Hannu Töyrylä
Åbo Akademi

Historical consciousness amongst eschatological speculation in Megillat ha-Megalleh of Abraham bar Hiyya

Overview

Megillat ha-Megalleh (The Scroll of the Revealer)[1] by Abraham bar Hiyya[2] (12th c.) is probably best known as a work containing extensive calculations for the coming the redemption.[3] Messianic speculation is one of the most conspicuous elements in the work, as is also its use of astrology. Seen as a whole, however, the work is written in a quasi-homiletical style and contains, aside of the calculations, varied materials ranging from philosophy, through biblical commentary, to astrology. A balanced view of the work requires that these various ingredients are all taken into account. This paper will address the materials concerning history in *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, and their role in the overall framework of the book. This question is not only relevant to the study of this particular work, but perhaps also for the research on the role of historical consciousness in the Medieval Jewish culture.

Bar Hiyya lived and wrote in the first half of the 12th century in Northeastern Spain. Very little is know about his life. His preserved works can be divided into scientific and

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1 The text of *Megillat ha-Megalleh* was published in Berlin 1924 by Posnanski and Julius Guttmann. Before this, the work had been studied by Jacob Guttmann, see Jacob Guttmann, „Ueber Abraham bar Chijja's "Buch der Enthüllung"“, *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* XLVII (1903) 446-468; 545-569. The book was translated into Catalonian by J. Millas i Vallicrosa: *Llibre Revelador* (Alpha, Barcelona, 1929).

2 On Bar Hiyya in general, see Geoffey Wigoder, “Introduction” in Abraham Bar Hayya: *The Meditation of the Sad Soul,* (New York Schocken Books 1969) 1-30; Wigoder’s entry on Bar Hiyya in Encyclopedia Judaica; Norman Roth, “Abraham bar Hayya” in Roth (ed.) *Medieval Jewish Civilization* (London Routledge 2002) 3-6; Georges Vajda, «Les idées théologiques et philosophiques d'Abraham bar Hiyya», Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age, (1946) 191-223 and Meyer Waxman, “The philosophical and religious thought of Abraham bar Hiyya the Prince” (in Hebrew) in *Sefer ha-Yovel likhvod Tzvi Wolfson*, Hebrew part, (Jerusalem American Academy for Jewish Research 1965) 145-168. Leon D. Stitskin, *The Judaism as Philosophy, the Philosophy of Abraham Bar Hiyya* (New York Bloch Publishing Company 1960) may contain valuable information, but needs to be approached critically.

3 Abba Hillel Silver: *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel* (Beacon Hill Beacon Press 1959) 69-74. Joseph Sarachek: *The Doctrine of the Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature* (Hermon Press New York) 313 - 328. See also Amos Funkenstein: *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley University of California Press 1993) where Funkenstein claims on this work that Bar Hiyya's ”sole interest is calculation of the End”.

theological. The scientific works include manuals on mathematics, astronomy and land surveying.[4] Of the two theological works, *Hegyon ha-Nefesh* is concerned of the meaning of repentance, and the other, *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, of the redemption of the Jewish people.[5] Bar Hiyya's works are characterised by a shift from Muslim to Christian dominance in Spain and its significance to the Jews. He is operative in a transfer of scientific information from the Arabic to Hebrew, and even into Latin.[6] Also, to some extent, his works display an apologetical, perhaps even polemical attempt to confront a growing Christian influence to the Jews.[7]

Summary of Megillat ha-Megalleh

Bar Hiyya begins *Megillat ha-Megalleh* with an introduction which mainly provides a justification for writing on a controversial topic: the date of redemption. He also declares a polemical intent stating that the exile has not been caused by the sins of the Jews, and that he intends to refute the claims of those according to whom the Messiah has already come.

The first chapter discusses the nature of time. The tone of the chapter is mainly philosophical, even if bar Hiyya does not present a philosophically problem-free definition of time[8]. Anyway, his main interest in the nature of time becomes clear: time is created along with the world, and time and creatures depend on each other for existence. Bar Hiyya proceeds to prove that time is finite, i.e. that it has an end, even if the philosophers

4 On Bar Hiyya's scientific works, see Jose Maria Millas Vallicrosa, *Estudios sobre historia de la ciencia española* (Barcelona Instituto Luis Vives de Filosofia, Seccion de la Filosofia Española 1949) 219-262 and Shlomo Sela, *Abraham ibn Ezra and the rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Leiden Brill 2003) 96-104. On Bar Hiyya's astrological works, see Shlomo Sela, "Abraham Bar Hiyya's Astrological Work and Thought" Jewish Studies Quarterly, 13,2 (2006) 128-158.

5 Hegyon ha-Nefesh was first published in Leipzig 1860; an English translation was published by G. Wigoder 1969.

6 Bar Hiyya is known to have cooperated with Plato of Tivoli in translation of scientific and astrological works from Arabic to Latin.

7 Bar Hiyya explicitly states in his introduction, that he intends to prove in the work that the Messiah has not come already. He also disproves of the idea, common in Christian polemics against Judaism, that the exile has been caused by sins of the Jews. Instead, he considers the exile as a necessary part of a divine plan in history. He also argues against typically Christian interpretations of Gen 49:10 and Dan 9:24-27, verses that were cornerstones of Christian polemics.

8 J. Guttman's introduction to *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, Berlin 1924, p. XIV.

have not been able to agree on the duration of the world. The first chapter also serves to introduce several philosophical concepts that will be made use of later in the book[9].

In the second chapter, Bar Hiyya states that the duration of the world can only be uncovered by means of the religious tradition. He first establishes, by a combination of exegetical and philosophical arguments, that the creation days in Gen. 1 correspond to periods of history: in fact he means that history with its good and bad periods is potentially contained in creation. He then goes deeper into strengthening this theory by support from the Scriptures and the rabbinical literature and examining in detail how the day-periods map to the history of the Jewish people. Finally the model is applied to a number of eschatological calculations. There are also two major excursions, a shorter one on worlds of light and a longer one on the levels of prophecy.

In the third chapter bar Hiyya defends the concept of physical resurrection believed to happen at the beginning of the Messianic era. According to his eschatological scheme the Jews will be resurrected in the beginning of the Messianic age, and a general resurrection for the Judgment Day will occur at the end of this age. Bar Hiyya even attempts to prove that resurrection can be reconciled with the contemporary scientific information, but the main part of his argument is a combination of biblical interpretation and philosophical concepts. He examines in great detail the accounts of the creation of man and of the story of the Garden of Eden[10]. According to his interpretation, these texts at the same time relate to the primal events and to the whole history of mankind. The final goal of redemption, which God has planned from the beginning, is to restore man into his original state as it

[9] Especially form, lack of form, actuality and potentiality, temporal and non-temporal precedence

[10] For a detailed study of this passage, see Sara Klein-Braslavy, "The Creation of Man and the Story of the Garden of Eden in the Thought of Abraham bar Hiyya" (In Hebrew), in *Professor Israel Efros –Poet and Philosopher* (Tel Aviv University 1981) 203-229.

was during the creation. This chapter also contains eschatological calculations towards the end.

The fourth chapter examines the book of Daniel, which bar Hiyya compares with later history starting from Alexander the Great, allowing him to comment on the later history, especially the fates of Roman/Christian and Muslim empires and their relation with the Jews. Occasionally, bar Hiyya appears to be arguing against interpretations used by the Christians. Again, eschatological calculations appear in the latter part of the chapter.

The fifth and final chapter of the book examines the history of Jews and the world, starting from the Exodus, interpreted according to the conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn. The author explicitly states, that the already presented material should convince a believing Jew, but the astrological material is included to convince even others. The chapter is full of detailed astrological information, while it simultaneously offers a unique view to Bar Hiyya's view and knowledge of history. The chapter also carries a polemical tone against Christianity, Manichaeism and Islam. The component of eschatological predictions is again present towards the end of the chapter.

Thus, even if the work contains speculation as to the time of the redemption, and occasionally even isolated comments on the nature of the messianic era, the work as a whole might be better seen as a sustained attempt to prove that the course of history is inevitable and eventually leads to the redemption of the Jews in a messianic age. In other words, to defend the traditional Jewish belief in the coming of the Messiah and the subsequent Messianic era as the culmination of history.

The historical element in Megillat ha-Megalleh and in Medieval Judaism

The historical element in *Megillat ha-Megalleh* has received surprisingly little attention in previous research. The idea of correspondence between creation and history is often mentioned, likewise the existence of a vision of the role of the Jewish people and its history in redemption. For Julius Guttmann, the role of history in his religious thought sets bar Hiyya apart from the neo-Platonists.[11] Guttmann mentions how bar Hiyya constructs a periodic view of history, based on a correspondence with the creation, which will finally be completed in redemption. This structure bears a resemblance to Christian thought,[12] as if bar Hiyya would present a Jewish version of originally Christian ideas.

Aside of these general notions, the amount and role of historical information in *Megillat ha-Megalleh* has not been discussed in detail. The main exception is the article of Resianne Fontaine that sees the consolation given by the history a major theme in the book.[13] Fontaine, however, focuses on the concept of the dependency of history on the creation week as contained in the second chapter of *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, largely ignoring the more detailed accounts of history contained in the fourth and fifth chapters of the book.

A more general research problem is related to the characterization of a text as historical writing, or perhaps rather, as a literary creation informed by historical thinking. The question of historiography and historical consciousness in medieval Judaism has been much debated. M. Steinschneider classified around 200 texts as *Geschichtsliteratur*,[14]

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11 Julius Guttmann: *Die Philosophie des Judentums* (Korneuburg fourier 1985) 130-131

12 Amos Funkenstein regards that Bar Hiyya is influenced by Augustine while Julius Guttmann and Resianne Fontaine also consider Isidore of Seville as a possible source. See Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley University Of California Press) 1993 103, 115-116; Julius Guttmann, "Introduction" in Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Megillat ha-megalleh* (Berlin Mekize Nirdamim 1924) XIII-XIV; Resianne Fontaine, "Over de troost der geschiedenis" *Studia Rosenthalia* vol. 26, n. ½ (1992) 65-84, esp. 74-75.

13 Fontaine: Over de troost der geschiedenis, see note 12 above.

14 Moritz Steinschneider: *Die Geschichtsliteratur der Juden in Druckwerken und Handshriften* (sic!) (Arno Press New York 1980).

whereas Salo Baron is said to have discarded much of the material as homiletical and thus non-historical,[15] and Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi came to accept only two cases of real Jewish medieval historiography: chronicles from the time of the first crusade, and *Sefer ha-Kabbalah* of ibn Daud.[16] Only in these cases, Yerushalmi claims, was there a sense that something new was happening and that there was special significance to the events themselves.[17] Yerushalmi divides historical thinking into two categories: historiography proper as opposed to the category of memory, which finds its expression in ritual and liturgy.

Yerushalmi's discussion also implicitly contains a third category. According to him, there was much interpretation of history without mentioning actual historical events or personalities.[18] Furthermore, whenever the Jews showed interest in recent events, they tended to see the events schematically and as a repetition of distant, Biblical events. According to Yerushalmi, there was no interest in the intermediate course of history, nor any real interest in the recent events as such. This tendency is particularly displayed in

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[15] Robert Bonfil: Jewish Attitudes Toward History and Historical Writing in Pre-Modern Times, in *Jewish History*, vol. 11, No. 1, Spring 1977, 7 – 40 esp 7. Bonfil is referring to Salo Baron: *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, *vol VI* (New York Columbia University Press 1958) 152 – 234, 399 – 440. It is however interesting to our present topic how Baron elsewhere regards Bar Hiyya's work: "Abraham bar Hiyya especially, confronted in Spain not only with Arabian but Christian historical reconstructions, developed a theory of Jewish history which adapted Augustinian and Isidorian teachings to Jewish needs. His philosophy might have stimulated further historical thinking were it not perhaps for the transcending influence of the "unhistorical" Maimonidean thought." Salo Baron: *History and Jewish Historians*, (JPS, Philadelphia, 1964) 112. Thus, Baron considers that Bar Hiyya had a genuine interest in history; it is only the later scholars that have ignored Bar Hiyya.

[16] In light of other research, Yerushalmi's lifting *Sefer ha-Kabbalah* as an example of real historiography does not really hold. While the work is structured as a historiographical work and consists of historical information, Ibn Daud too has been shown to be unreliable as a source and to use history both as a polemical tool and as a source of consolation. According to G. D. Cohen: *The Book of Tradition* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1967), Ibn Daud sees history schematically as displaying a rhythm based on Divine Will, and tries to uncover these rhythms even when it requires distorting of the chronological data. E. Krakowski: "On the Literary Character of Abraham Ibn Da'ud's Sefer ha-qabbalah" in *European Journal of Jewish Studies* volume 1, number 2, 2007 219 – 247, has recently challenged Cohen's theory concerning symmetries of history, which according to Cohen, are based on an intentional modification of facts and imply a messianic message. Instead, Krakowski sees a polemical intent in ibn Daud, and that what Cohen sees as modifications of facts to convey an esoteric message are merely caused by sloppyness.

[17] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi: *Zakhor, Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (University of Washington Press Seattle 1996) 31 – 52.

[18] Yerushalmi, *Zakhor* 31

texts of messianic and apocalyptical nature, which can often contain direct and detailed historical information, while there is, according to Yerushalmi, no historiography at all, only a desperate attempt to read the events into a fixed scheme.[19]

Amos Funkenstein provides a more extensive set of concepts than Yerushalmi. His primary modification is the addition of an intermediate category of *historical consciousness* between *collective memory* and *historical narrative*.[20] According to Funkenstein, Jewish historical thinking never ceased, even when it did not produce historiography. Jews never took their existence or granted; their culture was formed by an acute historical consciousness that was also related to a sense of distinctness and uniqueness of the Jews and a search for meaning in the sense of providence in history.

Also Robert Bonfil has in many ways challenged Yerushalmi's position. Instead of asking, whether and why Jewish historiography existed or did not exist in a particular period, Bonfil prefers a phenomenological and comparative approach, using which he has argued that in the Middle Ages Jewish historical writing was both quantitatively and qualitatively comparable to its Christian counterpart, whereas first in the early modern period the Jewish historical literature really falls behind its Christian counterpart. The conception of comparative lack of Jewish medieval historiography would thus be false.[21]

Against this background, it should be emphasized that *Megillat ha-Megalleh* is not a historiographical work. The accounts of history in the work are there to serve other purposes. On the other hand, Bar Hiyya does not easily match Yerushalmi's model of

[19] Yerushalmi, *Zakhor 34 - 37*

[20] Funkenstein, *Perceptions,* esp *10 - 12*

[21] Bonfil, *Attitudes* 8.
Robert Bonfil: How Golden was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?, in Ada Rapoport-Albert (ed.), *Essays in Jewish Historiography, in memoriam Arnaldo Momigliano,* 1988 (reprinted, Atlanta 1991) 78 – 102 .

seeing the present as a re-enactment of Biblical events. Rather, Bar Hiyya considers history to be a linear process, and even if he is looking for signs of the endtime, he presents summaries of history which are reasonably correct and it can be argued that it is the history as a whole, rather than the most recent events only, that his argumention is built on.

Bar Hiyya's sources for historical information are difficult to pinpoint. It is likely that much of the material comes from the extensive Arabic historiographical literature, but he may also have used Christian sources.[22] It is also interesting to note, that some Arabic works on history bear resemblance to Bar Hiyya's interest in time, creation and the question of the durations of the world. Al-Tabari begins his historical work on the nature of time followed by the question of the duration of the world.[23] Al-Maqdisi's *Book of Creation and History* contains philosophical and eschatological material in addition to the historical.[24] Finally it needs to be recognized, that in the 12th century, there was a revival of interest in history among Christian intellectuals, e.g. in the school of St. Victor history was used as a basis for biblical interpretation. [25]

Nature of time and Aetetas Mundi

Megillat ha-Megalleh is explicitly concerned of the question of the duration of the world. Bar Hiyya starts his book by an inquiry into the nature of time as a philosophical problem, and even if there are contradictions in his discourse,[26] a very central idea is time is related

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22 See note 12 above.

23 Franz Rosenthal (translated and annotated): *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. I (State of New York Press Albany 1989) 168 – 186.

24 Mahmoud Tahmi: *L'Encyclopédisme musulman à l'âge classique, Le Livre de la Creation et de l'histoire de Maqdisî* (Maisonneuve et Larose Paris 1998). C. Huart (transl. & ed.) *Le Livre de la Creation de l'histoire* in six volumes (Paris 1899 – 1919).

25 M-D Chenu: *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century* (University of Toronto Press Toronto 1997) 162 – 201 esp. 165 – 177. R. W. Southern: "Presidential Address: Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing: 2. Hugh of St. Victor and the Idea of Historical Development", in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series xxi (1971) 159 – 179. Rebecca Moore: *Jews and Christians in the Life and Thought of Hugh of St. Victor* (Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1998) 23 – 41.

26 Julius Guttman, in his introduction to *Megillat ha-Megalleh* (Mekize Nirdamim Berlin 1924) XIV.

to the moving of events from potentiality into actuality. Bar Hiyya sees creation as the establishment of events into a state of potential existence, from which these will later flow into actual existence in their proper time. He does not explicitly say it, but it appears that for him, time is either this motion into actuality itself, or rather a substrate in which this motion happens. Anyway, in Bar Hiyya's ontology time is probably the most basic entity, the foundation of all created existence.[27]

Bar Hiyya then goes on to show, based on the non-agreement among scientists and philosophers, that the duration of the world cannot be determined by reason. Thus he turns into a midrashic interpretation of the Biblical text, continuing his argument that all created existence is contained in the creation and that this existence gradually unfolds in time. He furthermore considers the days of the creation as archetypes, each different, each having its own mixture of good and evil, each corresponding to a period of history. He then proceeds to examine how these periods actually have been manifested in the history as he knows it. His scheme is much more complicated than the usual concept of six periods of one thousands years each. Through mathematics, Bar Hiyya arrives at a mean duration of 857 1/7 years per period, and then goes on to look for the actual turns of the periods.[28] The creation account is used to obtain characteristics for each period. The second and sixth periods are most evil, corresponding to the generations before the Flood and the exile after the destruction of the second temple respectively. The peak of the history has been the fourth day, starting from the Giving of the Torah to the Babylonian Exile. Compared to Christian applications of the same idea, Bar Hiyya appears to have created a clearly Jewish version of the ages of history.

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[27] Hannu Toyryla, “The concept of time in "Megillat ha-Megalleh"” in *Studia Orientalia 101*(2007) 441-460

[28] This really means that Bar Hiyya takes the 857 1/7 years only as a mean value and assumes that the actual durations of the periods have been of different lengths. He may here be influenced by geocentric planetary astronomy, where the planetary motions can be presented by mean motion, if observed over a longer time, but the actual motions are variable.

This account in itself seems to match the characteristics of schematic approach, i.e. having a tendency to see events as re-enactments of Biblical events, and interpreting history without actually touching events and personalities as described by Yerushalmi. But we should regard this part in the context of the work as a whole, and then these conceptions can be regarded as a framework and a basic outline, a foundation for more detailed accounts that follow later in the text.

The idea of six world ages corresponding to the creation days was extremely common in Late Antiquity as well as in the Middle ages, among Christians, Muslims and also Jews. It is difficult to point to a specific source.[29] Bar Hiyya's chronological division however is quite certainly his own.

Bar Hiyya's interest in providing a philosophical basis to his work is not unique. Among Muslim historiographers, al-Tabari starts with developing his concept of time, also discussing the question of duration of the world and also touches eschatological issues in his history.[30] Al-Maqdisi's *Kitâb al-bad' wal-Târîkh* treats philosophical, theological and eschatological questions extensively.[31]

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[29] The idea that creation days correspond to periods of history or ages of the world was very common from the late antiquity to the middle ages. On this concept among the Christian Church Fathers, see Auguste Luneau, *L'histoire du salut chex les pères de l'Eglise* (Paris Beauchesne et ses Fils 1964) and Roderich Schmidt, « Aetates Mundi. Die Weltalter als Gliederungsprinzip der Geschichte" *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte,* vierte folge V, LXVII Band (1955/56) 288-317. Amos Funkenstein regards that Bar Hiyya is influenced by Augustine while Julius Guttmann and Resianne Fontaine also consider Isidore of Seville as a possible source. See Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley University Of California Press) 1993 103, 115-116; Julius Guttmann, "Introduction" in Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Megillat ha-megalleh* (Berlin Mekize Nirdamim 1924) XIII-XIV; Resianne Fontaine, "Over de troost der geschiedenis" *Studia Rosenthalia* vol. 26, n. ½ (1992) 65-84, esp. 74-75. Muslims, especially Ismailis, also regarded the history as consisting of seven ages, each with its own legislating prophet. See Farhad Daftary, *The Isma'ilis, their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press 1990) 139-140 and Yves Marquet, *La Philosophie des Ihwân al-Safa* (Paris Arche Milano 1999) XIII, 419-438. Similar ideas are also found among the Jews: in the Talmudic idea of three two millennium periods of the world in Sanh. 97a, in the *Kitâb al-târîkh* attributed to Saadia Gaon and especially in the *Bereshit Rabbati* of Moses ha-Darshan. See also Fontaine, *Troost der Geschiedenis* 73-77.

[30] See note 23 above.

[31] See note 24 above.

History as an interpretation to Daniel 11

In the fourth chapter of *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, Bar Hiyya turns into examining the Book of Daniel, on the surface because it had been commonly used in an attempt to derive the duration of the world. Yet also here, Bar Hiyya's examination turns out to include much more than mere eschatological calculations. In his interpretation, Bar Hiyya uses a principle that a prophecy must be understood in its historical context and that contents of a prophecy or a series of visions or prophecies must conform to a logical and temporal sequence. In the case of Daniel, this means that the whole span of future was not revealed to Daniel at once. The more recent future was disclosed first and the more distant future later, gradually. Any matters concerning the destruction of the Second temple and the exile that followed, could not be disclosed to Daniel who at the time was merely waiting for the end of the first exile. This principle, which bar Hiyya uses in several places in *Megillat ha-Megalleh,* allows bar Hiyya also to argue against Christian interpretations of Dan 9:24-27.

As a background to his interpretation of the book of Daniel, Bar Hiyya also discusses Jer. 25:12-14, 19-26 which he also employs in a simple calculation. Bar Hiyya reads the passage so that God takes revenge on 27 nations one by one. Aside of the eschatological calculation based on the verses, the interpretation also implies the idea that the fates of nations within history carry a meaning that is relevant as to the eventual redemption of the Jews.

A large part of the chapter consists of a commentary to Dan. 11, in which Bar Hiyya gives his first detailed account of history, which can be summarised as follows:

The Persian rule that began in Daniel's time continued through four kings,[32] until the conquests of Alexander the Great. The rule of Alexander lasted only 12 years, after which his empire was split between several of his generals. In Alexandria, Ptolemaic kings ruled until the time of Cleopatra. Then, Rome had become a world power at the time a Julius Caesar, and gradually conquered Greece, Egypt and Babylonia. At this time, disciples of Jesus were active and finally killed. Also, Vespasian and Titus destroyed the Second Temple.

220 years later, Constantine adopted Christianity which became the religion of the Roman Empire and moved the capital to a new city called Constantina. Gradually, the Roman empire was divided into two parts and later even further.

340 years later Muhammad appeared with a new religion. He was not of noble descent and was not immediately accepted by his people. Later on, he managed to prevail over his enemies and rule over the Arabs. After his death, the kingdom he established was able to conquer the land of Israel, Babylonia and Persia.

The land of Israel has been ruled by the two empires: Rome and the Arabs, and the treatment of the Jews has varied. The Muslim rulers had sometimes let the Jews live there, sometimes expelled them. The Muslim empire had been split into parts at the time of the Abbasids, resulting in poorer conditions for the Jews. Recently, Rome had again conquered the land from the Arabs, taken the holy places to their possession and forbidden Jews access to them.

It must be noted that Bar Hiyya is presenting this account within his interpretation of the vision of Daniel, not as an account of past history. The summary, thus, is the result of extracting the historical elements from Bar Hiyya's interpretation. For a comparison, complete passages from Bar Hiyya's interpretation are included as an appendix.

At this point, we can assess the passage at hand against Y. H. Yerushalmi's conception of

[32] Bar Hiyya follows the traditional Jewish view of the succession of Persian kings and the chronology of the Second Temple period.

apocalyptic interest in times of upheaval, an interest in contemporary events which are subsumed into familiar archetypes from the remote past, to which the recent events were mapped, and a lack of interest in the longer span of time.[33] Now, in Bar Hiyya's case, we can affirm that his lifetime was a time of upheaval in the sense that the balance of power between Christians and Muslims shifted to the advantage of the Christians, both within the Iberian Peninsula and in a larger scale (meaning Europe, North Africa and the Middle East). However, even if the change was significant, it was certainly not catastrophic nor calling for immediate apocalyptic response. The life of the Jewish communities both in Spain was not directly affected, and it is difficult to see Bar Hiyya's discourse here as a response to events such as the massacres in Rheinland in the 1090s (which are not at all mentioned).

While it is true that Bar Hiyya maps the events described to familiar archetypes, in this case to the vision of Daniel concerning the four empires, this is not at all a case of matching recent events to remote archetypes. Bar Hiyya lays out a sequence of events spanning 1500 years, paying more attention to the latter 1000 years, quite loosely modelled according to a familiar text. We cannot dismiss the fact that Bar Hiyya presents his audience a view of history, be it simplified and be it presented as an interpretation of Daniel's vision. The recent events are significant, but they gain their relevance not only because they seem to match a prophecy, but also from their belonging to the course of events. Of course, the passage under analysis here is not historiography, but rather a sermon or a midrash on historical themes. It is not relevant as a source of information on the events it describes, but it is relevant as to the historical outlook of the author and through that, of his times and cultural context.

[33] See notes 17 to 19 above.

An astrological interpretation of history

In the fifth chapter of *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, Bar Hiyya turns into an astrological interpretation of history with a subsequent extrapolation into the future.[34] First, as he now extends the basis of his inquiry from the Scriptures to non-Jewish sciences, he needs to justify his use of astrology. Astrological evidence is needed when one has to convince those, Jews and non-Jews alike, that do not accept Scriptural evidence.[35]

Bar Hiyya's astrological interpretation is based on the conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn, occuring roughly at 20 year intervals. The conjunctions are then seen to mark cycles of roughly 20, 60, 238, 953 and 2859 years.[36] The shorter cycles are thought to represent minor changes in world history, the longer ones drastic changes and upheavals, like transfer of power from one dynasty or kingdom to another or even rise of completely new kingdoms.[37] A horoscope drawn for the vernal equinox preceding a conjunction is used to interpret the nature of the conjunction and the events of the corresponding cycle.[38] The technique is quite complex. Horoscopes are not merely static, they are also used dynamically so that the position of the sun, for instance, at a later date, is compared against the horoscope at the beginning of a cycle.[39]

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34 For a treatment on this chapter, see Sela: Astrological Works, 131 - 136

35 He also presents an argument for that his use of astrology is legitimate. This argument is not relevant in the scope of the present article.

36 Sela: Astrological Works, 133 – 135 ; Silver: *Messianic Speculation,* 72 – 74.

37 Keiji Yamamoto and Charles Burnett (ed. & transl.): *Abû Mashar on Historical Astrology, The book of Religions and Dynasties (On the Great Conjunctions),* vol. I (Brill Leiden 2000) 582 – 587. Mûsa ibn Nawbajt: *Kitäb al-azmina wa-l-duhûr, Tratado de Astrologia Mundial* (Universiad de Valencia, Valencia 2005) 0.50. E. S. Kennedy: The World-Year Concept in Islamic Astrology, in *Studies in the Islamic Exact Sciences* (American University of Beirut 1983) 351 – 371 esp. 358 – 359.

38 This technique is probably due to the fact that because of the very slow motions of the upper planets, the exact time of the conjunction cannot be determined accurately enough, whereas the time of the vernal equinox is accurate enough for astrological use.

39 For an explanation of dynamic use of horoscopes, see Kocku von Stuckrad: *Geschichte der Astrologie* (C. H. Beck München 2003) 27 – 29 . For an example of Bar Hiyya's interpretation of a horoscope, see Josefina Rodríguez-Arribas: Historical Horoscopes of Israel, Abraham bar Hiyya, Abraham ibn Ezra and Yosef ben Eliezer, in Oestmann, Rutkin and von Stuckrad (eds.): *Horoscopes and Public Spheres, Essays on the History of Astrology* (Walter de Gruyter Berlin 2005) 145 – 164.

Astrological interpretations of history were common in medieval Arabic culture,[40] and they also raised interest later in the Christian West, partly because of Bar Hiyya's work.[41] Bar Hiyya sometimes refers to earlier interpreters anonymously, but prefers to do his own calculations and interpretations.

Bar Hiyya then proceeds to discuss the course of history using these methods, starting from the birth of Moses and the subsequent birth of the kingdom of Israel. Throughout his discussion, astrological criteria are used to characterize the Jewish nation as just and God-fearing. Initially, Bar Hiyya is showing interest only in the events concerning the Jewish nation as recorded in the Bible. From the first exile onwards, the focus extends to include other nations. The account covers

- Alexander the Great and the disintegration of his empire
- destruction of the Second temple
- rise of Christianity and the adoption of Christianity by Constantine
- an account on Mani, the founder of Manichaeism
- rise of Muhammad and an account of the subsequent development of the Muslim empire including the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties
- Muslim rule in Spain, first by Umayyads and later by the Almoravids
- conquest of the land of Israel by the Crusaders

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[40] Best known are the work of Masha'allah and Abu Mashar. See E.S. Kennedy and David Pingree: *The Astrological History of Mâshâ'allâh*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1971) and Yamamoto and Burnett: *Historical Astrology.*

For a more extensive list of works, see Kennedy: *World-year* 360 -365. The extant work that perhaps comes closest to Bar Hiyya's treatment of astrological history is Mûsa ibn Nawbajt: *Al-Kitâb al-Kâmil, Horóscopos Históricos* (edición y Traducción por Ana Labrat, Prólogo de Juan Vernet) (Institito Hispano-Árabe de Cultura, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Madrid 1982).

[41] On Bar Hiyya's reception in Latin, see Guttman's introduction to *Megillat ha-Megalleh* (Berlin 1924) XXVIII – XXXI.

Compared with the account based on Dan. 11, this account carries a lot of chronological detail, which of course has been necessary in order for the horoscopes to be drawn. The accounts also carry a clear polemical tendency to use the astrological data to characterize other nations and religions as false, injust or outright evil. The astrological support appears to make Bar Hiyya's judgments look like more than mere opionions. Bar Hiyya appears to consider his astrological interpretation as especially convincing; he explicitly states that here he has used the science of the non-Jews to show that their claims are false. Bar Hiyya may have been working as an astrologer for the Catalonian court, and therefore had some firsthand experience on the value of astrological arguments.[42]

Towards the end, the chapter goes beyond interpretation of history to speculate on the coming of the redemption based on the astrological theory. These predictions have received much interest particularly from Christians in a Latin translation, but they do not contribute much to our understanding of Bar Hiyya's outlook on history.

Conclusions

Megillat ha-Megalleh contains both theoretical views on the nature of time and history, and reasonable summaries of the course of history. It is, of course, not a historiographical work, but rather a quasi-homiletical work intended to convince the public of the continued validity of the Jewish hope for redemption. History together with the Scriptures, philosophy and astrology are employed to support this argument.

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[42] Bar Hiyya's title *sâhib al-shurta* suggests that he held an official position of some kind, implying a connection with the court, see J.M. Millas-Vallicrosa: ”The Beginning of Science Among The Jews Of Spain”, in Joseph Dan (ed.): *Binah, Jewish Intellectual History in the Middle Ages,* volume 3 (Praeger, Westport 1994) 45 – 46. Also, Bar Hiyya himself writes, at the end of his so-called Astrological Letter, that in his youth his astrological skills had been valued by princes and kings, see Moritz Steinschneider: ”Abraham Judaeus – Savasorda un Ibn Esra”, in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin 1925, reprinted Georg Olms 1980) 334 – 335 and Z. Schwartz: ”Letter of R. Abraham bar Hiyya the Prince” (in Hebrew), in *FestSchrift Adolf Schwarz zum siebzigsten Geburtstage* (R. Löwit Verlag, Berlin und Wien, 1917) (23-36) 36.

In *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, Bar Hiyya displays familiarity with the general course of history, and utilizes it to build an argument. Therefore, it may be assumed that he regarded that his public also shared a certain historical consciousness in order to be responsive for this argument. It is also possible that Bar Hiyya intends to educate his public about the details of the course of history, following a similar motivation as displayed in his scientific works.

At the bottom of all this, Bar Hiyya also has his own philosophy of history, starting from the idea that time is connected to the movement of entities from potentiality to actuality, to the more specific idea that history is precontained in Divine thought and unfolds arranged to periods of varying degrees of good and evil, corresponding to the creation days. That Bar Hiyya was in this way looking for laws of history, similar to the laws of nature, even if it looks very unscientific in modern eyes, can be seen typical of a Sephardic Jew's scientific mind in the early 12th century.[43]

[43] G. D. Cohen: ”Messianic Postures of Ashkenazim and Sephardim” in Marc Saperstein (ed.): *Essential papers on messianic movements and personalities in Jewish history* (New York, New York University Press 1992) 214 – 215.