Through those near to me I shall be sanctified,
And gain glory before all the people.’ ”

Now, the straightforward meaning of the three cryptic verses (Lev. 10: 1–3) seems to be that the sons of Aaron erred grievously and were accordingly punished.³⁸

While this straightforward reading makes sense of the entire three-verse unit, it left some expositors, both early and late, uncomfortable, seemingly because of the note of approbation for the deceased young priests in Moses’s consolation of his brother Aaron. This led some to read the consolation in a radically different way:

Moses came to him [Aaron] and consoled him. He said to him: “Aaron my brother, at Sinai it was said to me: ‘I [God] shall in the future sanctify this sanctuary; I shall sanctify it through a great man.’ I thought that the sanctuary would be sanctified either through me or through you. Now your sons have been shown to be greater than I or than you, for through them the sanctuary has been sanctified.”³⁹

The fiery death of the Jews of Blois, then, is presented in a positive sense as a recapitulation of the fiery death of the sons of Aaron, who were chosen for their fate, according to some interpreters, because of a great-

ness that exceeded even that of Aaron and Moses. One could hardly imagine a more distinguished niche on the plane of historic Jewish experience.

The connection of the Blois martyrs with the sons of Aaron—seen in highly positive terms—is in fact pushed yet one step further. As noted, toward the end of the Orléans letter the author insists on an important point with respect to the physical remains of the Blois martyrs: their souls were extinguished by the flames of the fire, but their bodies remained intact.⁴⁰ While the imagery of the burning of the soul but not the body is not confined to Nadav and Avihu, such special circumstances of death are highlighted with respect to the sons of Aaron.⁴¹ It is clear that the author of the Orléans letter saw in this claim a continuation of the connection between the martyrs of his own day and the positively construed victims of an earlier divine fire.

Finally, in one more step backward in time, a decisive figure in pre-Israelite human history is invoked. Maintaining the imagery of sacrifice, the authors absorb and embellish the language of Genesis 8, the narrative that shows Noah, in many senses the progenitor of all humanity, descending from the ark. Upon emerging from the ark,

Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking of every clean animal and of every clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar. The Lord smelled the pleasing odor, and the Lord said to himself: “Never again will I doom the earth because of man, since the devisings of man’s mind are evil from his youth; nor will I ever again destroy every human being, as I have done.”⁴²

The language used in the Orléans letter—“and the Lord smelled the pleasing odor”—points unmistakably to the Noah scene. In a sense, then, the martyrs play a role in the drama of humanity in its totality, recapitulating the pure sacrifices offered by Noah and assuring all humanity of protection from divine wrath.

The martyrs of Blois, then, are projected onto the great canvas of Jewish and world history. While there is, on the one hand, full immersion in the immediate realities of the 1170s, there is, at the same time, a powerful sense of Blois as a link in a historic chain that stretches backward through the destruction of the two temples and the wilderness wandering all the way to the near destruction of all humanity during the days of Noah.

Indeed, the author projects the Blois incident, with its tragic and heroic elements, onto a plane beyond the historic plane of Jewish experience; it is in fact projected onto a cosmic plane as well. The author

portrays the Blois incident as more than simply a continuation of the great moments of Jewish history. The martyrs are more than simply related to the destruction of the First and Second Temples; they are an innovative continuation of the cosmically significant ritual of those two sanctuaries. The martyrs are portrayed throughout the passage cited as sacrifices offered on the altar, as the sin offerings of the Jewish people. This theme is powerfully stated and restated throughout the Orléans letter.⁴³ It is in fact for this reason that the fast of the twentieth of Sivan exceeds in importance the fast instituted in memory of Gedaliah ben Ahikam. The fast instituted on the twentieth of Sivan is projected by the author of the Orléans letter as “a veritable Day of Atonement.”⁴⁴ Just as in days of yore, when Jews found acceptance in divine eyes through the sacrificial offerings brought at the sanctuary, Jews henceforth would find their atonement on the twentieth of Sivan through the sacrifice on the field outside the town of Blois.

More than a historic linkage is achieved with the institution of the new fast: the Jews of Blois take their place of importance on the celestial plane as well.⁴⁵ In yet one further set of images, the Blois martyrs are projected into the celestial realms—they actually join the heavenly hosts. These Jews are angels, thirty-one angels. In a striking turn of phrase, the victims of the Blois pyre are identified as those *serafim* who are seen by Isaiah in his great vision as standing in service of the Divine. The *serufim* of Blois, those who were burned for their faith, are transformed into *serafim*, the heavenly figures who proclaim the sanctity of the Lord. Their proclamation shakes the foundation of the universe and fills the divine chamber with smoke, reminding us once again of their death by flames.⁴⁶

What must be emphasized at this point is that the temporal and the atemporal are in no way detached from each other. To put the matter differently, the claims for historic, cosmic, and celestial significance are firmly grounded in the detailed depictions of the terrestrial behavior of the Blois martyrs. The greatness of these martyrs (or sacrifices, or angels), their historic and metahistoric significance, lies in their earthly steadfastness in the face of a potent combination of threat and blandishment.

In the process of tracking the author’s projection of the Blois martyrs onto the planes of historic, cosmic, and celestial significance, we have in fact uncovered the letter’s construction of the meaning of the Blois episode. We have noted repeated reference to the sacrificial and expiatory functions of the Blois martyrs, the sense that they have taken upon

themselves the sins of the world and have offered themselves to the Lord in expiation of those sins. The letter is replete with references to the Jerusalem temples and their sacrificial system, and the suggestion that the twentieth of Sivan constitutes “a veritable Day of Atonement” is highly revealing. Thus, to the Christian challenge that Jewish suffering is a reflection of Jewish sin and divine rejection, the Jewish author of the Orléans missive replied that such was by no means the case. Rather, the Jews of Blois were a blameless group (in both the terrestrial and spiritual sense) that had been singled out to bear the sins of the world and to appease divine anger with others, and thus to redeem those others, by offering themselves in sacrifice. Clearly, in a Christian environment, all these themes resonated strongly. Early Jewish themes appropriated by nascent Christianity were reappropriated by northern European Jewry in the face of the medieval Christian challenge.

The Orléans letter is thus revealed as a complex composition, addressing simultaneously a number of audiences and a number of objectives. It achieves its multiple purposes through an artful combination of prosaic information and poetic hyperbole. It provided immediate information for the Jews of 1171 as they faced the aftermath of Count Theobald’s harrowing and precedent-setting espousal of new anti-Jewish stereotypes. At the same time, this complex composition addressed perennial issues and spun out a picture of Blois and its Jews that transcended Count Theobald and the year 1171 and that addressed unremitting Christian challenges to Jewish faith.

The fortuitous combination of sources deriving from the Blois incident has enabled us to discern a spectrum of Jewish accounts of an important event in the history of early Ashkenazic Jewry, ranging from the rigorously time-bound to the free-floating and timeless. Special attention has been accorded to the possibility that some prose narratives could effectively combine time-bound and timeless concerns, eventuating in compositions that were important and meaningful for the moment, yet retained interest and impact for future generations of readers.

Three-quarters of a century before the Blois crisis of 1171, early Ashkenazic Jewry had been wracked by a more spontaneous, more wide-ranging, and deadlier persecution. The call of Pope Urban II in 1095 for Christians to retake the Holy Land had unleashed enthusiastic responses all across western Christendom, responses that far exceeded narrow papal expectations. One of the unanticipated spinoffs of the papal call was the coalescing of a wide variety of military forces, all pointed toward the reconquest of Jerusalem. A further unanticipated byproduct of the

papal call was the emergence of an anti-Jewish ideology in limited segments of these diversified military bands. During the spring months of 1096, a number of major Jewish communities across northern Europe were threatened by violence. In most instances, the anti-Jewish hostility proved fairly weak and the forces of law and order strong. In a few cases, the anti-Jewish animus among allied burghers as well as crusaders was potent, and the forces committed to law and order proved ineffective. In such cases, the result was a stunning bloodbath, with a few of the most important Rhineland Jewish communities destroyed almost in their entirety.⁴⁷

The 1096 calamity surely attracted the kinds of attention we have discerned in the wake of the Blois episode. Unfortunately, wholly time-bound Jewish responses have not been preserved, although clearly there were such. In the earliest of the extant Hebrew First Crusade narratives, we are told (quite accurately, as we shall see) of the eruption of the crusade in France, of perceptions of danger on the part of French Jews, and of letters forwarded to the great Jewish communities of the Rhineland.

When the Jewish communities in northern France heard [of the development of crusading ardor], they were seized by consternation, fear, and trembling, and they reacted in time-honored ways.⁴⁸ They wrote letters and sent emissaries to all the Jewish communities along the Rhine River, [asking] that they fast and seek mercy for them from him who dwells on high, so that they [the Jews] might be saved from their [the crusaders'] hands.⁴⁹

There is only cursory reference to the reply that Rhineland Jewish leaders gave this request. A similar reference occurs in a report on a wealthy Jew named Shmarya, who was successful in escaping with his wife and three of his sons from the refuge of Moers, where a group of Cologne Jews had ultimately been converted under duress. This Jewish family and their Christian protector wandered about until effective communication could be established with two of Shmarya's older sons in Speyer. Eventually such communication was established, money was sent from Speyer to the Christian protector, and then Shmarya, his wife, and his young sons were abandoned by the scheming agent.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, rigorously time-bound materials have not survived from 1096.

By contrast, a substantial number of poems, with poetry's usual timeless quality, have survived. These poems wrestle with the meaning of the tragedy, paying scant attention to the details of the events of 1096. The poems, for example, tell us very little of the attackers or the circum-

stances of the attacks. They highlight, rather, the martyrological Jewish behaviors of 1096, the symbols current among the martyrs, and the meaning of the sanguinary events. Indeed, there is little interest in aspects of Jewish behavior beyond martyrdom.⁵¹

The focus of this study is on three Hebrew prose narratives that attempt, like the Orléans letter of 1171, to fuse the time-bound and the timeless. These three narratives—in differing proportions—portray a variety of Christian attitudes and behaviors and diverse Jewish responses and symbols. Like the Orléans letter, the authors of these narratives addressed pressing immediate needs within the post-1096 Jewish communities of northern Europe and, at the same time, addressed the meta-historic meaning of the events depicted. Further, like the Orléans letter, they projected an audience of contemporary readers, of Jewish readers over the ages, and of God himself. It is this combination of the time-bound and the timeless—I would argue—that has made these narratives so compelling to such a wide range of readers and has produced conflicting views of their objectives and techniques. Examining these prose narratives as simultaneously time-bound and timeless will, I believe, open up new perspectives on these fascinating compositions.

The Hebrew First Crusade Narratives

In 1892, the Historische Commission für Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland, committed *inter alia* to providing documentation illuminating Jewish life in Germany, published its second volume of medieval Hebrew sources, consisting of five narratives describing the fate of German Jewry during the great crusades of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹ While each of these five narrative sources is interesting in its own right, the first three—which depict the events of late spring and early summer 1096—have attracted by far the greatest attention.² The three narratives, in the order published in 1892,³ are: (1) the so-called *Solomon bar Simson Chronicle*;⁴ (2) the so-called *Eliezer bar Nathan Chronicle*;⁵ (3) the so-called *Mainz Anonymous*.⁶

Prior to the 1892 publication, little of the information provided in these three narratives was widely disseminated. The three texts do not seem to have been extensively copied during the Middle Ages, and very few exemplars have survived.⁷ The most important vehicle for knowledge of the events depicted in the Hebrew First Crusade narratives was the sixteenth-century ‘*Emek ha-Bakha*’, composed by Joseph *ha-cohen* of Avignon. Joseph copied from the *Eliezer bar Nathan Chronicle*, thus providing some dissemination of the data contained therein, especially throughout the Sephardic Diaspora.⁸ Subsequently, the material in ‘*Emek ha-Bakha*’ was absorbed into the Ashkenazic *Zemah David*, thereby ensuring that the 1096 crisis, at least in the terms described by Eliezer bar Nathan, would be known by German and Polish Jewry.⁹

Subsequent to the publication in 1892 of the three narratives, the events of 1096 have been widely cited in histories of both the crusades and the Jews. For crusade historiography, the assaults of 1096 have illuminated the popular fervor associated with the First Crusade and the misguided directions in which some of that fervor expressed itself.¹⁰ For historians of the Jews, the Rhineland attacks have had far greater significance. They have been projected as a significant marker in the long and complex history of antisemitism.¹¹ For many, 1096 has emerged as a major turning point in the history of the Jewish people.¹² At the same time, the extreme Jewish responses to these attacks have been seen as unusual manifestations of Jewish martyrological behavior, influenced in no small measure by the fevered atmosphere of late-eleventh-century western Christendom.¹³ Obviously, without the three key texts made available in 1892, the Rhineland attacks and the unusual Jewish responses would have remained relatively unknown.¹⁴

To be sure, the historical reconstructions based on these three important texts necessitate some sense of the reliability of the narratives, involving such matters as their provenance and objectives. In addition, interest has developed in these three narratives as important historical artifacts in their own right. Vigorously written and deeply moving, these accounts have been deemed deserving of careful investigation and analysis. As a result, a considerable literature on the narratives themselves has evolved; this literature addresses a web of complex issues associated with these important and somewhat problematic records.

As already noted, the manuscript foundation for these texts is limited in quantity and, in fact, in quality as well. Multiple manuscripts are available for only one of the three texts: the *Eliezer bar Nathan Chronicle* was published in 1892 on the basis of four manuscripts, one from the fourteenth century, one from the seventeenth century, and two from the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Both the *Solomon bar Simson Chronicle* and the *Mainz Anonymous* were published from single manuscripts, the former from a manuscript of the fifteenth century and the latter from a manuscript of the fourteenth century.¹⁶ Clearly, these texts could hardly be called popular. Moreover, none of the manuscripts is particularly reliable; obvious scribal errors abound.¹⁷ Ironically, the availability of three different accounts of the events of 1096 has created an additional set of problems. The three narratives are obviously related to one another in some fashion, because identical passages can be found in all three texts.¹⁸ More wide-ranging sharing is found in the *Solomon bar Simson Chronicle* and the *Eliezer bar Nathan Chronicle*.¹⁹ These shared

passages have given rise to considerable speculation as to the relationships among the three narratives. Some scholars have suggested independent sources, largely letters, absorbed by all three authors; others have suggested an *Urtext*, an earlier historical narrative now lost, from which all three authors drew; yet others have suggested one of the three as the master source, with the others drawn from it. Clarification of the relationship among the three texts is extremely difficult and involves a number of additional issues.²⁰

The most important question normally asked of such texts is the date of composition. Only one solid piece of information is available to us on the dating of any of the three narratives. The Cologne unit of the *Solomon bar Simson Chronicle* includes, about half-way through, a curiously worded observation that provides the specific date of 1140 for at least that particular segment of the Cologne unit, or perhaps for the entire Cologne unit, or perhaps for the *Solomon bar Simson Chronicle* in its entirety.²¹

Much more problematic is the dating of the *Eliezer bar Nathan Chronicle* and the *Mainz Anonymous*. Nowhere do these two narratives provide us with the kind of overt evidence found in the *Solomon bar Simson Chronicle*. Since the *Eliezer bar Nathan Chronicle* has generally been attributed to the well-known twelfth-century scholar of that name, the mid to late twelfth century has regularly been assumed as the date of his narrative.²² The *Mainz Anonymous* has proven the most problematic of all three texts with respect to dating. Suggestions have ranged from the fourteenth century back to the late eleventh century.²³ Obviously, the dating of these two narratives and the relationships among all three texts are intertwined issues. A strong case for the *Solomon bar Simson Chronicle* as the antecedent of the other two would necessitate a late dating for them. Alternatively, a strong case for an early dating for either of the other two narratives would affect the relationship of that narrative to the *Solomon bar Simson Chronicle*.

In order to avoid impeding the flow of discussion, I have opted to survey the major published views of the relationships among the narratives and their dating in an appendix to this study. At the conclusion of this survey, I enunciate a series of methodological conclusions, which are worthy of repetition:

The precise boundaries of each narrative—exactly where each begins and ends—must be ascertained. Much early argumentation was based on the contention that the opening section of the *Solomon bar*

Simson Chronicle is lost. Rejection of that contention has had an impact on the thinking of a number of the researchers reviewed.

Each of the narratives must be examined to discern whether it is the work of one hand or a composite text. If any of the narratives is a composite text, then its constituent elements must be carefully identified and analyzed.

Allowance must be made for the uniqueness of each narrative. Many researchers have assumed that the three texts are interchangeable, with common objectives and themes. Such an assumption is unwarranted.

The imaginative core of each narrative and primary unit must be identified. Each of the available sources—whether an entire narrative or a discernible unit within a composite narrative—must be examined as a literary and imaginative whole, with major themes and emphases.

Medieval textual borrowing must be properly understood. Much of the discussion of the relationship of the three texts has been carried out without a sufficient sense of precisely how medieval Jewish authors treated sources at their disposal.

The assumption of a uniform relationship among all three narratives—all independent, or two derived from one, or one derived from two—should be rejected. It is perfectly reasonable to find one relationship between two of the narratives and a completely different relationship between two others.

Early studies of the three Hebrew narratives focused on rather technical matters, particularly the relationships among the texts and the dating of the texts. Of late, new concerns have been voiced and new avenues explored. The first of these new concerns involves the facticity of the accounts. To what extent do they reflect the realities of 1096? To be sure, this new concern cannot be divorced from the more technical issues. If in fact some of the material is quite early, then the likelihood of facticity is enhanced; if all the material is quite late, then the likelihood of facticity is diminished. Yet, beyond the question of dating, there is a further and independent matter of reliability that has come to the fore.

Discussion of the facticity of the Hebrew First Crusade narratives can be conducted on two levels. On the scholarly agenda today are general questions as to the capacity of observers to provide “reliable” evidence for events perceived and the capacity of language to communicate “reliable” data for such events. The discussion of the facticity of the 1096

narratives has not been conducted on this highly philosophic plane. The questioning of the reliability of the data provided in the three narratives has been far more focused, more prosaic, and ultimately more useful.

The most radical position has been enunciated by Ivan G. Marcus. Marcus has expressed a number of views on the facticity of the narratives; for the sake of this overview I would like to focus on his most extreme formulations, since they lay out the issues with clarity and force.²⁴ Marcus has argued in a number of publications that the search for “facts” in medieval Jewish historical narratives is misguided, that the genre simply cannot provide such “facts.” In Marcus’s own words:

What appear to be facts in a medieval chronological narrative, then, should be considered a highly edited version of the “deeds” (*gesta*) which the narrator learned from traditional accounts, hearsay or eye-witness reports. The events actually reported qualify for inclusion only when they fit the narrator’s pre-conceived religious-literary schema. Medieval chronicles are, in this sense, fictions: imaginative reorderings of experience within a cultural framework and system of symbols.²⁵

It seems important to place this rather skeptical view in its proper setting. For a long time now, skepticism as to the historicity of the biblical records has been widespread. While the issue remains to an extent unresolved, no one is any longer discomfited by the suggestion that biblical materials may not accurately reflect the realities they purport to describe. Over the past few decades, however, there has been something of a revolution in stance toward the data supplied in the talmudic corpus. Once treated as utterly reliable and the firm basis for reconstructing the history of Palestinian and Babylonian Jewry in late antiquity, talmudic materials have come under increasing scrutiny and have been subjected to increasing skepticism. The bases for this skepticism are, again, not philosophic. They involve the normal historiographic issues of conflicting sources, distance of sources from the events depicted, and the objectives animating authors of narrative accounts.²⁶ It is in this context that the skepticism expressed by Marcus should be seen. Given this set of concerns, the 1096 narratives and their facticity should be examined in precisely the same terms—congruence among sources, dating of evidence, and analysis of the objectives motivating authors.²⁷

A less extreme skepticism has more recently been proposed by Jeremy Cohen. His questions as to the facticity of the 1096 narratives are somewhat more limited: they are focused on the motivations ascribed to the 1096 martyrs and the symbols that animated them. More specifically, he wishes to distinguish between the broad depiction of events in the

Hebrew narratives, which is relatively trustworthy, and the ascription of motivations and symbols, which he believes to have been heavily influenced by Christian spirituality in the first half of the twelfth century. Since Cohen posits that all the narratives were composed during the mid twelfth century or later, he suggests that the authors introduced into their accounts meaningful Jewish symbols intended to counter twelfth-century Christian imagery.²⁸

Cohen's suggestions too must be seen in the context of broader historical currents. One of the new perspectives that has emerged in crusading historiography of late is a strong sense of the First Crusade as a rapidly developing movement, with new themes and symbols evolving during the course of the four-year undertaking. It has been argued, for example, that martyrdom was not present as an early concern of the crusaders, but that it emerged during the course of the arduous and deadly campaign.²⁹ Cohen's suggestion that mid-twelfth-century themes were introduced into the narratives is reasonable if all the narratives indeed stem from the mid twelfth century or later. Thus, dating of the narratives is critical to an assessment of Cohen's interesting suggestions. In addition, the previously noted issues of congruence of sources and auctorial objectives must once more be taken into consideration.

Moving beyond the issue of facticity, a number of scholars have begun to probe the 1096 narratives as works of historical writing and/or theology. There has been growing interest in Jewish historical perspectives over the ages and in Jewish responses to crisis and tragedy. In both contexts, the 1096 narratives have figured prominently.

In a probing examination of Jewish historical memory, thinking, and writing, Yosef Haim Yerushalmi devotes brief but valuable attention to the Hebrew First Crusade narratives. The context of this attention is Yerushalmi's broad sense that historical writing did not flourish among medieval Jews because they thought that the essential patterns of history had been spelled out in Scriptures and that later Jewish history, at least in its preredemptive stage, was of minimal importance and interest.³⁰ According to Yerushalmi, "only in two instances in medieval Jewish historical writing can one detect a full awareness that something genuinely new has happened and that there is a special significance to the events themselves." These two instances are the Hebrew crusade narratives and the twelfth-century *Sefer ha-Kabbalah* of Abraham ibn Daud. According to Yerushalmi, however, "Ibn Daud and the Crusade chronicles are, in this respect, exceptional rather than exemplary, and ultimately even they show a marked tendency to pour new wine into

old vessels.”³¹ For our purposes, Yerushalmi alerts us to the important issues of the innovativeness of the Hebrew First Crusade narratives and the interplay of old and new in them.

In the wake of the catastrophe that struck world Jewry during the middle decades of the twentieth century, recent scholarly attention has fastened on historic patterns of Jewish response to tragedy. Among the broadest investigations of this important theme is Alan Mintz’s *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*. Mintz begins with biblical, rabbinic, and medieval literary reactions to catastrophe, moves to the literature occasioned by the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century outbreaks of violence in eastern Europe, and concludes with recent literary responses to the Holocaust.³²

In his analysis of medieval Jewish literary reactions to tragedy, Mintz highlights the reactions to the violence of 1096. Unfortunately for our purposes, he chooses to focus on the poetry evoked by the events of 1096, rather than the prose narratives that are our concern. He does, however, dwell on the innovativeness of the Jewish literary responses to 1096 and makes a brief but interesting observation on the prose narratives. After noting the existence of both prose and poetic materials occasioned by the events of 1096, Mintz distinguishes between the stances of social historians and his own interests.

Social historians have been chiefly interested in the chronicles because they constitute the first sustained examples of the genre of contemporary historical writing in Hebrew—it is no coincidence that the nature of the events warranted a new form of writing—and because as historians they are concerned with removing the layers of literary and mythic molding to get at “historical reality.” My concern here proceeds in the opposite direction: from the events as they happened toward their symbolization and stylization. The focus will therefore be on the poems, for it is there that the processes of image-making are most intensely at work.³³

Interesting for our purposes is Mintz’s reinforcement, from a different perspective, of Yerushalmi’s sense of the innovativeness of the Hebrew First Crusade narratives. Clarification of this innovativeness will constitute another major concern of the present study.

I would venture one slight disagreement with Mintz on these matters. While I agree that the 1096 poetry offers a more clear-cut opportunity to study “the processes of image-making,” I would urge that, because image-making in the 1096 Hebrew narratives is less clear-cut, these narratives are ultimately more interesting for the study of symbolization and stylization. To put the matter slightly differently, it is precisely the

interaction of time-bound and timeless concerns that makes the narratives ultimately more fascinating—even for studying post-1096 image-making—than the simpler poems.

This brief survey of prior work on the Hebrew First Crusade narratives serves as a useful backdrop for identifying the main thrusts of the present investigation. This study begins with a close scrutiny of the three 1096 narratives. The boundaries of each is clearly delineated, and each is carefully examined in its entirety in an effort to ascertain, first of all, its literary integrity. I conclude that the *Mainz Anonymous* is the work of a single historical imagination; the *Solomon bar Simson Chronicle* a compilation of prior compositions, each of which must be carefully identified and analyzed; and the *Eliezer bar Nathan Chronicle* a reworking of the *Solomon bar Simson Chronicle*, highlighted by the addition of poetic dirges over the destroyed Jewish communities of the Rhineland. Among the compositions absorbed by the editor of the *Solomon bar Simson Chronicle*—in addition to the *Mainz Anonymous*—are a striking depiction of events in Trier and a radically different account of the destruction of Cologne Jewry. Thus, the three narratives actually provide us with five distinct perspectives on the events of 1096.

After the five available post-1096 voices are scrupulously identified, the next items addressed are the dating and the objectives of each independent literary unit, two interrelated issues. Dating will help clarify objectives, and objectives will help clarify dating. In a general way, the earlier compositions—the *Mainz Anonymous* and the Trier unit of the *Solomon bar Simson Chronicle*—reflect the fullest time-bound orientation. Those voices at the greatest distance from the events tend, not surprisingly, to lose the time-bound focus and highlight the timeless. I argue that the *Mainz Anonymous*—like the Orléans letter noted earlier—is unique in its effort to integrate the time-bound and the timeless. These matters, all involving close analysis of the three 1096 narratives, occupy the first half of the study.

The second half of the book is organized in terms of issues, rather than sources. In the light of the analysis of the discrete literary units in the first half of the book, I clarify the time-bound and the timeless objectives of the diverse voices available to us. Close examination of the varied time-bound objectives of our authors leads readily to consideration of the facticity of the data provided in the narratives. If time-bound objectives did indeed animate our authors, what implications does this have for the reliability of the data transmitted in the narratives? Did the

time-bound objectives necessitate an effort to transmit verifiable and reliable information?

Careful consideration of the timeless messages of the narrators leads in an alternative direction—the identification of an innovative sense of the complex relationship between the divine and the human in shaping the course of history. At the close of this study, the innovativeness of this seemingly new style of historical narrative and this seemingly new conceptualization of God, humanity, and history—an innovativeness suggested, for example, in the Yerushalmi and Mintz studies—is rigorously examined. Is it possible to discover precedents in either the classical or the medieval literature of the Jews? If not, are there alternative models for this innovative style of historical writing and these innovative formulations of the interaction of the divine and the human? Again, these far-reaching considerations are ultimately rooted in a close reading of each of the literary units discernible in our three narratives. From the particular to the more general is the broad organizing principle of this study.