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IN
JEWISH LITERATURE.

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COLUMBUS IN JEWISH LITERATURE.

BY PROFESSOR R. J. H. GOTTHEIL, *Columbia College, New York.*

Joseph ben Joshua Hakkōhēn was of Spanish parentage.* His family had been compelled to leave their home during the forced exodus of 1492. His father settled in Avignon, at which place Joseph was born; but, later, removed to Genoa. When the Jews were expelled from that city, Joseph went to Voltaggio, where he did most of his literary work. He died in the year 1575.

Joseph was a careful historian. He gathered his facts from all possible sources, made notes, kept registers—all of which served him as material when writing his *Emek Hab-bākhāh* and *Dibhrē Hayyāmim*.† This last work is a Book of Chronicles—not only of his own people, but also of all the nations with whom they had come in contact. It contains an account of Columbus, which has recently been the subject of some discussion.‡ He curiously confounds Columbus with Americo. The whole description is vague and poor, and HARRISSE is right§ in wondering at the meagreness of Joseph's information. For the Genoa Psalter of 1516 was published before he wrote, and that contains a long and trustworthy account.

* On Joseph Kohen, see Steinschneider, *Bodleian Catalogue*, col. 1498; *Jewish Literature*, p. 251; *Hebräische Uebersetzungen*, vol. II., pp. 775, 948; Neubauer, *Mediaeval Jewish Chronicles*, p. xix; *Revue des Études Juives*, vol. xiv, pp. 28 sq.

† An English translation of this book was published in 1836 by C. H. F. Bialloblotzky, "*The Chronicles of Rabbi Joseph . . . the Sphardi*," 2 vols. London. Oriental Translation Fund.

‡ See A. Kohut, *References to Columbus and America's Discovery in Contemporaneous Hebrew Literature*. The Menorah, Dec. 1892, pp. 403 sq.

§ *Centralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*, 1888, p. 136.

The explanation is to be found in the peculiar manner in which Joseph wrote his works. Books were scarce in those days. Joseph had difficulty in procuring those he needed. He says expressly in a passage which I shall cite further on, that he did not, at that time, have the good fortune to possess a book giving him detailed information about the discoveries made in America. Afterwards he was able to obtain such a work, and he immediately set about to do it into Hebrew in order that his people might have correct information on the subject. This work was *La Historia general de las Indias* of Francisco Lopez de Gomara.* This work in two parts (*The Book of India* and *The Book of Fernando Cortes, or The Book of Mexico*) he joined to another work *Massībh Gebhulōth 'Ammīm*,† itself a translation of the *Omnium gentium mores leges et ritus* of Joan Boemus.

Now, the redaction of his *Chronicles* was finished in 1553. The translation of Boemus' work bears the date 1555. It was only after he had completed these two that he commenced translating his larger work on America, which he completed in the year 1557. We can thus follow closely his gradual acquisition of knowledge on the subject of the discoveries in the New World. Had he written his *Chronicles* after his translation of de Gomara, our judgment upon them would not have been so severe.

It is, perhaps, wrong to call these works translations. I have before me the text of de Gomara as published in the 22d volume of the *Bibliotheca de Autores Españoles*, Madrid, 1884. The Hebrew is an abridgment and only preserves the general run of the original. But Joseph is very careful in his proper names. At the end of each treatise he even has a list of Spanish words used, with their Hebrew equivalents.

* Cf. *Bibliographical Notice of Rare and Curious Books relating to America . . . in the Library of Carter Brown*. Providence. Vol. I., p. 168; Vol. II., p. 14. Winsor, *Narrative and Critical History of America*, Vol. II.

† *i. e.* that which setteth the bounds of the people. Deut. 32, 6.

Poetical quotations he gives in Spanish, but in Hebrew characters; and he adds a rhymed Hebrew translation of his own.

The MS. of these two works—for they seem to have been intended to go together—in my library was purchased at the sale of the library of the late R. N. Rabinowitz in Munich.* It was sold to me as being unique. It was some time afterwards that I discovered that I had been the victim of a deception, for another MS. of the same work was sold to the *Alliance israelite* in Paris at about the same time. To be more accurate, the MS. that I had bought was sold to Paris and an inferior one sent to me.† The discovery came when I read the excellent article of the late Isidore Loeb (*Revue des Études Juives*, Vol. XVI., pp. 28 sq.‡) on the very MS. which I supposed I had bought. Mr. Rabinowitz had died in the meantime, so that redress was impossible.

There are thus two MSS. of this work known. There were originally more copies. Joseph, it seems, thought well of his own works. He made several copies of the translation, carefully adding the date at which he finished each copy. That now in the library of the *Alliance* was the ninth, and was finished in the year 1568. My own copy is the fifth, and bears the date 12th Tishri, 1564. Our author had also a *penchant* for poetry. He affixed to this, his fifth copy, quite a number of verses; also formulæ for the heading of letters addressed to various personages of rank. There is the mark of the *visé* of a censor, with the date 1607.

* It is only necessary to look at the Catalogue *R'shūmath Sefarim Y'shēnīm, hamshēkh*, etc., sent out by Mr. Rabinowitz himself. I refer to the one bearing the date 5th Tammuz, 5647. The MS. is numbered 129 (p. 20), and the note is added: *w'ō' nōdha' 'ōdh bū'glām*. But the buyer of MSS. must expect many a surprise! Steinschneider, *Hebr. Uebersetz.*, p. 948, speaks of another MS. (Servi, dated 15 Omer, 1567). I can find nothing more about it.

† Towards the end, the ink has eaten into the thin paper and partly destroyed it.

‡ See also Leonello Modona, *Gli ebrei e la scoperte dell' America*, Casale, 1893, p. 5. I am indebted to one of my students, Mr. George Kohut, for this notice.

At the end of his abridgment of Boemus, Joseph has added a chapter of his own, entitled "On the other islands of the Mediterranean Sea," whose names the author did not mention. The concluding paragraph of this section reads: "These, then, are the nations, whose names are known to us: these are their customs and rites up to this day. But, in our own times Columbus the Genoan discovered large Islands and Kingdoms in the direction of the setting sun, the names of which were unknown up to the present day. Many Spaniards followed him, and they—in their turn—found cities which Columbus had not seen, as well as the whole country of Peru, where there is gold. They fought with these nations and made them tributary. These lands have belonged to the Kings of Spain, even unto this day. From there gold is brought, year by year. The inhabitants of those cities were idolaters, until the coming there of the Spaniards, who brought them from gloom into utter darkness. They also found there cities belonging to men who were like unto beasts—eaters of human flesh, even unto this day. The servants of the King of Portugal found also the island which to-day they call San Tome (סאַן טאָמֶי). There they found only the large fishes which come up from the sea, which they call Lagartos (לאַגאַרטוֹיִט), and serpents and insects and conies.* Thither the king sends every one condemned to death. He also sent some Jews there.

*Through the courtesy of Professor H. B. Adams, I am able to make use of the following references collected by Mr. J. H. Hollander: "In the year 1493, when King John the Second conferred the signory of St. Thomas's isle upon Don Alvaro de Caminha, he obliged the latter to people it, and, for this purpose, ordered that all the Jews should have their sons and daughters of tender age taken away from them, and that after the baptism of the latter, these should be handed over (as was done) to Don Alvaro, for the purpose of peopling the said isle of St. Thomas. Osorino, *De Rebus gestis Emanuelis regis Portugalliae*, lib. prim.; Monteiro, *Historia da Santa Inquis.*, parte 1^a, liv. seg., cap. 2. Cf. de Castro, *History of the Jews in Spain*, London, 1851, p. 202; Lindo, *History of the Jews in Spain and Portugal*, p. 323; Jost, *Geschichte der Juden*, viii, p. 93."

They found no saviour in the day of the anger of God. They were friendly with the servants of the King of Portugal, and built houses in which to dwell, and tilled their land. The ground gave forth its produce, and they dwelt there in safety. They also planted sugar-canes (קני הרביץ), which increased greatly. From there they bring the juice of the cane, which they call sugar (אטוקאר) to Portugal. But up till now I have not had the good fortune to see a book relating these journeys, or to learn a sufficient number of facts so as to write a book upon the subject.

And so I give thanks to God who has assisted me in writing this book thus far. I pray that in His mercy He may find me worthy to write other books to the glory of His great name, and to complete the account of the lands of Peru and Mexico, the other islands of the sea, Kush and Libya (?). To the end that the children of Israel know that the Lord is a God of knowledge, who maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters: by Him actions are weighed. Finished on the first day of the week, the fourth of Tammuz here in Voltabbio, the city in which I, Joseph Hakköhēn, dwell: in the vicinity of Genoa, in the year 5315."

The superscription to the abridgment of de Gomara reads: "Saith Joseph, son of Meir, son of Judah, son of Joshua, son of Judah, son of David, son of Moses, of the priests who went from Goete (גויאטי) in the land of Spain. I have sent to Spain to bring this book *New India*. It was forwarded to me. It also is divided into three parts, not counting the Book on Mexico (מגישיקו). I set my heart upon translating them."

Chapter 5 of Part I. of this book on India reads as follows: "We commence by relating how the Islands in India were first found. Columbus the Genoan (קולומבו הגינובריטי) was a man mighty in strength, accustomed all his life to sail on the sea in ships. This Christopher Columbus learned how to make sea-charts (מגלות מלחות). He went to Por-

tugal, in order to become acquainted with the cities in Southern Africa which are near the sea, and the way by which the Portuguese (פורטוגיזי) reach Calicut (קאליקוט). It happened, at that time, that a ship set out from Spain for the seas of Canaria (קאנאריא). But the wind blew upon the ship and drove it to a land which neither they nor their fathers had known. Most of the men died on the way. After some time, the ship returned. On it were five men and the captain. He went to the house of Columbus, took sick and died. His name has not become known, even unto this day. Only the remembrance of the road they took has been preserved through Columbus. About this time his heart prompted him to go there. He sent Bartholomew (בארטולומיא) his brother to Henry (אינריקו) VII., King of England (אינגלאטרה), to ask for help and means to go there. He told him (king) of all the precious wealth to be found there. But the King would not hearken to his voice. He also asked the King of Portugal (פורטוגאל); but he appeared as one joking. Then he went to Ferdinand (פירדינאנד), King of Spain, and his accursed wife Isabella (איזאבלא), while they were fighting against Granada (גראנאדה) in the year 1486. But at that time, they would not incline their ear.

When, however, he spoke to them day after day, they came to believe in the promises he made to bring all manner of precious wealth, silver and gold and spices. They received him well: he found, at this time, favor in the eyes of all who saw him. They gave him (Columbus) a tenth of the taxes gathered from those lands which did not belong to the King of Portugal: for the two kings were at peace one with the other. They made an agreement with him, written and sealed in Granada on the 30th of April (אבריל) in the year 1492—*i. e.* the year of the expulsion.

In that frightful year all the hosts of the Lord went forth from the land of Spain at the command of these rulers: in the fifth month. From there they spread to the four corners

of the earth. They went in ships to Africa (אפריקה), Asia (אשיאה), Greece (יוון), and Turkey (תורכיה). There they have dwelt up to this day. From Cartagena (קארטאגנה) there went out sixteen large ships filled with human beings, on the sixth day, on the tenth day of the month. In the rest of the cities of the king, and the cities near the sea, what did they do? There came over them many and evil misfortunes and various troubles, so that they grew weary on the way. Look O Lord! Turn and save us for the sake of Thy name!"

Chapter 6 of Book I. tells how Columbus first came upon the islands of India.

"These two princes gave him three ships. He went to sea with Bartholomew his brother. At that time there were with them one hundred and fifty men. They journeyed from Palos de Moguer (פאלוס ד' מוג'ור) on the third day of the month of August (אוגוסט), passing by Gomera (גומ'רה) which belongs to the Canary Islands. They continued their journey and found a certain herb upon the sea in large quantities. At that time they were in great fear. They went on their way; but had not gone far when one of the men saw [a light], from afar off, and told this to his fellows. Their spirits revived while he spoke to them. On the morrow, *i. e.* on the eleventh day of the month of October, the lookout cried with a loud voice 'Land! Land!' All ran and looked, and gave thanks to God, lifted up their voices and wept. These men now kissed the hand of Columbus, bowed down to him and said 'Behold! we are thy servants!' Then they neared the dry land, and came to the Island Guanahani (גואנאהני) which belongs to the Lucayos (לוקא'ויז'ט) Islands, between Florida (פלורידה) and the Island of Cuba (קיבה). This is the first island which was taken in the name of the Kings of Spain. From there they went to Barucoa (בארקואה) which is in the Island of Cuba, and they took some of the men of that place. Then they returned to the Island of Haiti (האיטי), threw the anchors into the sea, and

came to anchor there. Columbus called the name of that place Puerto Real (פּוּרְטוֹ רֵאָל). One of his ships was destroyed there.

The men then went on shore. Columbus, also, went with them at that time. The Indians saw the Spaniards and their arms. Taking them to be cannibals (טֵרֵפֵי אָדָם), eaters of human flesh, they fled to the mountains. The Spaniards pursued after them and came upon a naked woman, to whom they gave bread and wine, a linen garment and clothes wherewith to clothe her nakedness. Then they let her go. She ran and told the Indians what they had done to her, whereupon many of them came to the sea at that time. But they were unable to understand each other's speech; so that they were compelled to speak with them as one speaks to a dumb man. The Indians brought bread and fruit and birds and gold and many other things, and exchanged these for bells and glass necklaces and needles, and other things which were in the coffers of the Spaniards. At which Columbus was exceeding glad.

There came also thither Guacanagari (גּוּאַקָנָאָרִי), the head of the city, whom they call Cacique (קַאָקִיקוֹ). They greeted each other, gave presents, and made a covenant. The Indians brought some of their ships to the place and with heart and soul, as much as was in their power, helped the Spaniards to save some of the fittings of the ship which had been wrecked outside. Columbus rejoiced when he saw that the natives had much gold, and that they were disposed to be friendly. He made up his mind to return and relate to the princes what he had found there. He built a stronghold with the consent of the Cacique: whose men assisted him until it was built. He placed in it thirty-eight men in order that they might learn the language of the people and the hidden places of this country, until the time when he should return to them.

Columbus took with him ten Indians, forty papagayos (פּאַפּאַגַּאָוֹס) and gallipavos (גַּלִּיפַּאָוֹס) in large numbers, and

conies and Ajies (אײס) and Batatas (באטאטאס) and maize (מײז), and other strange things, and the gold which he had gotten in exchange. He embarked, and the chief of the city wept when they left that place. Columbus returned to Palos de Moguer at the end of fifty days, in the year 1493.”

I refrain from translating further. The history of Columbus and of the later discoveries in the South American continent is related *in extenso*. The above may serve as a specimen.

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