DAVID REUBENI IN THE LIGHT OF HISTORY

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In the literature of Jewish history, the appearance of David Reubeni has remained an unusual phenomenon. In contradiction to the writers of the nineteenth century, who, while neither pronouncing judgment on the personality of David Reubeni nor evaluating his appearance, tried, nevertheless, to doubt the veracity of his lineage and of his mission, it is at present accepted to regard his account as true and to explain in some manner the meteoric rise of a Jewish Kingdom in Habor.¹

Let it be noted at the outset that there is not a single element in the account of David Reubeni which would warrant it as more authentic than the accounts of other tribesmen who appeared among Jews. The mystery of his death, however, and his martyrdom stood him in good stead that his account should not be doubted. Indeed, besides the halo of national romanticism, there is also the circumstance that the appearance of David Reubeni created a furor in the world. He was received by kings and princes and he almost succeeded in attaining his end. The fact, however, that a Pope and an Emperor trusted in him does not in the least alter historical truth. Was not Sabbatai Zevi a false Messiah because the period during

This is the opinion of A. Kahana in his edition of ספור דוד הראובני, of A. Goldschmidt in his Yiddish translation of Reubeni's Narrative, Wilna, 1927. Already at an earlier date Abraham Farissol and after him Joseph ha-Cohen made critical comments on the personality of David Reubeni.

which he appeared caused him to gain yet greater popularity?

The cycle of problems connected with the appearance of David Reubeni is well known and need not be repeated or enumerated here. The main questions are:

- 1. Who was David Reubeni? Was he a member of an independent Jewish tribe?
- 2. If not, was he an Oriental Jew from one of the Arabian countries, and, if so, from which? Or perhaps he was but an adventurer—motivated either by an ideal or by sundry other reasons—from one of the Romance, Germanic or Slavic lands?
- 3. How much truth is there in the essentials of his account?

As long as we do not encounter David Reubeni in Europe, i. e., in Italy, we must rely on his own testimony. We know no more about him than what he himself tells us. While even for his account of his stay in Italy and what transpired there, the only sources of information we possess are his diary and memoirs, we know nothing at all about him before his appearance in Venice. It follows, since we rely on the narratives contained in his book, that we must needs accept it as authentic, i. e., as written either by David Reubeni himself or by a contemporary to whom he dictated it. Indeed, the book evinces some stamp of originality. The mere fact that in "The Book of David Reubeni's Travels" there is not a single complete narrative — at least in the only manuscript which came down to us — speaks in favor of its authenticity.

² I used Neubauer's edition, בחרכמים וקורות הימים, חלק ב', Mediaeval Jewish Chronicles, Anecdota Oxoniensia, Oxford, 1895, Vol. II, pp. 133-223. This edition, as well as the fragments previously published

In order to gauge the genuineness of David Reubeni's account we must subject it, and particularly its first chapters, to a critical analysis from several points of view:

- 1. From the geographical point of view: Whence did David Reubeni come to Egypt? What countries had he visited, and what had he seen there? Did he start out with a definite aim in mind?
- 2. From the historical point of view: Is everything he relates as having happened to him during his stay in Palestine and in Egypt true? Or do we possess other sources which reveal to us unfamiliar episodes about his life?
- 3. From a literary point of view: Is Reubeni's narrative genuine? Or did he make use of other material after which he patterned his own account?

Reubeni's first journey from the time he left his brother, the King, until he reached Giddu, by a mountainous road, lasted ten days. If we scrutinize minutely his journey from the time he started out from the desert of Habor (Tabor) until he arrived in Egypt, we get the following itinerary.

- 1. From the desert of Habor to Giddu (נידו).
- 2. From Giddu via the sea to Suakim (צואקין).
- 3. From Suakim via Asha (עשה) to the Kingdom of Sheba (שבא) of King עמרה, situated in the province (city) of Lamoule (למאול).

by Biberfeld (Der Reisebericht des David Reubeni, Leipzig, 1892), is the only edition in which the one extant manuscript (more correctly: a copy of it) was copied in its entirety, without being "touched up" by the editor. I take this opportunity to warn the reader against the later editions, whose editors willfully mishandled the text and "edited" it in accordance with their manifest ignorance.

- 4. Travels extensively until he comes to Sunar (סינאר).
- 5. From Sunar to Sheba.
- 6. From Sheba to the Kingdom of 'Al-Ga'al (אל־געל).
- 7. From the Kingdom of 'Al-Ga'al to the mountain 'Atakki (אטאקקי).
 - 8. From Mt. 'Atakki to Dongola (דונגולה).
- 9. From Dongola via the desert to Alhabor (אלחבור), in the vicinity of the Nile.
- 10. He traveled by land along the border of the Nile until he reached Girgah (גירנאה).3
 - 11. From Girgah via the Nile to Egypt.

In order to clarify this itinerary, it is well that we first ascertain the nature of the above-mentioned names so that we may be enabled to judge which of them are confused and which mistaken.⁴

1. The desert of Habor. It proved a stumbling block in the whole account of Reubeni. We shall, therefore, temporarily postpone the clarification of its name. Suffice it to say that it is found on the eastern side of the Red Sea, in the Arabian desert, on the way to central Asia, and near the Red Sea. David Reubeni himself states that of the nine and a half tribes who dwell in the land of Kush and in other places near his country, the province of Habor, thought to have been the country of the Reubenites and Gadites, is really the habitation of the tribes of Simeon and of Benjamin, who dwell by the Nile, opposite the

יאחרי כן נכנסתי במצרים to אני דוד בן המלך שלמה נכנסתי במצרים to יאחרי כן נכנסתי במצרים to אני דוד בן המלך שלמה... יאחרי רפ"נ...

⁴ For a critical study of the geographical names, it is well to use the well-known work of Reclus, *General Geography*, Vol. X. In case it cannot be procured, Varigny's *Geography*, Vol. V, will answer the purpose. For the sake of convenience, many places are designated after Andree's *Atlas*, which is the most easily procured.

Kingdom of Sheba, and are located between two rivers, one of which is black and is called the Nile.⁵

- 2. Giddu. It is the coast city Gedda, on the shore of the Red Sea in Hedjaz. Suakim is the well known city in Nubia on the western shore of the Red Sea (Sudan). Asha, which Reubeni mentions as a thoroughfare for traders traveling to the land of Kush, enables us to establish the precise location of Kush and Sheba, both of which compose Ethiopia. The reference is to Wadi Asha(t) which is 38° longitude east of Greenwich, and which flows southward to Ethiopia.^{5a}
- 3. The Kingdom of Sheba. From the fact that he describes it as the dwelling place of King עמרה, who reigned over both the white and the black populations, one may conclude with certainty that what he refers to is the Kingdom of Shoa, whose capital is 'Ankober and whose Kings reigned at times over the whole of Ethiopia or over the greater part thereof. Further evidence that this is so would be the name of the King, עמרה, king of the province 'Amhara inhabited by a people who even till recently (1936) was holding sway over all the provinces of Ethiopia.

⁵ P. 189.

so The ignorance of the later editors reached such an extent that they erased the word אָשה, which they did not understand, and in its stead substituted the word Mecca! Graetz also adds: "This geographical place (מעשה) is unknown to me." Biberfeld emended the name unnecessarily to Massaua, which would only mean a road along the coast and not into Abyssinia, but at any rate would not be a geographical absurdity like Mecca!

⁶ Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, Rome, 1928, part I, passim. Biberfeld, who limits David's travels exclusively to Nubia, thinks of Saba, near Khartum, as a country which without being passed by David was back of the place where he then sojourned. By the way, this Nubian *Saba* is a little town and was never a "Kingdom"!

We note that in 'Amharic (and in the majority of the other Ethiopian dialects) the *heth* (π) is pronounced like a *he* (π) and the 'ayin (y) like the *aleph* (x), something akin to the Samaritan pronounciation of Hebrew. Thus while we write 'Amhara, we read 'Amara-'Amara.

This postulate is in accord with Reubeni's later statement, namely, that the Kingdom of Galla is part of the Kingdom of Sheba, i. e., dependent on the Kingdom of Shoa and is under the rule of the Kingdom of עמרם. It is both written and read 'Amharim. On the other hand, I cannot identify with certainty the location of Lamoule which Reubeni mentions as the city (metropolis?) of Sheba-Shoa. Graetz fixed its location in Nubia, near the fifth cataract of the Nile, where Mount Lamoule and Wadi Lamoule are situated.7 If this were so it would alter my identification of the itinerary, but I do not know how Graetz, or Ritter, to whom Graetz is indebted for this information, reached such a conclusion. The Wadi and the mountain identified by Graetz are named by all geographers and appear on all maps not as Lamoule but as Laemeb⁸ and consequently this opinion, which was faithfully followed by all redactors of Reubeni's book, none of whom took the trouble to verify the facts, comes to naught. We note on this occasion that in the single copy which we used, this name occurs three times, twice in the form of לאול. Which of the two forms is the more correct? The only probable supposition is to identify לאול with Lalibala,

See Andree, map 110-111, D E5.

⁷ Hebrew edition, part VII, p. 406, note 2, after Ritter's Erkunde, part I, p. 616. I regret that I was unable to look up the reference in Ritter's book. The geographical impossibility of Graetz's localization of this place has already been noticed by Biberfeld, although he has not suggested an improvement.

the city built by King St. Lalibala, which is situated in the district of Lasta, in the southern part of Ethiopia, in the very same environ where we established Reubeni's whereabouts for that time. At any rate, although there would be no more reliable support for this opinion, there is no support at all for the supposition which would locate the place in Nubia, near the fifth cataract of the Nile.

- 4. Sunar. The reference is to Senear, an oasis on the eastern edge of the desert of Sudan, at the source of the Nile in western Ethiopia.
- 5. Sheba. We have already indicated above that it is Shoa, one of Ethiopia's provinces, and this was the mediaeval metropolis of all Ethiopia during many centuries after the period of ancient Aksum. The King of Shoa ruled then over the whole country.
- 6. The Kingdom of 'Al Ga'al. It, too, was mentioned above and we indicated that what is meant by it is the land of the Gallas, a name applied either to a people or to a group of people who lived in Ethiopia and who called themselves 'Ormomo.¹⁰
- ⁹ On Lalibala and the city built by him, see Perruchon's Vie de Lalibala (published by the University of Algiers), Paris, 1892. With regard to the time during which he lived, and when he built his city, see the various opinions in Conti Rossini's "Les Listes des Rois d'Aksoum" in the Journal Asiatique, 1909 (IX-X). See also Perruchon's Les Chroniques de Zar'a Ya'eqob, Paris, 1893.
- ¹⁰ It is not likely that the reference is to the Wolla-Gala tribes who dwell in Ethiopia proper, on the border of Shoa, east of Godjam, since Reubeni informs us that from Sheba he went to El-Ga'al, whereas the Wolla-Gala tribes are closer than Shoa to one who arrives from the northeast.

Subsequently I find the identification with the Gallas already noted by Zunz (Geograph. Literatur, p. 180). In this case Biberfeld follows Graetz, who thinks of Ğalain, because the geographical situation and the spelling of the name do not appear to fit in with the country of the Gallas. Of course, that is a consequence of his former unfounded topographical identifications, like Saba, etc. Therefore he thought the

- 7. Mt. 'Atakki. Since Graetz, scholars are wont to regard it as the hill of Tukaki, but it is difficult to see how Reubeni, stranger that he was, jotted it down as one of the boundaries or stop-overs in his journey. I am inclined to emend the words Mt. 'Ataki (יהר אטאקקי) to יהר לגהר (הר אטאקקי) to 'At-taki, i. e., the Takasé which traverses the eastern part of Ethiopia, or perhaps it is but the abode of the Taka tribes at the edge of the Sudan on the border of Ethiopia?
- Dongola. As a matter of fact, from the text one does not gather clearly whether or not Reubeni went to Dongola, for he only says that Prince 'Abd-al-Wahab wanted him to go through there. From Reubeni's account of his six-day visit in the Prince's palace, however, I infer that the palace mentioned is the one which the Prince had in Indeed, Dongola is at the beginning of the Sudan and on the way to Egypt, but since Reubeni goes from the distant south, from the environ of the land of Galla, to the North, one may ask whether names have not been confused and interchanged here, and that instead of Dongola we read Danakil (which is in Eritrea, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the gulf of Aden, and possesses the harbor Asab, north of the river Mareb), which is, at any rate, a natural way of traveling to Massawa, Reubeni's objective at that time.

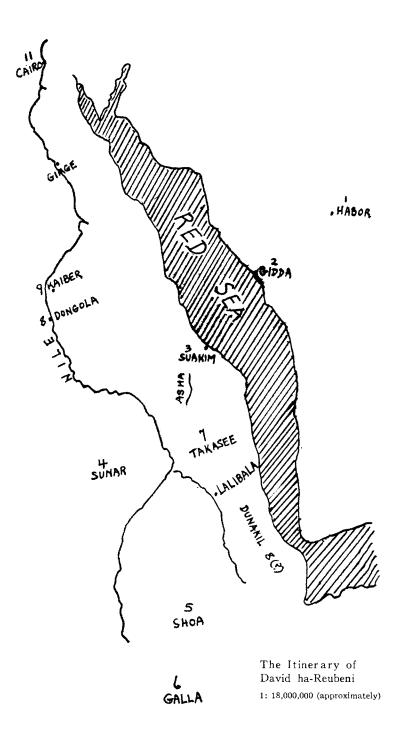
Reubeni makes mention of his traveling companion and bestows upon him the title Prince 'Abd-Alwahab. It is difficult for us to assume that he refers to an Arab named Al-Wahab, (like the name of the founder of the Wahabite sect, Mohammed 'Abd-al-Wahab, 1745), since he always

country of the homophages to be the empire of the Gallas, which is impossible from the topographical as well as from the ethnographical point of view.

indicates that his traveling companion is a Moslem, as he does further in his narratives. (By the way, in this case we lack the name of the person, for Abd in itself is not a name in Arabic.) Neither can we allow that the reference is to a Negro who was a slave to a Wahabi, since in such a case, too, Reubeni would have indicated that the person was a Negro. But as we have already seen above that King 'Amrah of Amram is none other than the King of the Amharites, we may therefore postulate with certainty that in 'Abd-al-Wahab we have the name of a province, the one which is mentioned by Benjamin of Tudela as lying in the very same surroundings. We quote: "And one descends into a level country, which bears the name of Libya, (Nubia) and it is under the reign of Edom, and the inhabitants thereof are the Libyans of the land of Libya." The reference here is to the Christian country Alua (Aluwyans) which was in Nubia, on the road descending to Massawa.

- 9. Alhabor. From Reubeni's description that it is located in the vicinity of the Nile, we conclude that the reference certainly is to Kaibar which is situated on the right bank of the Nile, at the edge of the land of Dongola.
- 10. Girgah. This is the city Girge, famous for its sugar industry, situated on the banks of the Nile in upper Egypt.

Almost all the names mentioned in this list are certain beyond any doubt. Only two or three we explain hypothetically, an hypothesis, however, which does not call into question a well-known name, but which endeavors to explain, for the sake of geographical exigency, an unknown name, so as not to make it appear farfetched. We thus get the following map indicating approximately the itinerary followed by Reubeni until he had reached Egypt.



From this itinerary we arrive at several conclusions whose certainty cannot be doubted.

1. If this is the route which Reubeni followed from the time he left his abode in the desert of Habor until he arrived in Egypt, then it would seem that his journey was not purposeful and planned, but, on the contrary, accidental and desultory. The roundabout way which he pursued would serve to indicate that he was not a *traveler*, who is, indeed, dependent on caravans, but a wanderer who passes from land to land.

Granted that he chose Giddu, because it was the nearest or the most important port, and therefore he preferred it above the northern ports on the coast of the Red Sea, as for instance, Mastura, El Haura, El Wiğ, the latter of which is closer to Khaiber, if Reubeni's Habor should prove to be Khaiber—as some think in Arabia. But a man whose purpose is to go to Europe via Egypt and Palestine, and who travels on a diplomatic mission, would undoubtedly have gone from Giddu to Massawa, especially so since sea traffic between these two ports was more regular and frequent than between Giddu and Suakim. At any rate, it is difficult to understand why he had to go south as far as the land of Galla, then by strange zigzags return northwards, to finally sail to Egypt!

- 2. In Reubeni's narrative there are many indications which would tend to show that his journey was not planned, but that it was contingent on the whims of his fellow travelers, who had no relation whatsoever with his journey's mission.
- 3. From geographical considerations, his itinerary is correct only insofar as we look upon his narrative as upon a legendary tale, but when we recall that we are dealing with a chronicle of a diplomatic emissary, in which things are recorded as they actually occurred, then we must

conclude that the "entries" are defective and wanting in veracity. The tales about King 'Amrah and about the 'Abd-al-Wahab, etc., testify to the soundness of this conclusion. Before we attempt to identify the desert of Habor we shall elucidate the "entries" relating to this stage of his journey from the standpoint of historico-ethnographical truth.

Since there is no doubt that Reubeni relates about his travels in Ethiopia, we are faced with this first enigma: Reubeni, who does not know that there are Jews in Ethiopia, is ignorant even of the fact that the country is Christian and not Mohammedan! This becomes the more puzzling when we recall that the arrival of Reubeni in Ethiopia coincided with the period when heavy warfare was carried on between the Christian Ethiopians and the Mohammedan Gallas, the latter of whom, with Ahmad Gran as their leader, conquered the greater part of Ethiopia. This fact alone is sufficient to cause us misgivings that perhaps Reubeni was only in Nubia, about which he speaks in few but precise words, and that he knew Ethiopia only by hearsay, which would account for the vague and erroneous information about it. We shall further see why Reubeni deemed it necessary to confuse the order of his travels.

For the sake of historical precision, let us note that the period during which Reubeni traveled in those countries was the period of struggle between the Christians and Falashas of Ethiopia. Almost half a century preceding Reubeni's journey, Rabbi 'Obadiah of Bartenora already tells about the Falashas whom he had seen in Egypt, and what he heard about them in Palestine. Moreover, during the time of Reubeni there lived in Jerusalem the Cabalist, R. Abraham Halevi, who knew all the details of their

ישראל ישראל המסע לארץ ישראל ד, Berlin, 1922.

wars and their victories, and who saw a beginning of Israel's redemption in the victory of the Falashas over all their enemies in the year 1520, the year in which, according to the prophesying of Nahman Qetopha, the Messiah would appear and put an end to Israel's suffering; in short, almost the very time when Reubeni was in Ethiopia.¹² It is of interest to note that the Falashas and the wars waged by them gained cognizance among Jews the world over during the reign of Lebna-Dengel (also known as Wanag Sagad I, 1508–1540) despite the fact that this was not the decisive period in this drawn-out warfare. (The important battles were fought in the days of Zar'a Ja'gob. "the annihilator of the Jews" (1434-68), who suffered defeat at the hands of the Falashas, and in the days of Bada-Mariam (1468-78), who effected a compromise with them.)13

That the Falashas and their struggles should have gained popularity during this period is due to the reports brought

יי These are his words: "My interpretation of a passage in the רעיא בריט. . . . leads me to the conclusion that this year, 5280 (1520), will witness the redemption of some of our people in one of the lands." Then follows a marginal note. Says the copyist: "This redemption of the year 5280 (1520) took place, as we were informed, in the land of Ethiopia . . . For in the year 5280 (1520), the Jews having gained strength, raised the banner of revolt and, having successfully waged war against the nations who oppressed them, succeeded in throwing off their yokes." אורה סוד הואולה. Hebrew manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, No. 454, fol. 12 V°. The same words he repeats with considerable detail, explicitly mentioning the name "Falasha," in other dispatches. See the letter published by Neubauer, קרית ספר nother dispatches. See the letter published in קרבץ על יד, Vol. IV, p. 24, and what G. Scholem published in Vol. II, p. 137; Vol. VII, pp. 442–443.

¹³ Conti Rossini, *Historia Regis Sarsa-Dengel*. The chapters dealing with the wars of the Jews were translated into Hebrew by Halevi, "La Guerre de Sarsa-Dengel," *Revue Sémitique*, 1907. See Conti Rossini, "Appunti ed Osservazione Sopra I re Zagué," in *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei*, Philosophical-Philological section, tract 5, Vol. IV, Rome, 1895. Also Rathjens' *Die Juden in Abessinien*, Hamburg, 1921. p. 28 ff.

back by the Christian (and perhaps also by the Jewish?) pilgrims and by the Jewish captives, who were brought to Egypt to be sold as slaves but were redeemed there by their brethern. Is it conceivable that David Reubeni should have been in Ethiopia for several months and had heard nothing about all this? Especially, since — as much as we surmise from his own words — he came from Ethiopia to Egypt via Nubia, also via Semien, the Jewish province which lay in northern Ethiopia, and since, as we shall later see, he tells us during his visit in Portugal that in the land of Kush, between the green and black rivers, there dwell tribes, two of which will come to him in Nubia.¹⁴

We are now in a position to ascertain how well grounded is the identification of the desert of Habor with the country of Khaiber. The only ground for this identification is the resemblance of the names, and the reliance on the historical fact that in the days of Mohammed, Khaiber (the city and not the province) was quasi-independent, i. e., under the rule of its Jewish inhabitants with whom the prophet dealt. If we consider the fact that Habor does not occur by itself, since both Halah and Habor are the two countries whither Sennacherib exiled the tribes of Israel, and since all those who seek the lost tribes search these countries, what is left as a result of this identification will be the fact that a thousand years before Reubeni, the Jews enjoyed there complete autonomy, which was later broken by Mohammed and his successors!¹⁵ And even if, on the ground of explorers' tales and rumors current during the middle ages, we assume that among the nomadic tribes in the Arabian desert there were some who professed the Jewish faith. 16

¹⁴ P. 179.

יז See the sources: Ritter, Die Erkunde, Vol. XII (second edition), Berlin, 1846, p. 60 ff.; Leszynski, Die Juden in Arabien zur zeit Mohammeds, Berlin, 1910, chapter 2 ff.; Dinaburg, ישראל בנולה, Vol. I, p. 4.

¹⁶ This rumor has long since been disproven. See Ritter, ib., pp. 62-63.

we still have gained nothing thereby. Those two questions, namely: the location of Habor and the historical significance contained in the rule of Khaiber by the Jews, demand additional explanation, part of which will be furnished in this study. But I must also mention that from an historical point of view the solution of this problem is not imperative, since Halah and Habor are names of places in Babylonia.¹⁷

All the sources, where mention is made of the abode of the ten tribes, assign them either to the eastern side of the Red Sea, extending in the Arabian desert as far as India, or to the western side in the lands of Kush and Ethiopia. If we designate all these lands by one geographical name, as was done in the middle ages, namely: India, divided into India Parva and India Magna, we shall discover a certain sequence in all those accounts which treat of the existence of Jewish independent tribes. And what gave rise to these accounts? The technical reason is evident: the meager information concerning that region.^{17a}

To the scarcity of information about the locale was added also the lack of factual knowledge concerning its peoples and their religions. The travelers who traversed

¹⁷ See Jeremias, Das Alte Testament im Lichte des Alten Orients (first edition), Leipzig, 1904, p. 321, passim.

The vagueness of the term *India* dates from early times. Alcuin divided the whole world into Europe, Africa and India. *Eo ipso* it was necessary to sub-divide India into different special terms. The different authors do not agree as to this sub-division. The terms *India Magna* and *India Parva* are old. They are mentioned in the *Liber Junioris Philosophi*, which is a Greek work of the 4th century. But the real character of the two or three Indias varies. Some authors describe India Minor (or Parva) as including Persia. India Major (or Magna) includes Zanzibar. Some others include China in India Major. There are many other geographical localizations of these terms. The threefold division has an inclination to place one of the Indias in Africa—a consequence of erroneous ideas of the real geographical situation of Middle-Asia and of South- and West-Africa. See *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*... with notes by Sir Henry Yule... 3rd ed., revised... by Henri Cordier, London, 1921, Vol. II, p. 425ff.

these lands knew to tell on their return of only strange peoples and strange religions. These reports, when cast in the form of the exaggerated tale à la Munchausen, assumed a stranger aspect yet. Let us recall that the accounts of Marco Polo, the celebrated Venetian, are at present considered geographically and ethnographically sound and compare them with the form in which they were cast! Attempts have lately been made to accept as basically true not only the accounts of Eldad the Danite, but also the strange, uncouth stories of the author of the אנרת הקודש. 18 Does it not seem natural that the Jewish people, after having gotten hold of these tales, should have perceived in them an echo of their yearnings for an independent national existence? At a time when the cup of suffering was filled to the brim, and when the Jew saw himself engulfed in darkness and harassed by persecution, the belief in the coming of the Messiah "though he tarry" was not sufficient to allay his sufferings. It should be noted here that the very same countries which the different Jewish narrators peopled with the ten tribes, the Christians assigned to the followers of Prester John, and it happened very frequently that where the Christians saw signs of Prester Johnism the Jews perceived indications of the Sons of Moses.¹⁹

¹⁸ See Burckhardt, "Die Falaschajuden in Abessinien," in Anthropos, Vols. XVIII-XIX (1923-24), pp. 258-266; Conti Rossini, Leggende Geografiche Giudaiche del IX Secolo (Il Sepher Eldad), Rome, 1925.

יהורי חבש בספרות העברית in the Quarterly ציון (Vol. I, fasc. 3 and 4) in which the historical and geographical foundation of the narratives about the tribes is elucidated and analyzed in accordance with the sources. This is not the place to consider the details. Already Isaac Aqrish saw in all these reports and legends about the magnificence of the lost tribes a literary work of an edifying character, which was meant to uphold Israel's hopes. Referring to the reports of the existence of a Jewish kingdom in Ethiopia, he also expresses this opinion about David Reubeni:

^{...} בהיות שכל ימי היותי על אדמתי שמעתי... מדברים על ענין השבטים, לאמור; שיש מקומות ידועים שיש מלכים לישראל, והם בתקפם ובגבודתם, וכל אלה הדברים הם

When did the legend of Prester John originate? It arose at the time when the crusaders suffered defeat in the East, and as a result of this a feeling of despondency pervaded the Christians in Europe. It was then that they became invigorated by a great hope, that somewhere in the Far East, amidst disbelief and heathenism, amidst Islam, there lives a people who from its very inception follows the tenets of the Christian religion.²⁰ Only at a later date was the place limited to Ethiopia; in former days, however, sometimes Ethiopia, another time India, vied with one another as the home of this people; in short a corner of Asia-Africa on both banks of the Red Sea. Still later this people was searched for even in Kofar-at-Turak and among the people of the Near East.

Before we proceed to deal with the other parts of Reubeni's book, attention should be given to conclusions which hold historical and ethnographical interest, and which are deduced from an analysis of this chapter of his narrative.

1. Reubeni relates: "And the King whom I visit has maid-servants and bondsmen, the majority of whom are naked. The Queen, the concubines and the princesses wear bracelets of gold but the entire body is completely naked every one of them, both male and female and they feed on elephants and wolves

קשים בעיני...ואף על פי שראיתי...ובספר אלדד...והראובני...נוכל לאמור שהם המצאות שהמציאו לחזק ברכים כושלות ולאמץ לב נרכאים... אנדת ארחות עולם ed. Offenbach, 1720 (with קול מבשר, fol. 42b-43a.

²⁰ See the various books and articles by Zarncke, especially De Patriarchae Johanne, Leipzig, 1875; Der Priester Johannes, Leipzig, 1883; De Rege David, etc., Leipzig, 1875. See D'Almeida's "De nome Presto Joã," which is the first chapter of his well-known Historia Aethiopiae, Rome, 1907 (Beccari, Rerum Aethiopicarum, Vol. X. See also G. Oppert, Der Priester Johannes, Berlin, 1878.

and also on human flesh."21 Now, in whatever manner we fix Reubeni's itinerary in Ethiopia and in Nubia, we are at a loss to determine to which place he is thus alluding: it is certain that in his time there were no cannibals in that His account seems to be based on the story of Eldad the Danite, in which he relates about the people of Haromomos (according to others 'Ormomis, i. e., the Gallas) who go around naked and feed on human flesh.22 By the way, Reubeni is not the only one who imitated Eldad's account; many other travelers, both his predecessors and successors, have done likewise. Perhaps Reubeni also tampered with Benjamin of Tudela's narrative, for in the latter we read: "And there is a people among them who is likened unto animals in all respects; they feed on grass and go about naked."23

2. It has already been mentioned that Reubeni was unaware that the King of Ethiopia and the inhabitants thereof were Christians, but, instead, thought them to be Mohammedans, a fact which invalidates his whole testimony.

Reubeni tells us time and again that among the Ethiopians he paraded as a descendant of the Prophet Mohammed. He thus addresses the King: "I bear love to you. All your sins I will forgive and remit and a place in Paradise I will secure for you, for your sons and for your daughters. The following year you will come to us, to Mecca, the place where all sins are forgiven."²⁴

והמלך הזה אשר אני עמו לו שפחות ועברים ורובם ערומים, והמלכה ... 27 והמלך הזה אשר אני עמו לובשות שמה צמירים מן זהב ... וכל הגוף ערום ועריה ... ואוכלים הפילים והזאבים ... ואוכלים בשר ארם ... ואוכלים ... ואוכלים ... ואוכלים ... ואוכלים בשר ארם ... ואוכלים .

²² Ed. Abraham Epstein, Pressburg, 1891, p. 14.

²³ Ed. Asher, p. 97. ויש אומה מהן שהן כבהמות לכל עניניהן, אוכלים עשבים ערומים ערומים . . . ערומים והולכים . . . ערומים

²⁴ Ib., p. 134: אני אוהב אותך ואתן לך מחילה וסליחה וחזקה בגן ערן ולבניך. ותבוא אלינו בשנה האחרת במדינת מיכא, מקום כפרת העוונות.

These words certainly breathe with a true Christian spirit. This whole promise of sin remission is not characteristic of one who comes to represent the spirit of Islam, and the distinctive quality of Mecca is not its being a place where sins are forgiven, as are Christ's Sepulcher and all places sacred to Christians. The same may be said concerning the opinion of Reubeni voiced by Abukamil. We quote: "He deports himself in a respectable manner, he fasts daily and is God-fearing, is not inclined towards laughter, nor lured by women, and does not like money.²⁵

3. We have already indicated above that although Reubeni's journey led him through Semien, he was completely unaware of the existence of the Ethiopian Jews. But on leaving Ethiopia to enter Nubia, i. e., on drawing near the border of Egypt he says: "And in that land there came to me five youths from the two tribes."26 This becomes the more puzzling when we recall that on no previous occasion did Reubeni speak of tribes, and that here too he does not mention their names, but speaks of them in a general way, "the tribes." Also in this case, Reubeni bases his account on material which he apparently misunder-At any rate this again disproves his testimony. Who these "two tribes" were, we learn from his later declaration before "the Judge of the King of Fez," in The reference certainly is to the tribes who dwell in the land of Kush, whose abode is the nearest to the Kingdom of Habor, namely, the tribes of Simeon and Benjamin.

It seems that the Reubenical narrator forgot that all these matters pertain to the ten tribes only and not to twelve, as according to his calculation, and that the tribe

²⁵ Ib., p. 136. הולך אתר הולך הוא ירא אלהים ואינו הולך אתר בכל יום והוא ירא אלהים ואינו הולך אוהב ממון"...

²⁶ Ib., p. 179.

of Benjamin remained with the Judaean and not with the Israelitish exile. But the most important thing is that the whole concept of mere *tribes* was evolved since the days of Eldad the Danite, and that among these were always the Gadites, who together with the Reubenites ruled Habor! With Eldad's successors the Reubenites too are quite frequently included among "the tribes."

"The youths from the tribes" who brought him presents were, therefore, in agreement with the material he used, either from the tribe of Reuben or from the tribe of Gad! It should also be noted on this occasion that the country from which Eldad the Danite came lay in Africa, in the vicinity of the Gulf of Aden, by the Red Sea, amidst the native land of the aforesaid tribes and of Reubeni.

4. Reubeni recounts the gifts which he distributed, and the sums paid out by him, all in Italian florins. It is a generally accepted fact that the florin never gained currency in the East. This is the opinion of all numismatists. But granting that he could obtain them in Palestine and in Egypt, they certainly were non-procurable in Arabia, in Ethiopia or in the Sudan. Or are we to say that even in Habor, whence Reubeni had only recently arrived, they were current — a fact to which he pays no attention?

At this stage of Reubeni's journey, the only source of information we possess is his account. At times it even gets difficult for us to distinguish between the important and the unimportant. The situation changes, however, as soon as he crosses the border of Egypt. From now on we follow closely his narrative with a clear understanding of the situation in all its aspects, and the closer he draws to the West the more numerous become the other sources about him, which help us to determine the nature of his statements.

Egypt was now his objective. Here too some adventures happened to him, but as regards the essence of his mission, Reubeni is very brief. He tells us that here also he first disguised himself as a Mohammedan, and when he went to see Rabbi Abraham, the Coiner (בעל המטבע), i.e., Abraham de Castro,²⁷ the latter refused to converse with him. It seems that he caused Reubeni to leave or to be banished from the city. Reubeni does not tell us whether he revealed to De Castro the essence of his mission. Later we shall see that he did not tell us in his book all that happened to him in Egypt, but that he omitted the unpleasant incidents. From his own account we note that both from an ethnical and an oratorical point of view Reubeni did not especially impress De Castro!

Thence he went to Palestine in the following order: Gaza, Hebron, Jerusalem. From Jerusalem he returned to Alexandria, Egypt, and thence sailed to Venice. We note that also the second time he did not succeed in Egypt. For although he admits now of having disclosed to some Jews of Egypt (to the Cabalist R. Mordecai, and others) that he was the brother of the King of Habor, by whom he has been sent on a mission to Rome, he had to resort again to his old stratagem and pose as a Mussulman before the Turks to gain their favor and protection.

More interesting are the incidents which occurred in Palestine. As everywhere else, here too he disguised himself as a Mohammedan, but already in Gaza he begins to reveal his secret to the first Jew he meets. While in Hebron, he went to see the cave of Machpelah. The Arabs, who thought him (probably because of his dress) to be a sheik of the Prophet's family, admitted him into the cave, whereupon Reubeni tells us how he was thrice deceived

²⁷ See Graetz, Hebrew edition, Vol. VII, chap. 1.

by them, until finally they showed him the exact burial places of the Patriarchs and their wives. To his inquiry, who built the entrance to the cave, rendered impassable by stones and lead, they produced a book out of which they read as follows: "That one King built this entrance after the Mohammedans seized the Mosque from the Christians. That King, who was Mohammed's vizier, sent into the cave four people, each of whom carried a candle in his hand. They remained there for about an hour, and upon leaving three of them died instantly, while the fourth remained speechless until the third day. To the King's question: 'What did you see in the cave?' he answered . . . " and then there follows an account of how the Patriarchs and their spouses lie in a cave flooded with light like that of sunshine and scented with pleasant odors. There they saw apparitions, and Isaac upbraided them, etc.²⁸

Now, that the Mohammedans were wont to defraud the cave visitors by concealing from them the true sepulchers, and that the rocky soil formed the actual cave whose entrance was closed with heavy bars of iron, we already gather from R. Benjamin who, as is his wont, also describes, without any exaggeration, the shapes of the sepulchers and their inscriptions. He too saw the iron door, which he thought had existed since the days of the Patriarchs, and which for a little money was opened to Jews.²⁹ After R. Benjamin, we have R. Petachiah of Ratisbon tell us in his *Sibub* that the Jews of Acco warned him of the deception practiced by the Mohammedans, and that on approaching the actual sepulchers he felt a stormy wind

כי מלך אחד, בנה פתח המעדה, אחד שלקחו הישמעאלים 145: 24 במעדה את ביה'מק מן הנוצדים, והמלך ההוא משנה למחמד ... שלח אדבעה אנשים במעדה את ביה'מק מן הנוצדים, והמלך ההוא משנה למחמד ... ומתו שלשה וכל אחד מהם בידו נד אחד ועמדו בתוך המעדה כמו שעה אחת ויצאו ... ומתו שלשל ... מהם תיכף [אחדי] צאתם מהמעדה, והדביעי עמד אלם עד יום השלישי, והמלך שאל ... מה דאית תור המעדה ואמד להם ...

²⁹ Eisenstein, אוצר המסעות, p. 28.

coming from the midst of the iron bars.30 It is thus possible to determine the blocking of the entrance, undoubtedly because of escaping obnoxious gases, as taking place between the period of R. Benjamin and R. Petachiah's Sibub. Following him we have the account of R. Jacob ben Nathaniel ha-Cohen, who lived in the twelfth or the thirteenth century, of how he entered the cave disguised as a Christian, because in those days, when Palestine was ruled by the crusaders, no Jew was admitted into the cave. He tells us that the Christian priests deceived the cave visitors, and he already speaks about the closed entrance, and that once a small aperture was made in the wall whence a wind issued forth which slew all of them.31 The entire account, resembling that of Reubeni's, is related by later travelers, among whom is also Gerson Yidels, the author of the אגרת הקודש, who, like others, imitated the earliest narrators, extracting from their accounts whatever he saw fit.

At any rate, this miracle with which Reubeni prides himself, and which he ascribes to his prophetic inspiration, was one of the episodes current among the Jews of Palestine and undoubtedly also among the Jews of the diaspora, who were indebted for this information to the numerous pilgrims who returned from the Holy Land. We possess a letter, written by one of Reubeni's contemporaries, addressed from Palestine to the diaspora, which narrates the very same miracle, but instead of the cave of Machpelah, it speaks of the Gate of Compassion (Golden Gate) at the site of the Temple.³²

The most astounding miracles, however, Reubeni performs in Jerusalem. He tells us how he succeeded in

³º Ib., p. 56.

³¹ Ib., p. 16.

יד על יד יד Vol. IV, Berlin, 1888.

entering, disguised of course as a Mohammedan, the Holy of Holies, on the mountain where the Mosque stood, and remained there for several weeks. "Ten messengers from my royal brother Joseph and his Elders came to me thither. They pretended not to know me, while they stood before me in the Mosque . . . Now, on the top of the Dome of the Rock there is a crescent which faces westward. On the first day of Pentecost, in the year 5283 (1523), the crescent leaned to the east, and when the Arabs saw this they shouted in great alarm. To my question: 'Why do you shout?' they gave me the following answer: 'It is because of our sins that this crescent is facing the east, which is an evil omen to the Arabs.' Workmen climbed up and restored the crescent to its former position . . . but on the next day it was again facing the east . . . and all their efforts to restore it to its former position proved futile." "Indeed, I have thus been told by the Elders: 'When you behold this sign, it is time to proceed to Rome' . . . But before leaving Jerusalem, I performed, under the Mosque, in a place where no one could harm me, that which the Elders instructed me to do and after this the above mentioned sign occurred."33

Reubeni did what he did without disclosing his secret to us. However, we will see that about this matter too we are informed from another source and, as a result, no great honor is reflected upon the Prince. Let us first analyze the miracle of the turning of the crescent.

באו עשרה שלוחים מהמלך, אחי יוסף ווקניו לפני, והם מתנכרים .146–147. והציור ועמרו לפני בביה"מק... הישמעאלים יש להם ציור בראש קובת העורה, והציור הוא חצילבנה נוטה לצר מערב, וביום הראשון להנ שבועות רפ"נ נטה לצר מזרח וכראות הישמעאלים זה צעקו בקול נרול, ואמרתי להם מה אתם צועקים והשיבו: בעוננותינו-זה הציור מחצי הלבנה נטה לצר מזרח והא סמן רע על הישמעאלים. ואחר כך עלו האומנים מהישמעאלים והחזירו הציור ... וביום השני חזר פעם שנית... ובקשו להחזירו ולא יכלו. וכבר אמרו לי הוקנים, כאשר תראה זה הסימן תלך ובקשו להחזירו ולא יכלו. וכבר אמרו לי הוקנים, כאשר תראה זה הסימן תלך לרומא... ועשיתי תחת המקרש את אשר צווני הוקנים, במקום שלא יכול ארם לננע בי, נהסמן הנוכר מהציור נראה אחרי עשותי צווי הוקנים תחת ביה"מק...

In those days, when all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. and some of the diaspora as well, applied themselves to the task of computing the time of Israel's redemption, every sign was gladly received. It is, therefore, not surprising that this sign too was welcomed. We are told by Reubeni that the sign occurred after performing the Elder's command underneath the Mosque. Now, in those days there lived in Jerusalem another Cabalist, by the name of R. Israel, who knew nothing about the Elders of Habor, and still in a letter to Rabbi Abraham of Perosa, Italy, who was intensely interested in all the legends concerning the lost tribes, and in all the rumors about the coming of the Messiah, he writes as follows: "I am about to relate to you the occurrence of a miracle which recently took place in this country, besides the one about which I previously wrote to you. May it be known unto you that on the spacious lead-inlaid dome of the Holy of Holies there is a brass pillar whose top is adorned with a crescent facing the south. In that direction are their prayers directed, and their religion makes it incumbent upon them that the crescent should face towards that city (Mecca). This year, during the week when the portion אַרא was read in the synagogue the crescent was seen to face the east, and the workmen, after failing to restore it to its former position, had it removed and then inserted again. During the same week and on the very same day, two other pillars, just like the one in the Mosque, were seen to face the east, and moreover the very staff which, as they brag, was planted by him who became a leader of his people(?) (Mohammed) also leaned eastward. Now there arrived a Jew from Egypt who reports that there too a pillar which was formerly facing the south has leaned towards the east."34

כבר אוריע לכם אות שאירע עתה בארץ הזאת מלבד. ib., p. 31, קבץ על יד 34 אות הראשון אשר כתבתי בתחלה, והוא כי יש על קרש הקרשים כפה גדולה מחופה

It is true that the author of this epistle does not tell us the year when the events described by him happened, but from the context and from the things discussed in the letter, namely, the prophecies of Nahman Qetopha, there can be no doubt that it was the first years of the decade 1520–1530. Rabbi Israel's letter places the events in the week of אָרָאָר, i. e., in the period between Hanukkah and Purim, but Reubeni, who arrived at Jerusalem close to Passover, and learned there of the event, reports it to have happened on the first day of Pentecost . . .

The period abounded in persons who computed the time when the Messiah will come, and was rich in legends about the lost tribes. One of the causes for this were the wars waged by the Falashas against the Christians, whose echo reached then the Near East and Europe. We have reliable information dating from that century about captured Ethiopian Jews who were brought to Egypt, some of whom later came to Palestine. These are mentioned, as stated above, by Rabbi 'Obadiah of Bartenora, Rabbi David ben Zimra in his responsa,³⁵ the Karaite Abraham Bali, the physician,³⁶ and others. Reubeni's contemporary, Abraham Halevi, whose whole life's interest centered in computing the time when the Messiah would come, and in the wars waged by the tribes, knows nothing about messengers supposedly dispatched by these tribes and their descend-

באבר ועליה עמוד נחושת ובראשו כדמות הצי ירח נוטה לנגב כי שם עוד תפלתם ומניאום דתם הוא שיהיה החדש ירח נוטה בלבם שם נוכח העיר ההיא ובזאת השנה, פרשת וארא. בהפך, בצד מזרח, ולא מצאו כל אנשי חיל ידיהם להחזירו עד שכרתו החצי ירח וחזרו ונעצוהו כתחלה. עוד באותו שבוע באותו יום נהפכו ב' עפודים אחרים כמו זה בבה'מק לצד מזרח, שהיו מתנדבים כמו זה בבה'מק לצד מזרח, שהיו מתנדבים בו שאומר שנטעו ההוא דאתקם (?) לרבה בעמיה. ועתה בא יהודי ממצרים ואמר כי נו שאומר שנטעו ההוא דאתקם לצד מזרח עמוד אחד שהיה נטוי נ'כ אצל הנגב

³⁵ Vol. IV, § 219.

^{1867,} ח"י גורלאנד, ננוי ישראל בס'ט פיטרבורג, חוברת ג 1867. St. Petersburg, 1867, pp. 33–34. A copy of this fragment was also published by Neubauer in קבץ על יד, but unfortunately some errors crept in.

ants, or about Reubenites who appeared then as redeemers of Israel. Let us examine these documents which speak about messengers having been sent by the tribes, and we shall see whether we cannot find in them some additional information about David Reubeni which will throw more light on his personality as well as on his acts.

If we analyze Reubeni's itinerary from Palestine to Europe, one thing appears very strange to us.

On the 15th day of the month of Tammuz 5283 (1523), Reubeni leaves Gaza and, a few days later, on the 24th of Tammuz, we find him in Alexandria, Egypt. There, he reveals his mission to a few Jews, but meets with very little success. Thanks to the intercession on the part of some Mohammedans, he leaves Alexandria on the 15th day of Kisley 5284 (1524). Five months did Reubeni stay in Egypt and how niggardly is his account of what happened to him there. It comprises only a few lines! Much less space does he devote to his five months stay in Egypt than to his stay in Gaza, in Cairo, or in any other place in Ethiopia. This silence of his is fraught with suspicion! Especially when we keep in mind that his temperament did not allow him to spend his time inactively. becomes the more perplexing when we recall that the time was one replete with troubles and misfortunes for Egyptian Jewry, due to the well-known uprising, which had De Castro as one of its most active participants, and in commemoration of which the "Purim of Egypt" was established, but not a word about all this do we hear from Reubeni!

We possess another document in the form of a letter written by Raphael Tarboto of Jerusalem to Abraham of Perosa,³⁷ who, as stated above, took great interest in such

³⁷ Rabbi Abraham of Perosa, Italy, kept in touch with Abraham Halevi, the leader of the group, also with Rabbi Israel and Raphael Tarboto, who were engrossed in computing the time of the Messiah's

matters. In it we read: "Afterwards there came to us a youth from the ten tribes. His father, he says, is from the tribe of Reuben, while his mother is from the tribe of Dan. He brought us good tidings and proclaimed great and wonderful things about the redemption. He told us that soon the tribes will arrive, and that the tribe of Reuben will come first. The Zohar in its interpretation of the phrase 'unstable as water' (Gen. 49.4) supports his utterances.³⁸ He also told us that the King of the tribe of Reuben has sent him to Jerusalem to remove from the Wailing Wall of our Temple a stone which was with sorcery inserted by Jeroboam, the son of Nebot, for as long as it stayed in the Wall the Jews could not be redeemed. This youth vaingloriously declared that he removed it in the presence of the glory of our strength, the Nagid, R. Isaac Shalel, may the Lord keep him and preserve him. We were also informed by him that the ten tribes are not, as we thought, on the other side of the mountain(?) Sambation, but that they are on this side . . . The youth gave me as a remembrance all the ten signs . . . But after he left Jerusalem to go to Damascus, the Nagid, may the Lord keep him and preserve him, wrote me a letter in which he denies everything the youth told in his name, concerning the removal

coming and in information about the ten tribes, and who were helped financially by Abraham of Perosa. While in Galilee, Raphael changed his own and his wife's names, due, as it seems, to cabalistic motives. See קבץ על יד, ibid., passim.

יהר sons of Reuben are destined to wage two wars in the world . . . ני א יחר עור (Gen. 49.3): At the time when the King Messiah will appear in the world, they will go forth and wage wars in the world. They will succeed, and overcome the nations, and all the inhabitants of the world will fear them and tremble before them . . . To the four corners of the earth were the sons of Reuben scattered while in exile . . . so in like manner will they wage war in the four corners of the earth. They will rule over all. They will overcome great nations and rule over them.' "Zohar, Vol. I, fol. 235 verso — 236 recto. The reader will find there more material uttered in the same spirit.

of the stone... Indeed afterwards, Jews arrived from Egypt and from Gaza and related that twelve messengers sent by the tribes to the Jews of Egypt had arrived there."³⁹

This letter, which goes back to the time of David Reubeni, bears no conclusive date, but since it speaks of Prince Isaac Shalel as still living, we are certain that it was written before 5285 (1525).40 Besides, we possess other documents which will help us to establish precisely the date of the letter. We have ground to assume that the Reubeni mentioned here is David Reubeni and thus we are enabled to find out what was the extraordinary thing which he performed in Jerusalem underneath the foundation stone at the bidding of the Elders. It is the removal of the stone, inserted by Jeroboam, the son of Nebot, an act which Rabbi Isaac Shalel denied. We must then thus construe the following words of Reubeni: "And afterwards I gave the document which I had written in the Mosque... and I said unto him: Deliver this document into the hands

יר יד 39, ibid., pp. 32-33. ואח"כ בא הנה בחור אחד מן עשרת השבטים. אביו מבני ראובן ואמו משבט דן ובשר לנו והשמיע לנו נדולות ונפלאות מן הנאולה וכי מהרה יבואו השבטים ושבט ראובן יעלה תחלה והזוהר מסייעו בפרשת ויחי על פחז כמים. ואמר כי שלחו המלך משבט ראובן בירושלם להסיר אבן אחת שהיתה בכוחל מערבי בבית תפארתנו, אשר בנה אותו ירבעם בן נבט והיתה עשויה בדרך כשוף ובכל עת שהיתה בכוחל לא היו ישראל יכולין לצאח מן הגלוח, והבחור הזה החפאר כי הוציאה בפני נאון עוזנו צניף תפארתנו . . . ר' יצחק שואלאל יצ'ו, נם אמר שעשרת השבטים אינן מהלאה להר (?) סבטיון כאשר חשבנו אנחנו, אלא מעבר הזה . . . וכל העשרה אותות נתן אלי הבחור למזכרת ... והבחור הזה נסע מפה והלך לרמשק. ואחר נוסעו כתב אלי מירושלם הנגיד יצ'ו כי כל מה שאמר בשמו. כמו מהסרת האבן ... הכל היה שקר וכזב ... אמנם אח"כ באו יהודים ממצרים ומעזה ואמרו כי הגיעו במצרים י"ב שלוחים מאת השבטים אל היהורים ממצרים שיצאו מן ... אמקום ההוא. By the way, from reading this letter, we learn that Rabbi Raphael thought that the Yemenite Jews constituted the ten tribes, for he says of them that they possess a thorough knowledge of Maimonides' books, but do not have the Talmud (i. e., do not engage in its study). להר סמבטיין is probably here also to be emended to להר לונוהר.

⁴⁰ Rabbi Isaac Shalel was the last Nagid in Egypt, who, after it was conquered by the Turks in the year 1515, and the institution of the Nagid was abolished there, came to live in Jerusalem, where he died either in the year 1525 or 1526. See Graetz's *History*, Hebrew edition, Vol. VII, note 1, pp. 389–391.

of the Nagid, Rabbi Isaac, and I left Jerusalem on the 24th of Sivan 5283 (1523)"....⁴¹ In the aforesaid document Reubeni certainly disclosed to the Nagid the act which he had performed, while simultaneously the rumor was spread, either by himself or by others in his name, that the act performed took place in the presence of Rabbi Isaac, who hastened to deny it as soon as the rumor reached him. Raphael Tarboto's letter also makes mention of Egypt and Gaza, places where David Reubeni visited, and the twelve messengers spoken of in the letter refer to the twelve advisers whose signatures were affixed to a letter sent by the King of Reuben, as we shall later have occasion to see.

We learn from this letter that the youth Reubeni went from Jerusalem to Damascus, a thing novel and significant for us. In concluding his letter Tarboto adds: "Also this week a dispatch arrived from Damascus stating that one of the messengers sent by the King of Reuben had arrived thither, to Saloniki(?), bearing a letter signed by the King and his twelve councilors, urging the Jews to be of good spirits."⁴¹a

The only thing of which we are certain is that at that time there was one Reubeni, sent by the King of Reuben, to whom the same incidents were ascribed as to our Reubeni. Details about this Reubeni we gather from another letter written in Damascus and addressed to Rabbi Samuel of פולייא (Spoglia).

This letter is of particular interest to us, for in it the details about the King's emissary and his twelve councilors are elucidated to a greater extent than in the previous

יו אמרתי לו תן לי P. 147: לבית המקדש ... ואמרתי לו תן לי שכתבתי לבית המקדש ... יצחק... הנתב ליר הגניר ר' יצחק...

על יד קבץ על יד, Vol. IV, p. 33. על מדמשק על יד קבץ על יד אחד אם בשבוע הזה בא כאלוגיקי (?) הגיע אחד משליחי משלוחי המלך משבט ראובן ובידו כתב אחד אשר בשולי הכתב חתום המלך עם יב' מחכמיו ומעורר את רוח היהודים בלבד'.

document cited above. Some excerpts from the letter follow: "Hearken unto my words and mock me not for all I write to you is manifestly true . . . I am not able to impart to you all I know and a word to the wise is sufficient. Be informed that a man from the tribe of Reuben came to us, to Damascus. He has been sent on a mission into this district. To-day I saw him and as evidence for this I cite the fact that I drank with him a glassful of wine(!) Before he arrived here he visited Egypt, for the shortest road to us from the dwelling place of his Prince lay in that direction. The Prince who sent him bears the name of Hananel. surnamed Armilus, the reason for this being the war which he waged with Armilus, and a word to the wise is sufficient. He is two hundred and fifty years old, a descendant of the tribe of Reuben, and surrounded by six hundred thousand mighty warriors some of whom are from the tribe of Dan, and others from the tribe of Reuben. They crossed the river Sambation, which is dry as though water never flowed there . . . And, pray, be informed that this Jew, before coming to Damascus, visited Egypt, where the people laughed at him and at his words. He therefore revealed his secret to only a few, and kept aloof from the populace. From Egypt he went to Jerusalem and from there to the land of Š B Š . . . ('www?) whence he came to Damascus. He will tarry here until his two friends, whose arrival he daily expects, join him here . . . and a word to the wise is sufficient . . . Before his arrival we received letters from the Jews of Egypt warning us not to mock or laugh at him, an act which they were guilty of . . . For after the above mentioned emissary paced(!) from Egypt, an epistle from the Reubenites was received signed by the Great Prince. Commander-in-Chief Hananel surnamed Armilus and by his twelve subordinate princes. Whereupon,

on seeing the letter, the Jews of Egypt regretted the treatment they accorded him... And twelve people from Damascus went to Aleppo to celebrate there the Feast of Passover at the end of which they will go to see the Sultan, may his glory be exalted. There, in Turkey, they will be joined by a youth only twelve years old whose name is not to be committed to writing and a word to the wise is sufficient."⁴²

Here is a document which, although incoherent, certainly bears witness to the great yearnings for the Messiah experienced in those days and which re-echoes the wars of the tribes and of the sons of Moses, thought to have been waged at that time. We also get a glimpse of how deeply concerned the messengers were about the trust committed unto them and that they did all they could.

On examining this letter we discern in it the same fundamentals which characterize Reubeni's mission, with the exception that instead of King Joseph we have here Hananel

4º Ibid., pp. 35-36, שימו לבבכם לדברי ואל תלעיגו עלי כלל, מפני מה שאני כותב הוא אמת ויציב ונכון. ויותר עניינים ועוסקים, כי אין לי אפשר ואיני אוכל לכתוב כל מה שאני יורע, ור'ל ברמיזה. עתה תרע כי הגיע פה רמשק איש אחר משבט ראובן שליח נשלח בנליל הלז; ואני ראיתי אותו היום וראייה לרברי כי שתיתי עמו כוס אחר מלא יין (!) וקורם ביאתו פה היה במצרים כי אותו הרדך היה קצרה מביאתו מנשיא שלו . . . אותו הנשיא ששלח אותו שמו חננאל המכונה ארמילוס על זה נקרא שמו ארמילוס כי היה [ב]מלחמה עם ארמילוס ור"ל. וימי שנותיו מאתים וחמשים שנה והוא משבט ראובן זה הנשיא ויש עמו ששים ריבוא אנשי מלחמה חלוצי צבא גבורים כל אחר ואחר; וקבת מהעמים האלה והם גבורים משבט רן אבל חלק אחר מהם משבט ראובן והם עברו נהר סבטיון ומצד זה אצלנו כי הנהר יבש כאילו לא הין מים מעולם . . . ונא תדע שאותו היהודי קורם ביאתו הנז' דמשק הגיע למצרים ואנשי מצרים עשו שחוק ממנו מדבריו בראותו כך לא דבר רבריו דק לאנשים מועטים ולא היה לו עסק עם העם והלך... לירושלם ומירושלם לארץ שבש' (?) ומשבש'(?) מגיע הנה רמשק והוא פה עד היום והוא ימתין פה רמשק עד ביאת שני חבריו . . . ובכל יום ויום ימתיו עד ביאתו וד"ל. וקורם שהגיע השליח הנז' ברמשק בא אלינו . . . כתבים מאנשי מצרים באומרם בכתבם ממנו להזכיר ולהזהיר אותנו אנשי רמשק שלא להלעיג ולצחוק בשליח לרבריו כאשר עשו הם . . . כי אחר פסיעת(!) השליח הנז' במצרים הניע אליהם כתב למצרים, אגרת אחת מבני ראובן נחתם בשולי המכתב ההוא מי"ב נשיאים וג"כ נחתם עמהם הנשיא הגדול שר צבא הנגאל המכונה ארמילוס. ובכן בראותם אותו הכתב . . . אנשי מצרים חזרו בתשובה... ופה דמשק נסעו וילכו י"ב אנשים להיות בעד פסח בחלייפי' ואחר הפסח ילכו אל המלך יר"ה. ויבוא אליהם בטורקיאה איש בחוד אשר אין לו דק י"ב שנים יוהוא האיש אשר אין להעלות על ספר וד'ל...."

surnamed Armilus, a variation based on the Romulus legend which, in ancient times, was widely diffused in the East, and which in Hebrew and Arabic sources assumed the name of Armilus. The oldest Hebrew source is the midrashic work bearing the name of Va'vosha.43 In later sources the name Armilus was confused with that of "Archileos the wicked," the reason perhaps being that the latter appears in another legend as the name borne by the person against whom the Messiah the son of Joseph will wage war.44 (Is this the explanation why the King, by whom Reubeni claimed to have been sent, bore the name of Joseph?). In spite of the coinciding periods and the evidence contained in the letter pointing to Reubeni, as, for example, the mentioning of his stay in Egypt where he was laughed at — a fact borne out by David Reubeni's words — we would still be unjustified in saying that the person mentioned in the letter is Reubeni, were it not for a passage in the letter which expressly mentions his name.

After this information there follows a short account which completely identifies the man, and its end reminds us of Reubeni's words uttered in Portugal: "... Please be informed of what happened to-day before I concluded writing this letter. A man from this city, desiring to honor the emissary, invited him to the house to eat and drink with him. While they were thus enjoying their repast, a resident from our city, Damascus, repaired to a village, and on his way homewards met a distinguished-looking old man who thus addressed him: 'Go to the city where

⁴³ Steinschneider, Jewish Literature, Hebrew edition, p. 81.

⁴⁴ The opinions aboùt the origin of the name Armilus vary. Some derive it from the Greek ' $E\rho\eta\mu\dot{o}\lambda\alpha\sigma$ s, others from Ahriman, while still others from Agramanius and Armalagus. But none of these opinions seem probable. The Syriac and Arabic forms of the name Romulus and the legend about him, however, help us to establish the origin of the name. See *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. III, pp. 364–366.

you will find my friend David and tell him to act with haste for he tarried there more than was necessary, seeing that work is plentiful and time is short.' The man went away and on finding the emissary David wanted to deliver to him the message entrusted to him by the old man. But no sooner had he opened his mouth than the emissary David said to him: 'Enough! I know what you have been instructed to tell me. Here is the sign: You met an old man on the road who asked you to tell me to hasten my departure, for I have tarried here more than is necessary seeing that the time is short.' All this he uttered in the presence of more than forty people. We are in daily, nay, hourly expectation for extraordinary things to happen. Neither am I able, nor am I at liberty, to impart to you all I know . . . Certainly, God has remembered us and He will deliver us . . . and please bear in mind that repentance and charity can avert the evil decree — for thus proclaimed the emissary from the Prince. For great and numerous misfortunes will befall us if we do not sincerely repent. The emissary from the Prince told him(?) that you should endeavor to collect all your debts and all other things — and a word to the wise is sufficient . . . "45

ונא, תדעו מה שקרה היום קודם כלותי .35–37. ולאכול ולשתות עמו ולעשות לכתוב כתב זה נזדמן שבעל הבית מפה הביא את השליח הנז' לאכול ולשתות עמו ולעשות לו כבוד כמנהג ובהיותו אותו השליח על השלחן לאכול בא איש אחד פה דמשק מחוץ לעיר בכפר היינו וויל'ה ובחזרתו בלכתו לעיר דמשק מצא בדרך איש זקן חשוב ואמר לו לאותו יהודי תושב מדמשק: ,לך אל העיר ותמצא חברי אשר שמו דוד ותאמר לו שימהר מעשהו ושיקצר דבריו כי היה שמה יותר מדאי, כי המלאכה מרובה והזמן קצר, כי עמד זמן רב בעיר הזאת". וכן עשה האיש תושב דמשק שבא מהכפר למצא את האיש שליח דוד. ובפתוח פיו להשליח מה שאמר לו הזקן בדרך וכראותו דוד שליח האיש מדמשק הבא לדבר עמו, אמר לו דוד לשליח: .אל תאמר לי דבר, כי אני ידעתי מה שהאמר לי מצדו איף ימהר ללכת לדרכו כי הייתי פה יותר מדאי כי הזמן קצר' וכל זה שתאמר לי מצדו איף ימהר ללכת לדרכו כי הייתי פה יותר מדאי כי הזמן קצר' וכל זה ואיני אוכל לכתוב את כל אשר אני יודע ... ה' הזכיר אותנו ויצילנו ותזכ(י)רו שתשובה וצדקה מעבירין את רוע הנזרה. כי כן אמר השליח מהנשיא שתראו לנבות את כל וגדולים אם לא נעשה תשובה נדולה. אמר לו השליח מהנשיא שתראו לנבות את כל החובות שלכם וכן כל שאר דברים ור'ל..."

Even if we refuse to admit that the David spoken of in this epistle as the emissary sent by the Prince of the Reubenites and David Reubeni are one and the same person, we have already taken away from him every claim to originality. But this identification is not to be doubted, since besides the elements common to both — the indifference met with in Egypt, etc. — the name David is here explicitly mentioned, and even if we allow this to be accidental, namely, that two persons should bear the same name, the time element confirms that the David mentioned in the letter is none other than David Reubeni.

This letter which reached Castile⁴⁶ was copied by Judah ibn Solomon of Blánes, and from the date — twenty-eight days in the month of Ab of the year 1523 — inserted by him, we learn that the copy was made about six weeks after Reubeni — as is confirmed by his account — left Gaza to go to Egypt. It is logical to assume that the copy was made almost as soon as the letter arrived from Damascus, i. e., a few days or weeks after Reubeni, traveling from Gaza northwards, had arrived in Damascus, and not southwards to Egypt. Only afterwards he returned from Damascus to Egypt via Palestine.

It is apparent that in Damascus he met with even less success than in Egypt, and although during his stay in Egypt he does not speak of the failure encountered there—though it becomes evident from a careful perusal of the account—it is logical to assume that in Damascus his falsification that a strange old man, similar to Elijah, came to him from his king, was laid bare.

From the words of David Reubeni we learned that "messengers" of that sort came to him in Hebron, Jeru-

⁴⁶ It is not clear which Castile is here meant. For there was more than one city by that name. I am inclined to identify it with the one in Campagna, east of Mt. Vesuvius, close to Palma.

salem, etc. Therefore, he did not mention Damascus at all in his memoirs. Perhaps, because of the failure he met in that city, he afterwards changed the name of his brother, the King, from Hananel-Armilus to Joseph and the constitution of his country from twelve advisers to seventy elders.

It has already been stated above that David Reubeni was not the only one to appear in a time when the people, and especially those living in Palestine, were engrossed in computing the End, and evinced a deep interest in the ten tribes and the river Sambation. This was a time when the news about the Falashas helped, as it were, to make it ripe for all sorts of national hopes and aspirations. Neither does he display more originality than others of his kind: Eldad the Danite was the prototype of all the Reubenites and the Danites, etc. So deep-seated was the interest elicited by the ten tribes that even in our own times Rabbi Simeon Horowitz so fervently interests himself in these problems that he started out with the intention of finding the river Sambation and the ten tribes and actually met some of the messengers dispatched by them . . . Moreover, even lately we had messengers arriving from Habor . . . but the spirit of the times has changed.

Reubeni was not an exceptionally interesting personality if we are to judge the caliber of his imagination and the range of his conceptions. If at the outset he chose the Armilus legend as the basis of his words, he later retracted from it to adopt a simpler method: David is his name; the name of his father, the King, is Solomon; while his brother, the King, bore the name of Joseph, the reason being, as formerly stated by me, the war which Armilus will wage with the Messiah, the Son of Joseph. Also later on, his deportment in Rome and in Portugal does not suggest much intelligence.

It must also be noted that in his lifetime Reubeni impressed neither the Eastern nor the Western Jews. With the exception of some groups bent on computing the End(?) he was looked upon either as an impostor or as one mentally deranged, and even his few pseudo-supporters doubted his claim of being an emissary from the Jewish Kingdom. The Marranos, whose thoughts were completely centered around the problem of Israel's hope for redemption, were the only ones to cling to him in the same manner as he who drowns grasps at a straw. Doubts in the veracity of his words he could arouse only among the Gentiles and at that not among all of them. That this was so was due more to the influence exerted by his predecessors than to his own merits.

In a letter from Venice written sometime prior to Reubeni's arrival thither we read: "Rumors about the coming of the Jews and about the river Sambation are current in Venice to such an extent that many Gentiles give credence to them." Indeed, in Portugal Reubeni himself was astonished to find this belief among the Gentiles. At any rate, when David Reubeni appeared, the groundwork among the Gentiles was already laid.

On the other hand, his stay in Venice was detrimental for these ideas among the disinterested Gentiles. The *Diarii Sanūto alla Marciana* of the Archives of the Doges' palace in Venice contain the following notice, as of November, 1530, under the heading "David Judeus":

"David claimed to be a son of King Solomon of Tabor and brother of King Joseph. He traveled through the whole of Europe to persuade the princes to liberate the Jews and he also visited the Emperor Charles. He lived in Venice in the house of Count Guido Rongom, a San Paternian. The Senate sent the famous traveler, J. S. Ramusio, to ask Reubeni where he came from, what his

יד אל יד 47, ib., p. 35.

means were, and so on. After this conversation Ramusio gave an account of it, saying that David was an adventurer and what he said was not true. David was advised to leave the town."^{47a} This statement contains several important items: 1. We have another confirmation of the name *Tabor*, which puts an end to the romantic identification of Habor with *Khaiber*.^{47b} 2. This is also important in connection with the remark of Joseph ha-Cohen on the end of Reubeni and shows the opinions of disinterested Gentiles even after his successes and adventures in diplomacy.

What was the intention of all his activities? Perhaps his intentions were really of a nationalistic character aimed at the alleviation of the terrible sufferings of his people, as is the opinion of some historians, and as Max Brod depicts in his interesting novel.

This fact, however, and not even the contingency that perhaps Clement VII believed in him (for who could vouch whether the Pope did not want to use him as a political scapegoat in his relations with the Emperor and the King of Portugal?) allow us, out of consideration for the romanticism of the ten tribes with which we too are imbued, to see beneath this utopian usurper a man more trustworthy than others who dealt with the same subject and to build on this foundation theories about the tribes.

478 Tom. LIV, p. 151. See G. Wolf, Allgem. Zeit. des Judenth., Vol. XXX (1866), p. 585. The fact that in 1530 Reubeni was in Venice makes it more probable that he was also a second time in Rome, an opinion upheld by Zunz against Graetz. But, I do not know any source for Biberfeld's ascertion that David Reubeni resided in Venice till 1532. This is not verified by the report contained in Joseph ha-Cohen's histories אַממק הבכא הומים למלכי צרפת ומלכות בית אוממאן.

^{47b} I also intend to add in a new critical edition of the travels of David Reubeni the contemporary accounts written by Gentiles. Some of them have already been noted by Biberfeld. In most Gentile documents the name of David's Jewish kingdom is *Tabor*. In the epistle of Pope Clemens VII, it is the "mons Thabor" in the desert of Arabia.

APPENDIX

One of the problems about which there is disagreement among historians, whether to ascribe it to Reubeni's inventions or not, and which I did not treat in this study, is: Whence was he? By far the greatest number of historians he was declared to be an Oriental Jew. So Biberfeld, Graetz, Dubnow and others. Indeed, his knowledge of Arabic would tend to make this opinion plausible. For after all the only positive thing we do know is that before his coming to Europe he visited Arabian lands. Moreover, from his conversations in the royal court of Portugal, we learn that through the testimony of sea captains who made voyages to the East he also verified the location of his "country" in Arabia.

Neubauer, who refrains from expressing any opinion whatsoever about Reubeni, only remarks: "All I can say with certainty is that the Hebrew style of David's Diary is that of a German Jew"⁴⁸ and it looks as though Neubauer is inclined to accept this opinion, but soon he also adds: "David might have been such, although a native of Egypt, who knew Arabic as his mother tongue."

Neubauer's hypothesis gave rise to the legend that Reubeni was an Ashkenazic Jew. Likewise Brod, in his famous novel, made him a native of Prague. That his native country was Egypt is a thing least plausible to accept, for it is not likely that he would have attempted to accomplish his affairs among his own countrymen and in a country where there were only a few organized communities, and where he could have easily been proven to be an impostor. By the way, his scant description of Egypt and its inhabitants gives the impression as though he were speaking of a country which was not native to

⁴⁸ Jewish Mediaeval Chronicles, Vol. II, pp. xii-xiii.

him. It is customary with Reubeni to call the people by their family names, if he heard them so, as we observe his practice when he speaks about the people whom he met in Venice, Rome, etc. But such an important man as Abraham de Castro he calls Abraham the Coiner, the reason being that he, as a stranger who inquired after the greatest man among the Jews, remembered him to be the person appointed over the coinage of money. If we regard Arabic as Reubeni's native tongue, it is more proper to consider him a Yemenite Jew (in those days some Yemenite Jews who were known more from hearsay than from actual observance lived in Palestine).49 Moreover, Yemen is in the environ where Reubeni fixes the location of the desert of Habor, and the description which the author of אגרת ארחות עולם. Abraham Farissol, has left us of Reubeni fits more a Yemenite Jew: of small stature, with a shriveled face, dark-complexioned, and his pronunciation of Hebrew jarring to the ears of the European Jew.50 There is no doubt that were we to possess any evidence whatsoever that he was born in the Arabian East, there would be no doubt that his native land was Yemen.

But even had Neubauer not remarked about the style of Reubeni's diary, we would have to analyze, on this occasion, the ungrammatical Hebrew in which it had been written so as to discern by which language it had been influenced. I repeat, these matters are important only insofar as we take the chronicle to be the handiwork of Reubeni, for, although the style and the general form would serve to prove that it is so, Neubauer does not prescribe to this opinion. It seems, however, that Neubauer is

יד פל יד על יד, Vol. IV, passim.

⁵⁰ One should use the earlier editions, the best of which is that of Toma's, Oxford, 5480 (1720). It contains a Latin translation. In the later editions, many interesting details concerning Reubeni were expunged by the Christian censor.

referring to the actual handwriting only, and not to the book itself, for he treats clerical mistakes and omissions only. On the other hand there is only one place in the book which raises a doubt as to the book itself, since it proves beyond a doubt that the only copy which came down to us was *not* written by Reubeni. In the manuscript, in the midst of his account of how he prayed on the mountain on which the Mosque stood, the following phrase, which obviously has nothing to do with the context, occurs: "After David Reubeni went to Egypt and I have not seen him." The later copyists, who willfully mishandled the manuscript by "editing" it, and by changing it as they saw fit, also omitted this phrase.

Our first attempt must necessarily be in the direction of establishing the degree of influence the Arabic language has had on the style of the diary, and what we find is that throughout the whole book there is only one Arabism: his use of the word ייו, "olive," instead of ייסו, "oil," which while it is not the result of a word being omitted, olive-[oil] ייח [שמן-], it is nothing but a lexical barbarism used in Palestine, and its importance from a comparative point of view is not great. The same may be said about his use of the word "province" (מרינה) instead of "city" — a common Arabism in Hebrew literature. But I wish to draw up a list of expressions to be examined from the points of view of style, syntax and grammar. Some strange details in the style of David were already noted by Biberfeld.

- (p. 138) וצוו לי אלך תחלה ברומא לפני האפיפיור. 1
 - (ib.) לקחתי בית במדינה ההיא
- (ib.) אבא כוש במלכות שבא בארץ כוש במלכות שבא3
 - (p. 134) יכינו לי בית מן עצים 4.
 - (ib.) בשלשלת מן זהב 5

51 P. 146.

- (ib.) אם הזכרים והנקבות עושים לפניהם אש ולאחריהם אש 6.
 - (ib.) ואתן לך מחילה וסליחה ואתן לך חזקה ואחוזה בגן עדן 7.
 - (ib.) והשמנה עומדים לפני
 - 9. בשנה האחרת (p. 135)
 - 10. הספר השקר (ib.)
 - (p. 137) אשר הוא עומד על כל ממונך. 11. השר אשר הוא עומד
 - (ib.) ... ויש נהר אחר מעפר במים, יטבעו בו .12
- (ib.) ויועץ אנשים רבים לבקש מלפני המלך להרג אותך 13
 - (p. 137) שנים סוסים .14
 - (ib.) (this) אובריה השר האל 15
 - (ib.) ויש להם בתים מן עצים 16
 - (p. 138) דע כי אתה תמות 17.
- אָת the sign for the accusative) (ib.) ונתן לי אחיו. 18. (is omitted
 - (ib.) הלילה שעברה 19
 - (ib.) שנים עבדים 20
 - (p. 139) מן השנים שבטים 21.
 - (ib.) בלילה הזאת 22.
 - (ib.) אני ממתין העבר שלך. 23
 - (p. 140) בזה הפעם. 24
 - (p. 141) (three times) השני אריות. 25.
 - 26. המלך התונד (ib.)
 - (p. 142) ועמד חמשה ימים במטה ... ועמד 142....
 - (ib.) צער נדול ומחשבות גדולות .28
 - (ib.) בשוק .29
 - (p. 143) הנעתי בעזה תוך בית אחד נדול 30.
 - (ib.) שנים ימים .31
 - (ib.) בזה הארץ.32
 - (p. 145) במערה במער אנשים במערה .33
- (p. 147) הייתי בבית היהודי ההוא לפני שנים ישמעאלים
- מתתי כתב שכתבתי לבית המקדש... ואמרתי לו תן לי (ib.) הכתב ליר הנניר ריצחק
 - (p. 148) (to Spoglio) שהולכת בפולייא .36
 - 37. ובא יוסף והכה בדלת (p. 149)

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38. וצעקתי עליו (I was angry) (150) (19. 150) (29. מוה יוסף גנב לחם ויין לאנשי הספינה עד שהיה לי בושה ממנו (ib.) בושה ממנו (ib.) בית הכנסת הזאת... הנדולה... הקטנה (p. 149) (p. 150) (p. 150) (p. 150) (p. 150) (p. 151) (p. 152) (p. 151) (p. 152) (p. 152) (p. 152) (p. 153) (p. 152) (p. 153) (p. 154) (p. 159) (p. 159) (p. 159) (p. 159) (p. 164) (p. 159) (p. 164) (p. 169. 169)
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This selection comprises but the minimum. A few expressions were cited by me more than once so as to demonstrate that they were not due to error. On the other hand those expressions which I listed once occur in the book several times.

From this small selection we observe the following:

- 1. Interchanging of genders. The masculine gender used instead of the feminine and vice versa.
 - 2. ne the sign for the accusative in Hebrew is omitted.
 - 3. The reverse use of the conjunctions \exists (in) and \flat (to).
- 4. A series of barbarisms show an association of various meanings in the language used, an association which is not in Hebrew.
- 5. A style not peculiar to Hebrew; lack of knowledge of the laws governing the construct state in Hebrew.

We are faced with the fact that in no way can these characteristics of the text before us be explained as a translation from the Arabic. If we attempt to translate some of these sentences, it is possible to render them into a European language only. It would be rash, however, to precisely determine the language on the basis of the gender,

since the examples are so few. It might have been a Germanic, Slavic or Romance (Italian or Spanish) language. But it we attempt to render complete expressions into another language the circle nevertheless gets smaller until it narrows down to the Germanic dialects and Slavic Indeed there are indications which by all languages. means point to German, as, for example, the interchange of the conjunctions 2 (in) and 5 (to) which is possible in that language only where in, an and partly also zu can serve as synonyms, particularly when the meaning is "staying in a place" (zu), proceeding in any direction (in), time and designation of place (an). This same conclusion we will reach after observing how Reubeni makes use of both transitive and intransitive verbs, or of the accusative and genitive cases. It is only when we render the words into German that we get a correct translation.

It is proper to also add these details:

- 1. The book also contains many foreign words, the greatest number of which comes from Italian and the origin of a few is doubtful. The use of these words (among which are names of coins or gold-weights, such as ducats, florins; measures, such as liters, etc.) is met with immediately at the opening of the book when Reubeni is still in Africa and Asia.
- 2. It is impossible for a man, who comes from an Arabian country and particularly for a Yemenite, to change a p for a p especially when writing the name of a famous city such as Mecca.

This is not the place for a detailed investigation into the language used by Reubeni.⁵² This language, however, which has nothing of the strangeness peculiar to the style

 52 I treated this question in more detail in my article לשונו של דור in the עמונו Quarterly, Vol. V, pp. 39–48, 142–151, which is the first essay of a more detailed study.

of the Eastern Jews, but which on the contrary contains idiosyncrasies of a European Jew, points to a foreign language from which it was originated. This certainly was a European language.

Finally, there is in the Memoirs a little rhymed aphorism, repeated twice:

The rhyme בעם / העת is exclusively that of an Ashkenazic Jew!