CHRONICLING THE MEROVINGIANS IN HEBREW
THE EARLY MEDIEVAL CHAPTERS OF YOSEF HA-KOHEN'S
DIVREI HAYAMIM

By YANIV FOX

Yosef Ha-Kohen (1496–ca. 1575) was a Jewish Italian physician and intellectual who in 1554 published a chronicle in Hebrew titled Sefer Divrei Hayamim lemalkei Tzarfat ulemalkei Beit Otoman haTogar, *or* The Book of Histories of the Kings of France and of the Kings of Ottoman Turkey. *It was, as its name suggests, a history told from the perspective of two nations, the French and the Turks. Ha-Kohen begins his narrative with a discussion of the legendary origins of the Franks and the history of their first royal dynasty, the Merovingians. This composition is unique among late medieval and early modern Jewish works of historiography for its universal scope, and even more so for its treatment of early medieval history. For this part of the work, Ha-Kohen relied extensively on non-Jewish works, which themselves relied on still earlier chronicles composed throughout the early Middle Ages. Ha-Kohen thus became a unique link in a long chain of chroniclers who worked and adopted Merovingian material to suit their authorial agendas. This article considers how the telling of Merovingian history was transformed in the process, especially as it was adapted for a sixteenth-century Jewish audience.*

The so-called *Chronicle of Fredegar*, a universal history whose oldest extant redaction was probably compiled ca. 660, tells the story of a conversation between the fifth-century Frankish king Childeric and his new wife Basina on their wedding night.[1] Instead of consummating the marriage, the queen orders her husband to go to the palace window, look outside, and tell her what he sees,

which he does three times. On the first trip, Childeric sees lions, unicorns, and leopards; on the second, bears and wolves; and on the third trip he sees dogs and smaller beasts twisting and fighting amongst themselves. The interpretation offered by Basina is clear: the diminishing succession of animals foreshadows the future of Childeric's heirs, the Merovingian kings of the Franks.[2]

The *Fredegar* chronicler wrote almost a century before the last Merovingian king was deposed in 751 and thus had no inkling of how the dynasty's story might end, nor, certainly, of how his royal protagonists would fare in the writings of later chroniclers and historians. Yet in his short parable, the chronicler captured the spirit with which the Merovingians came to be known to posterity. Indeed, *Fredegar* III.12 can be viewed as an early template for future depictions of this period of Frankish history, as essentially a three-act play — ascent and consolidation; stasis and conflict; and, finally, decay and decline. Pessimism with regard to matters of state was not unique to *Fredegar*. Gregory of Tours opens the fifth book of his *Histories* with a scathing assessment of the kings of his own day.[3] Clovis is built up as a paragon of royal demeanor against which Gregory's Merovingian contemporaries fare very poorly. And while the *Fredegar* chronicler's debt to Gregory is unquestionable, the three-part narrative schema was his own invention; Gregory had nothing to say about a future scenario that includes the decline of the royal line.

A sense of foreboding is likewise present in the early eighth-century *Liber historiae Francorum*.[4] The *LHF* provides a modified ancestry for the Franks' earliest kings, although like *Fredegar*, it links them to the Trojan line of Priam. It is a nostalgia that had contemporary aims, namely to legitimize Merovingian kingship at a time of severe crisis.[5] While the chronicle never wanes in its support of the

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[2] Colette Beaune, "La rêve du roi fondateur dans l'histoire de France," in *Genèse de l'État moderne en Méditerranée: Approches historique et anthropologique des pratiques et des représentations; Actes des tables rondes internationales tenues à Paris (24–26 septembre 1987 et 18–19 mars 1988)*, Publications de l'École française de Rome 168 (Rome, 1993), 27–44 at 31.

[3] Gregory of Tours, *Libri historiarum X*, ed. Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, MGH SRM 1,1 (Hanover, 1951), 193–94 [hereafter, Gregory of Tours, *LH*].

[4] *Liber historiae Francorum*, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM 2 (Hanover, 1888), 215–328 [hereafter, *LHF*]. An English translation is available in Bernard S. Bachrach, ed. and trans., *Liber historiae Francorum* (Lawrence, KA, 1973).

[5] On this, see Richard Christopher Broome, "Approaches to Community and Otherness in the Late Merovingian and Early Carolingian Periods" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2014); Philipp Dörler, "The *Liber historiae Francorum* — a Model for a New Frankish Self-Confidence," *Networks and Neighbours* 1 (2013): 23–43; Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerberding, ed. and trans., *Late Merovingian France: History and Historiography, 640–720* (Manchester, 1996), 79–87; Richard A. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the* Liber historiae Francorum (Oxford, 1987). Later, the *LHF* was conveniently appropriated by the Carolingians and used to further their own narrative ends. On this, see Yitzhak Hen, "Canvassing for Charles: The Annals of Metz in Late Carolingian Francia," in *Zwischen*

Merovingians, it has a clear sense of their changing fortunes. The *LHF* sees the reigns of Chlothar II and Dagobert I as a time of unparalleled royal power and efficiency. Clovis II's kingship marks the end of the Merovingian heyday and precipitates the breakdown of political discourse in the late seventh and early eighth century. Thus, the *LHF* offers a history of the Merovingians that, in many respects, agrees with the tripartite model adopted by *Fredegar*.

The chronicles composed in Merovingian Gaul give voice to a variety of agendas rich enough to accommodate a plurality of readings. Just as the *Fredegar* chronicler, who relied heavily on the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours, consciously molded the original perspective of his composition to conform to his own narrative needs,[6] so too did later chroniclers return to Merovingian sources in an attempt to synthesize and recontextualize Frankish history.[7] Of these, perhaps no voice has been more devastatingly decisive to the memory of the Merovingians than Einhard's in his opening to the ninth-century *Vita Karoli*. Einhard caricatured later members of the dynasty as long-haired, bearded puppets shuffling around their dilapidated villas in ox-drawn carriages.[8] It is a vision that was energetically expounded by other works of Carolingian historiography, bent on legitimizing the family's claim to power, and has also gained traction in later generations of chronicles.[9] Despite the outsized impact of Carolingian compositions in determining the outcome of this process, the story as we recognize it today was not, by the ninth century, a *fait accompli*. Merovingian history never ceased to be rewritten, especially when pro-Carolingian perspectives were abandoned in favor of competing voices. Interest in the Merovingians did not subside in subsequent centuries, and much like the author of the *LHF*, medieval and early modern authors made the Merovingians their own, subjecting them to interpretations that fit their own agendas.

Of the great body of works that became popular in later centuries I will mention only a few, such as the tenth-century *Gesta Francorum* by Aimoin of Fleury,[10] the thirteenth-century *Grandes chroniques de France*,[11] and a

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Niederschrift und Wiederschrift: Hagiographie und Historiographie im Spannungsfeld von Kompendienüberlieferung und Editionstechnik, ed. Richard Corradini (Vienna, 2010), 139–46.

[6] See Reimitz, *History*.

[7] See Scott G. Bruce, "The Dark Age of Herodotus: Shards of a Fugitive History in Early Medieval Europe," *Speculum* 94 (2019): 47–67, which introduces the useful concept of "shards" for discussing a similar practice of repurposing elements of Herodotus in Roman and medieval historiography.

[8] Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SRG 25 (Hanover, 1911), chap. 1, pp. 2–3.

[9] See Yitzhak Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, AD 481–751* (Leiden, 1995), 198–206.

[10] Aimoin of Fleury, *Gesta Francorum*, ed. André Duchesne, *Historiae Francorum scriptores coaetanei* 3 (Paris, 1641), 1–120; repr. in PL 139, cols. 627–796.

[11] *Les Grandes chroniques de France*, ed. Jules Viard (Paris, 1920) [hereafter, *GCh*].

sixteenth-century composition in Italian, *Le vite de tutti gli Re di Francia e de gli duca di Milano*[12] by a minor *cinquecento* historian named Vittorio Sabino. All of these works converge in an unexpected source, a sixteenth-century world chronicle in Hebrew produced by the Jewish historian Yosef Ha-Kohen. The compositions that make up this eclectic collection were written with different audiences in mind;[13] they therefore differ from each other in their language, structure, and aim. As historiographical layers accumulated and interacted, however, a recognizable way of conceptualizing the early medieval history of Gaul had emerged. Regardless of their many differences, they all share a basic understanding of this historical setting formulated in seventh- and eighth-century compositions. Since we are fortunate enough to be able to trace the evolution of the story by following a long chain of works whose intertextual relationships are fairly well studied, the forces that shaped the treatment of this narrative in the *longue durée* become better understood.

Early modern Italian historiography provides an especially illuminating example of the continued appeal of the Merovingians for new audiences. Opening horizons in the East and in the far West radically shifted the worldview of *cinquecento* chroniclers, occasioning new attempts at historical synthesis. Old compositions once thought lost were rediscovered apace and subjected to renewed scrutiny, and, as the sixteenth century progressed, humanist historiography spread across Europe, and with it came a budding interest in early medieval history. One example of this is the first printed edition of the *Chronicle of Fredegar*, which was prepared by Mathias Flacius Illyricus and appeared in Basel in 1568.[14]

Jewish communities throughout Europe had likewise not remained unaffected by the humanistic proclivity for historiography, although the chronicles that ensued differed from those produced in Christian circles. The inherent difficulty in defining the nature of sixteenth-century Jewish historiography, which seemingly teeters between traditionalism and novelty, was famously — and pessimistically — evaluated in several studies by Robert Bonfil.[15] Looking at the

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[12] Vittorio Sabino, *Le vite di tutti gli Re di Francia fino alla presa del Re Francesco primo & le ragioni quali sua Maiestà pretendeva in Milano, Napoli, & Sicilia* (Rome, 1525) [hereafter, Sabino, *Vite*].

[13] For the notion of "chronicle chains" see the discussion in Ian N. Wood, "'Chain of Chronicles' in London BL 16974," in *Zwischen Niederschrift und Wiederschrift: Historiographie und Hagiographie im Spannungsfeld von Edition und Kompendienüberlieferung* (Vienna, 2010), 76–78.

[14] Flacius based his edition on Heidelberg Univ. Palat. lat. 864. On this, see Luka Ilić, "What Has Flacius to Do with Erasmus? The Biblical Humanism of Matthias Flacius Illyricus," *Colloquia Maruliana* 24 (2015): 207–20.

[15] Robert Bonfil, "Esiste una storiografia ebraica medioevale?," *Associazione Italiana per lo Studio del Giudaismo: Atti del Congresso IV* (1987): 227–47. Robert Bonfil, "How Golden Was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?," *History and Theory* 27 (1988): 78–102. Robert Bonfil, "Jewish Attitudes toward History and Historical Writing in

relatively paltry harvest of Jewish historiography up to the sixteenth century, Bonfil viewed renascent Jewish interest in writing history more as a swansong than a renaissance. Even more damningly, he regarded the inability of Jewish historians to emulate the secular-political perspective of Christian authors as the ultimate undoing of Jewish historiography. Consequently, Bonfil saw the chronicles of the period as products of compromise; they either treat Jewish and gentile history as separate fields meriting separate works or they focus on the Jews as victims of persecution. There can be no doubt that Jewish historians wrote for a different audience than did their humanist contemporaries. It is nevertheless possible to appreciate the complexity and precariousness of the Jews' condition and their ensuing literary sensibilities without assuming, as Bonfil had done, that the reluctance to embrace fully humanistic historiographical models meant that Jewish historiography had atrophied. More recent scholarship has, moreover, expressed a growing appreciation for the debt Jewish historiography owed to humanist attitudes.[16]

Yosef Ha-Kohen (1496–ca. 1575) is a clear example of the effect humanist thought had on Jewish intellectuals in the sixteenth century. The son of exiles from Spain (Cuenca and, after 1412, Huete), Ha-Kohen was born in Avignon, where his parents had settled briefly after the 1492 expulsion. Ha-Kohen spent most of his adult life in the environs of Genoa and became an eminent member of the Italian Jewish community with far-reaching connections throughout the Apennine peninsula. He was also intimately involved in current affairs, ransoming Jewish captives and representing the interests of his coreligionists. Throughout most of his turbulent career, framed by the gradually worsening state of the Jews in northern Italy, Ha-Kohen wrote extensively. He produced two major chronicles — *Sefer Divrei Hayamim lemalkei Tzarfat ulemalkei Beit Otoman haTogar*, or *The Book of Histories of the Kings of France and of the Kings of Ottoman Turkey*,[17] a universal history completed shortly before 1554 and *Sefer*

Pre-Modern Times," *Jewish History* 11 (1997): 7–40. For a thorough response to this approach, see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Clio and the Jews: Reflections on Jewish Historiography in the Sixteenth Century," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 46–47 (1979–80), 607–38.

[16] For Ha-Kohen, see Martin Jacobs, "Joseph ha-Kohen, Paolo Giovio, and Sixteenth-Century Historiography," in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early-Modern Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (Philadelphia, 2004), 67–85; Martin Jacobs, "Sephardic Migration and Cultural Transfer: The Ottoman and Spanish Expansion through a *Cinquecento* Jewish Lens," *Journal of Early Modern History* 21 (2017): 516–42; Idan Sherer, "Joseph ha-Kohen, Humanist Historiography and Military History," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 69 (2018): 86–108. My thanks to Idan Sherer for allowing me an early look at this paper.

[17] Yosef Ha-Kohen, *Sefer Divrei Hayamim lemalkei Tzarfat ulemalkei Beit Otoman haTogar* (Amsterdam, 1758) [hereafter, *DH*]. On Ha-Kohen in context, see the introduction in David Gross, ed., *Sefer Divrei Hayamim lemalkei Tzarfat ulemalkei Beit Otoman haTogar*

Emeq Habakha, or *The Vale of Tears*,[18] composed several years later, which records the travails and persecutions endured by the Jews from the destruction of the Second Temple to his own day. Ha-Kohen was an equally prolific translator. His works include *Sefer Metsiv Gevulot ʿAmim*, a reworking of Joannes Boemus's *Omnium gentium mores, leges, et ritus*; *Sefer India* and *Sefer Fernando Cortez*, a revision of Gomora's *La historia general de las Indias*; and *Sefer Mekits Nirdamim*, a translation of Meir Alguades's medical treatise.[19] In addition, there survive numerous letters sent and received by Ha-Kohen, as well as a number of smaller works on diverse subjects such as Hebrew grammar, epistolary protocol, and poetry.[20]

Ha-Kohen's erudition was undoubtedly impressive, although not unprecedented among Italian Jews. One of his epistles expresses an admiration for its addressee's fluency in "foreign wisdom" and his ability to detect flaws in the arguments of philosophers.[21] At the very least, such a statement suggests that acquaintance with Christian scholarship was not unheard of in his social circles. Ha-Kohen was also fluent in at least five languages. He was born in a Spanish-speaking home and would have picked up Italian from his surroundings. On his mother's side, Ha-Kohen was a scion of the elite Aragonese Alconstantini family and his father, Yehoshua, was a physician, who bequeathed to his son several medical treatises. Considering his background, it stands to reason that Yosef grew up in a highly literate environment, where he was also able to perfect his mastery of Hebrew.[22] Ha-Kohen was equally conversant in Portuguese, in which his main source for the *Vale of Tears* — Samuel Usque's *Consolação ás Tribulações de Israel* — was written. Latin would have been the standard medical language, and *Mekits Nirdamim* contains a list of medicinal formulae

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(Jerusalem, 1955) [Hebrew]. Robert Bonfil is currently working on a new annotated edition of *Divrei Hayamim*. See also Moses Avigdor Shulvass, "To Which of Rabbi Joseph Hacohen's Works Had the Proof-Reader Written his 'Continuation'?," *Zion* 10 (1945): 78–79 [Hebrew]; Shlomo Simonsohn, "Joseph HaCohen in Genoa," *Italia: Studi e ricerche sulla cultura e sulla letteratura degli Ebrei d'Italia 13–15* (2001): 119–30.

[18] Joseph Ha-Kohen, *Sefer ʿEmek Ha-Bakha (The Vale of Tears) with the Chronicle of the Anonymous Corrector*, ed. Karin Almbadh (Uppsala, 1981) [hereafter, Almbaldh, ed., *Vale*].

[19] For an excellent treatment of Ha-Kohen's approach to his geographical works, see Limor Mintz-Manor, "The Discourse on the New World in Early Modern Jewish Culture," (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2011) [in Hebrew]. Many thanks to Limor Mintz-Manor for sending me the dissertation and for her insights.

[20] On the letters, see especially David Avraham, *Historion be'Searot Rucho* (Beit David, 2004) [Hebrew].

[21] Yosef Ha-Kohen, *ep.* 3, in Avraham, ed., *Historion be'Searot Rucho*, 33: ובסתרי תורתנו...
הקדושה ידך רמה וחכמות נכריות צדוניות חתיות היו לנפשך לשפחות לרקחות ולטבחות ולאופות. ומהוד ההגיון לבשתה
כובע ושריון, להקים דברי חכמים באמת ובתמים ולהלחם עם בעלי ההטעה ולגלות דופם, יעטו על שפם בבושה וכלימה,
תחזירום מעורכי מלחמה, הן אלה קצות תאריך על כל אויתיך מכל החי ומכל הבשר.

[22] Gross, ed., *Sefer Divrei Hayamim*, 3, 75–76 n. 6.

in Hebrew and Latin.[23] Ha-Kohen's reliance on the *Grandes chroniques* betrays a knowledge of French, and indeed as a resident of Genova, he would have spent several years under French occupation in the first decades of the sixteenth century.[24]

Ha-Kohen is the only known Jewish chronicler to have taken up early Frankish history as a topic of inquiry, which makes him especially interesting. The first two chapters of Ha-Kohen's *Divrei Hayamim* provide a Hebrew rendering of late antique and early medieval Frankish history, a treatment that has no parallels in comparable Hebrew works. Admittedly, the early material is but a small introduction into a much lengthier treatise, which devotes considerably more attention to later and, primarily, contemporary events. The two opening chapters are nevertheless remarkable in their own way. Firstly, in their unique authorial tone, which is informed by an eclectic mixture of sources ranging from biblical prose and early medieval Jewish sources to late medieval and humanist historiography. Secondly, they are significant in the way Ha-Kohen uses the early medieval section to frame his discussion and establish its terminology. Ha-Kohen's editorial decisions and the way he chose to conceptualize Merovingian history for a sixteenth-century Jewish audience are the topic of this paper. In what follows, I will discuss the early medieval Frankish narrative found in the opening chapters of *Divrei Hayamim*, following Ha-Kohen's prose in tandem with that of his sources. I intend to show that, while Ha-Kohen was certainly no expert in early medieval history, he nevertheless deftly adapted the treatment he took from his sources to conform to his readership's ideological, historical, and religious expectations, and did so in a way that served his overarching agenda as an author. Ha-Kohen therefore produced an early medieval history that was a unique adaptation of earlier renditions, informed by the needs of a new readership.

THE TEXT

Ha-Kohen did not set out to write an early medieval history, of course, and consequently its events occupy a very modest place in the overall arc of his composition. Ha-Kohen's foray into Merovingian history in *Divrei Hayamim* is not a very original one either. During the early chapters of the composition, he appears to be more a compiler than an innovative author, betraying his reliance on established narrative traditions very clearly.[25] Ha-Kohen did not supplement his account with

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[23] If indeed Ha-Kohen used Alphonso de Spina's *Fortalitium fidei* as a source for the *Vale*, as argued by Gross, ed., *Sefer Divrei Hayamim*, 22, it is reasonable to assume that he encountered it in Latin, although it was composed to be used by preachers, and sections of it undoubtedly would have been translated into a vernacular. My gratitude to Yosi Yisraeli for his insight on this.

[24] Gross, ed., *Sefer Divrei Hayamim*, 93 n. 8.

[25] On Ha-Kohen's "slavish" adherence to his sources, see Almbaldh, ed., *Vale*, 13.

anything that may not be recovered with relative ease from a small, though diverse, list of sources. This pertains not only to the factual nature of his account, but also to his dependence on a borrowed historiographical model. Ha-Kohen's debt is especially apparent in his decision to portray the Merovingian centuries as a sequence of three vignettes: first, an account of Frankish prehistory, which includes semi-legendary figures and brings the plot up to Clovis; then, an abridged history of Clovis's heirs and their regnal dramas; and finally, the royal family as an exhausted force overwhelmed by Carolingian vigor. Ha-Kohen's wholesale adoption of his sources is telling in its own right; yet it also makes his sporadic revisions especially illuminating.

Divrei Hayamim open with a genealogy of nations, charting the geographical spread of the offspring of the biblical Noah. Such openings are not a rarity in Jewish historiography, and in fact the passage we read here was lifted in its entirety from the tenth-century Hebrew composition, *Sefer Josippon*.[26] Ha-Kohen likely saw himself as continuing his namesake's historiographical mission because he also used *Sefer Josippon* for his opening of the *Vale*.[27] The first sentences of the *Liber generationis* were therefore copied verbatim, although *Josippon* was discarded when it reached the Franks, from which point Ha-Kohen went his own way. Such lists were not an isolated phenomenon found only in Hebrew texts. Based on Genesis 10, they were useful templates for any author wishing to place his subject within a clear historical and geographical setting.[28] The *Fredegar* chronicle also incorporates a *Liber generationis* as a preamble to a more detailed discussion about the Franks' Trojan pedigree.[29]

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[26] On this passage, see *The Josippon (Josephus Gorionides)*, ed. and trans. David Flusser, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 2009) [Hebrew], 3–4; David Flusser, "Josippon, a Medieval Hebrew Version of Josephus," in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit, 1987), 386–97. See also the work of Saskia Dönitz in such essays as "Historiography among Byzantine Jews — the Case of Sefer Yosippon," in *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures*, ed. Robert Bonfil et al. (Leiden, 2012), 953–70; "Sefer Yosippon (Josippon)," in *A Companion to Yosefus*, ed. Honora Howell Chapman and Zuleika Rodgers (Oxford, 2016), 382–89.

[27] Almbaldh, ed., *Vale*, 23.

[28] See for instance the genealogy found in the *Excerpta Latina Barbari*. See *An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Garstad, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 14 (Cambridge, MA, 2012), c. 2, pp. 148–66. For an alternative vision of Frankish kingship, see *Catalogi regum Francorum praetermissi*, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM 7 (Hanover, 1920), 850–55. On both documents, see Helmut Reimitz, "*Pax inter utramque gentem:* The Merovingians, Byzantium and the History of Frankish Identity," in *East and West in the Early Middle Ages: The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective*, ed. Stefan Esders et al. (Cambridge, 2019), 45–63. On geography as a tool of Christian historiography, see A. H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2005).

[29] The foundational work on *Fredegar* and the Trojans is František Graus, "Troja und trojanische Herkunftssage im Mittelalter" in *Kontinuität und Transformation der Antike im Mittelalter*, ed. Willi Erzgräber (Sigmaringen, 1989), 25–43. See also N. Kıvılcım Yavuz,

Divrei Hayamim contains several elements that first appeared in *Fredegar*, such as the Trojan origin story, so it is tempting to speculate that the *Liber generationis* passage, though borrowed from *Josippon*, was inspired indirectly by Ha-Kohen's Christian sources. Incidentally, a manuscript of the *Fredegar* chronicle would have been available to Ha-Kohen had he managed to gain entry to the archives of the Basilica of St. Ambrose in nearby Milan. Since Ha-Kohen admits to using "their books," by which he means Latin compositions, this is, at least, within the realm of possibility.[30] Yet, as will become clear in what follows, Ha-Kohen's Trojan comment, and in fact much of the factual basis for his Merovingian section, were drawn from sources composed much nearer to his own day and cultural milieu.

One important source for Ha-Kohen's work that was undoubtedly influenced by *Fredegar* was the late thirteenth-century *Grandes chroniques de France*, which he frequently quarried for tidbits with which to enrich his narrative.[31] *Fredegar* and the *LHF* are the narrative trunk from which sprang an entire tree of French medieval historiography. The *Grandes chroniques* are but a later leaf on a larger narrative branch of this tree, which emerged from Aimoin of Fleury's *Gesta Francorum* and from its continuators.[32] It is therefore no surprise that material from *Fredegar* found its way into the *Grandes chroniques* and into other works of Latin and vernacular historiography, with Aimoin as the conduit. The *Gesta Francorum* omits the biblical *Liber generationis*, opting instead for a lengthy geographical discussion of Germany and Gaul, followed by a shorter treatment of the Trojan origins of the Franks. The *Grandes chroniques* follows Aimoin in

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"Transmission and Adaptation of the Trojan Narrative in Frankish History between the Sixth and Tenth Centuries," (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2015); Thomas J. MacMaster, "The Origin of Origins: Trojans, Turks, and the Birth of the Myth of Trojan Origins in the Medieval World," *Atlantide* 2 (2014): 1–12. On usage in late medieval historiography, see Colette Beaune, "L'utilisation politique du mythe des origines troyennes en France à la fin du Moyen Âge," in *Lectures médiévales de Virgile: Actes du colloque de Rome (25–28 octobre 1982)* (Rome, 1985), 331–55. On Jewish usage, see Ram Ben-Shalom, "The Myths of Troy and Hercules as Reflected in the Writings of Some Jewish Exiles from Spain," in *Jews, Muslims and Christians in and around the Crown of Aragon: Essays in Honour of Professor Elena Lurie*, ed. Harvey J. Hames (Leiden, 2004), 229–54. For exhaustive literature on the Trojan myth, see Hen, "Canvassing for Charles," 125 n. 31.

[30] Gross, ed., *Sefer Divrei Hayamim*, 100 n. 61.

[31] While much of the work was indeed done by Primat in the late thirteenth century, the version of the *Grandes chroniques* Ha-Kohen used would likely have been based on fifteenth-century manuscripts, which is why I refer to it as the *Grandes chroniques* and not the *Roman des rois*.

[32] For the relationship between the *Grandes chroniques* and the *Gesta Francorum*, see Karl Ferdinand Werner, "Die literarischen Vorbilder des Aimoin von Fleury," in *Medium Aevum Vivum: Festschrift für Walther Bulst*, ed. Hans Robert Jauss and Dieter Schaller (Heidelberg, 1960), 69–103; Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis: A Survey* (Brookline, 1978).

omitting *Fredegar*'s genealogy of nations, yet here too the Trojan story remained. It is an understandable editorial choice for the author of the *Grandes chroniques*, whose writing was aimed primarily at legitimizing the French monarchy.[33] *Fredegar*'s universal history may have dictated its use of biblical lineages, but for the authors of the *Gesta Francorum* and the *Grandes chroniques* illustrious mythological origins would have been much more relevant. Ha-Kohen's introduction contains both the biblical stemma and a brief allusion to the Trojan story,[34] so he seems to have adopted his opening not from the *Grandes chroniques*, but elsewhere.

The genesis story of the Frankish kingship provides the next narrative block. Initially, this strand was introduced into medieval historiography through *Fredegar* and a report found in the eighth-century *LHF*. In the latter chronicle, the story unfolds roughly as follows: after a brief survey of the Franks' Trojan ancestors, their flight from the fallen city, and their subsequent divisions into distinct ethnic groups, the author's lens narrows, closing in on the *duces* of the Franks in Sicambria.[35] Faramund, the son of the Frankish *princeps* Marcomir, makes his debut in the *LHF* as the Franks' first king.[36] Faramund is present in many — though not all — textual traditions, and is also found in Ha-Kohen. Faramund begets Chlodio, who in turn is succeeded by Merovech, the eponymous ancestor of the Merovingian dynasty. Both *Fredegar* and the *LHF* credit Merovech with lending his name to the royal family, but they also leave the question of Chlodio's paternity of Merovech hanging.[37] The former satirically postulates a sea-monster for a father,[38] while the latter only admits to the existence of kinship ties between the king and his successor.[39] Aimoin of Fleury seems to be downplaying this

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[33] Anne D. Hedeman, *The Royal Image: Illustrations of the* Grandes Chroniques de France, *1274–1422* (Berkeley, 1991), 2–3. See also Bernard Guenée, *Comment on écrit l'histoire au XIIIe siècle: Primat et le* Roman des roys (Paris, 2016).

[34] *DH* 1: ומארקומירו איש גיבור חיל ויתנוהו עליהם כרועה, ויכבדוהו מאד וימליכוהו עליהם כי אמרו לו
נאה למלוך כי מזרע פריאמו מלך טרויא הוא.

[35] The *duces* Marcomir, Sunno, and Genobaudes are already mentioned in Gregory of Tours, *LH* II.9, pp. 52–58, himself quoting Sulpicius Alexander.

[36] *LHF* 4, p. 244.

[37] As indeed does Gregory, *LH* II.9, p. 58: "De huius stirpe quidam Merovechum regem fuisse adserunt, cuius fuit filius Childericus."

[38] See Ian N. Wood, "Deconstructing the Merovingian Family," in *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artefacts*, ed. Richard Corradini, Maximilian Diesenberger, and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden, 2003), 149–71; Ian N. Wood, "Defining the Franks: Frankish Origins in Early Medieval Historiography," in *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble (New York, 2006), 110–19; Alexander Callander Murray, "*Post vocantur Merohingii*: Fredegar, Merovech, and 'Sacral Kingship,'" in *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History* (Toronto, 1998), 121–52.

[39] Only in the *LHF*'s A-class of manuscripts. The B-class ignores the matter altogether. *LHF* A, chap. 5: "Chlodione rege defuncto, Merovechus de genere eius regnum eius accepit"; *LHF* B: "Meroveus regnum sublimatus est."

ambiguity by referring to Merovech as Chlodio's *affinis*, on whose account relied the more detailed and explicit treatment found in the *Grandes chroniques*.[40]

As I have already mentioned, the *Grandes chroniques* was not the only composition to make use of the *LHF* material, nor, it seems, was it the main source for Ha-Kohen's Merovingian material. In fact, a more concise — and patently corrupt — account, which Ha-Kohen used as the backbone of his Merovingian chapters, is the Italian composition *Le vite de tutti gli Re di Francia e degli duca di Milano* by the sixteenth-century humanist Vittorio Sabino.[41] Having sided with the French invaders of Italy, Vittorio Sabino went to France, and his *Vite* was written with the purpose of legitimizing French rule over north Italian cities.[42] As he himself notes, he wrote to inform his readers:

> how and under what kings the great and richest Kingdom of France gained such repute, so it is first necessary to relate where they had their origins, for which I shall refer to what is said by the great part of ancient writers.[43]

During Sabino's French sojourn he could easily have come into contact with the *Grandes chroniques*, although how much it influenced his own writing is a matter for speculation. He certainly partook in a renewed interest among Italian historians in the French monarchy, following France's involvement in Italian affairs since the fifteenth-century.[44] Sabino's decision to include the Trojan narrative is a clear indication of his Francophile leanings. The storyline came into vogue in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a *topos* meant to bolster French legitimism, and was later also used to place French learning on equal footing with the intellectual accomplishments of Italian humanism; both would have been consonant

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[40] *GCh* 1.4: "Quand li roi Chlodio out regné XX anz, il paia le treü de nature. Après lui regna Merovées. Cil Merovées ne fu pas ses fiuz, mais il fu de son lignage. De cetui eissi la premiere generation des rois de France…." Note that the editor (26 n.4) remarks that this was not information gleaned from Aimoin and was therefore an addition made by the author of the *GCh*. On this, see Justin Lake, "Rewriting Merovingian History in the Tenth Century: Aimoin of Fleury's *Gesta Francorum*," *Early Medieval History* 25 (2017): 489–525, at 503. According to Lake, *affinis* is meant here not as son-in-law, but more generally as kinsman.

[41] Robert Bonfil, "Riflessioni sulla storiografia ebraica in Italia nel cinquecento," in *Italia Judaica* 2 (Rome, 1986), 56–66 at 58.

[42] Eric W. Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago, 1981), 342.

[43] Sabino, *Vite*, p. 1: "Volendo scrivere come & sotto quali Re sia venuto in tanta riputatione el grande & richissimo Regno di Francia, par quasi necessario prima raccontare, donde havessi origine, della quale ne referiro quello che dicono per la magior parte gli antichi scrittori."

[44] Martin Jacobs, *Islamische Geschichte in jüdischen Chroniken: Hebräische Historiographie des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism 18 (Tübingen, 2004), 99. See also D. Abulafia, ed., *The French Descent into Renaissance Italy, 1494–95: Antecedents and Effects* (London, 1995).

with Sabino's aims.[45] It is from Sabino that Ha-Kohen drew his brief remark about the Franks' Trojan lineage and it also accounts for his depiction of Chlodio. Ha-Kohen follows Sabino, closely mimicking the wording found in the *Vite* (and, more distantly, those of the *Grandes chroniques*):

> Chlodio died without leaving any legitimate sons, having reigned twenty years. In his place Merovech, who came from the same family, was made king.[46]

Or, in Ha-Kohen's work:

> He did not have any sons; he reigned for twenty years and died. And Merovech his kinsman succeeded him.[47]

Jacky Kessous and Robert Bonfil are at odds about the sources used by Ha-Kohen, with Kessous opting for the *Grandes chroniques* and Bonfil for Sabino's *Vite* and other Italian histories.[48] It is, however, quite obvious that for the early medieval section of his work, at least, Ha-Kohen used both. Sabino provided the primary narrative scaffolding, which was occasionally supplemented with anecdotal information drawn from the *Grandes chroniques*. Since the *Grandes chroniques* was an excellent starting point for early modern historians interested in early Frankish history, it is possible that Ha-Kohen was influenced by it twice: once directly, and once as it refracted from his main source, Sabino's *Vite*. Ha-Kohen further streamlined an already heavily aestheticized storyline, either augmented considerably by the *Grandes chroniques* or reworked for brevity in the *Vite*. Yet it is important to recall that the basic narrative architecture shared by all of these chronicles was put in place by the seventh- and eighth-century material. Nevertheless, it remained relatively intact in the later works. Whether *Divrei Hayamim* assume the shape of the *Vite*, as is most often the case, or whether they incorporate material from the *Grandes chroniques*, the narrative nucleus undoubtedly originated with *Fredegar* and the *LHF*, and it retained much of its original structure.

Ha-Kohen's account then moves on to Childeric and Clovis, providing for each a cursory note on military accomplishments, followed by certain emblematic aspects of their career. For Childeric, it was his pride that caused him to be deposed from his kingship, though he would later reclaim it:

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[45] Philippe Desan, "Nationalism and History in France during the Renaissance," *Rinascimento* 24 (1984): 261–88.

[46] Sabino, *Vite*, p. 2: "Clodio … mori senza lasciare di se alchun figliuolo legittimo, hauendo regnato uenti anni. In luogo suo fu fatto re, Meroveo, della medesima famiglia. …" For the wording of the *GCh*, see above.

[47] *DH* 1, ‎ובנים לא היו לו. וימלוך עשרים שנה וימות. וימלוך תחתיו מירוביאו ממשפחתו. All translations from Hebrew are my own.

[48] Jacky Kessous, "La 'Chronique' de Joseph Ha-Cohen," *Archives Juives* 13 (1977): 45–53; Bonfil, "Riflessioni," 58.

> Merovech died and his son Childeric succeeded him. He was very proud and wherever he went he committed evil deeds and the peoples banished him and refused to obey him. It eventually came to pass that he reclaimed the cities of his kingship.[49]

For Clovis, the space devoted is equally modest in scope:

> He died and his son Clovis succeeded him. He is the same Clovis who subdued the inhabitants of Reims and Soissons and subjected them to tribute. Clovis also fought the Alamanni and they fell before him. And an unclean spirit came upon him and he forsook his god. Bishop Remigius of Reims baptized him. He then gathered men-at-arms and fought the Burgundians, the Aquitanians, and the Goths, and he crushed them, and they fell beneath his feet.[50]

Childeric is uncomfortably lodged in the shadowy regions between myth and history. We are certain of his historicity because he appears not only in Gregory of Tours's *Histories* and in the sources mentioned above, but also in the *Vita Genovefae*, or *Life of Genevieve*, a hagiography of a fifth-century Parisian saint.[51] More important still for our understanding of Childeric is his tomb, unearthed in Tournai in the mid-seventeenth century, which yielded the famous signet ring bearing the inscription "CHILDIRICI REGIS." Childeric never speaks for himself, however. His tomb complex and its riches, and whatever message they were meant to convey, were not his creations, but those of his son Clovis.[52] The hagiography and historiography are later still and provide very little actual information. In any event, Ha-Kohen's superficial treatment of Childeric is forgivable, given the paucity of source material.[53] Childeric's tomb was only discovered a century after the publication of *Divrei Hayamim*, so any information it may have revealed was, of course, unavailable to Ha-Kohen.[54]

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[49] *DH* 1: וישכב מירוביאו עם אבותיו וימלוך קילדריקו בנו תחתיו. ויגבה לבו מאד ובכל אשר פנה הרשיע ויגרשוהו העמים מאנו שמוע אליו. ויהי לימים עוד וישוב אל ערי מלכותו.

[50] *DH* 1: וישכב עם אבותיו וימלוך קלודוביאו בנו תחתיו. הוא קלודוביאו אשר כבש את הרימי ואת האישבישי. ויתנם למס עובד. וגם עם האשכנזים נלחם קלודוביאו ויפלו תחת רגליו. ותהי איתו רוח אחרת ויעזוב את אלוהיו. ויטבלהו רימיניו רימינשי ההגמון. ויאסוף אנשי חיל וילחם עם הבורגוניוני ועם האיקואיוטאני ועם הגו״טי וימחצם ויפלו תחת רגליו.

[51] *Vita Genovefae virginis Parisiensis*, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM 3 (Hanover, 1894), 204–38, at chap. 26, 226. On Genovefa, see Martin Heinzelmann and Joseph-Claude Poulin, eds., *Les vies anciennes de Saints Geneviève de Paris* (Paris, 1986); Lisa M. Bitel, *Landscape with Two Saints: How Genovefa of Paris and Brigit of Kildare Built Christianity in Barbarian Europe* (Oxford, 2009), 51–71.

[52] Guy Halsall, "Childeric's Grave, Clovis' Succession, and the Origins of the Merovingian Kingdom," *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul*, ed. Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (New York, 2001), 130–47.

[53] Here he again follows Sabino closely. Sabino, *Vite*, 2: "successo a Meroveo Childerico suo figliuolo, e quale per la superbia fu scacciato da populi, & e poi restituto nel regno…."

[54] On Childeric and his tomb, see Dieter Quast, ed., *Das Grab des fränkischen Königs Childerich in Tournai und die Anastasis Childerici von Jean-Jacques Chifflet aus dem Jahre 1655*, Monographien des römisch-germanischen Zentralmuseums 129 (Mainz, 2015).

Clovis is another matter entirely. Not only was he the first of his line to secure single rulership over all the Franks and to legislate on their behalf, he was first to adopt Nicene Christianity. From his glowing portrayals in Gregory of Tours to the eleven chapters dedicated to him in the *Grandes chroniques*, Clovis towers over other Merovingians in the relevant historiographical works.[55] Rightly seen as a turning point in Frankish history, Clovis's death thematically concludes both Gregory of Tours's Book 2 and the *Grandes chroniques* Book 1.

At first glance, this all seems to have left very little trace on Ha-Kohen's blasé depiction of Clovis. Given its faithful adherence to Sabino's text, one would expect Clovis to merit a more thorough treatment than he receives in *Divrei Hayamim*. This is an anomaly, considering Ha-Kohen's sources, and requires some explanation. Ha-Kohen's inclination for brevity meant that Clovis's legislative policies and political maneuverings, discussed in Merovingian chronicles, were regarded as superfluous. That left only his martial prowess and baptism, which were, of course, a source of great pride for the author of the *Grandes chroniques*. As one would expect, Clovis also received the most detailed treatment of any Merovingian king in the *Vite*. Not so for Ha-Kohen. While he was certainly able to muse about Christendom's role as a vehicle for ushering in Jewish salvation in the end times, he also had firsthand experience of the evils perpetrated by Catholic kings against his parents and his coreligionists, harboring no illusions about the greater significance of Clovis's baptism. This is why he uses a phrase which awkwardly translates as:

And an unclean spirit came upon him.[56]

Of Sabino's narrative not much remained apart from a terse statement on Clovis's psychological change and his decision to undergo baptism. To compare, this is some of what Sabino had to say:

Clovis …, having defeated the Alamanni in an undecided battle, was baptized by Remigius bishop of Reims, and was anointed with oil carried from heaven by a dove, as some have written. Here was born the solemnity that the kings of France, when they receive the royal ornaments, are anointed with the same oil.

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[55]   For the treatment of Clovis in late medieval French historiography, see Colette Beaune, *The Birth of An Ideology: Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late-Medieval France*, trans. Susan Ross Huston (Berkeley, 1991), 70-89.

[56]   יותהי איתו רוח אחרת ויעזוב את אלוהיו׳. For the rationale behind this translation, see below. The hermeneutical space afforded by this phrase is quite large. It was likely influenced by Numbers 14:24, although its meaning is far from obvious. Though rabbinical thought has often seen it as a positive phrase, this was hardly unanimous. Or Hakhayim Hakadosh, an eighteenth-century Moroccan exegete, regarded רוח אחרת as an evil urge or temptation, a reading likely shared by Ha-Kohen. My thanks to Ari Geiger for this insight.

Having been thus anointed and made Christian, Clovis vanquished the Burgundians, the Aquitanians, and the Goths.[57]

The description in the *Vite* distantly echoes Hincmar's *Vita Remigii* and its account of Clovis and the holy ampulla also found in the *Grandes chroniques*.[58] Ha-Kohen of course rejected the miraculous events that preceded the baptism in Sabino's account and therefore glossed over them. His account builds on an imagery of the Visitation, though, tellingly, the word chosen to describe the supernatural presence is רוח אחרת. Literally, the phrase translates into "foreign" or "other spirit," calling to mind some supernatural aberration afflicting an erstwhile good king and causing him to forsake his god. Yet it is also reminiscent of another well-known Hebrew phrase — דבר אחר (lit. "other thing") — used frequently in the Talmud and elsewhere as a euphemism for pig, signifying the animal's uncleanly, abhorrent nature.[59] Ha-Kohen does not say "gods" or "idols" (Hebrew: צלמים) but uses the neutral-sounding "his god" (אלוהיו), toning down the sympathetic tone used by Sabino. Even more strikingly, Ha-Kohen entirely omitted Sabino's comment about the royal tradition of using the oil to anoint the kings of France and substituted the explanatory preamble about Clovis's anointing and Christianization with a phrase of his own invention: "He then gathered men-at-arms" (Hebrew: ויאסוף אנשי חיל).

Here Ha-Kohen is clearly in the role of a Jewish author writing for a Jewish readership. Not wanting his audience to become too impressed with his subject, he kept his reporting to a factual minimum, omitting the story of the holy ampulla entirely. The decision to speed through the baptism and to ignore the later royal traditions is not only a sign of Ha-Kohen's general disapproval, but perhaps also of his reluctance to acknowledge it as the constitutive act of the Merovingian dynasty, and, by extension, of the French monarchy. Since he divulges so little, it is perhaps best not to push this point any further. Nevertheless, Ha-Kohen does see Clovis's reign as concluding a period of early Merovingian history characterized by conquest and consolidation of power. For the succession of kings stretching from Chlodio to Clovis, Ha-Kohen follows Sabino in reporting the cities and tribal entities subdued by the Franks.[60] Sabino was, again, possibly

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[57] Sabino, *Vite*, 2–3: "Clodoveo …, auendo uinto i Todeschi in una dubiosa battaglia, si fece batezare da Remigio uescouo Remense, & fu unto con olio portato di cielo da una columba, si come alchuni scriuono. Donde e nata la solennita che li Re di Francia, quando pigliono li ornamenti reali, si ungino con quello medemiso olio. Cosi essendo unto Clodoveo & fatto Christiano domo li Borgognioni, li Aquitani, & li Gotti."

[58] Hincmar of Reims, *Vita Remigii episcopi Remensis*, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM 3 (Hanover, 1896), 239–341; *GCh* I. 20, pp. 72–73.

[59] See, for instance, BT Pesachim, 66 b.

[60] Chlodio: ויכבוש את הטורינגי, ואת הטוראסינשי, ואת הקאמבראסינשי, וישימם למס עובד ;Merovech: וילחם עם גילוני רומיי רועה האששיישיאוני ;Childeric: וילחום בעד הרומיים עם האונגארי ועם הגוטי ימים רבים וינגפו אנשי דרומיי וינוסו מפניו: וגם את האורילייאנשי ואת האגדיגאבי כבש קילדריקו ויתנם למס עובד

influenced by the *Grandes chroniques*, which contain a similar list of captured cities. For Sabino and Ha-Kohen, this is not something that recurs in the accounts of later Merovingian kings, although we know from Gregory of Tours and other sources that it was under Clovis's direct heirs that the Franks achieved dominion over the Burgundians, the Thuringians, and Provence, and that they embarked on a campaign against the Danes. A generation later, successive expeditions against the Lombards in Italy were dispatched and an offensive posture was frequently adopted on the Visigothic front. In the seventh century, Bavaria and other outlying regions on the eastern frontier were brought under Frankish hegemony. Silence on this matter was therefore intentional, and in service of a greater narrative model.

In both Sabino's and Ha-Kohen's account, Clovis is located at the end of a thematic block devoted to the Merovingians' energetic beginnings. The sense of stasis becomes apparent immediately after the death of Clovis, whose successors, remarks Ha-Kohen, were prone to fighting amongst themselves.[61] Of Clovis's four sons only Chlothar survived, and was, in turn, succeeded by Charibert. After Charibert died in Toulouse, Dagobert, his "mother's son" (Hebrew: בן אמו) ascended to the Frankish throne. This is a mistake, of course, since Chlothar had not one but four sons who survived him — Charibert I, Guntram, Sigibert I, and Chilperic I — as well as several who did not. Each received a part of Chlothar's bequest, and when Charibert died in 567 his kingdom, centered on Paris, was carved up and redivided among the remaining brothers. Thus, the Charibert who appears in Ha-Kohen's narrative more closely resembles the next king who bore the name. Charibert II also had a father named Chlothar — Chlothar II — who, much like his namesake and grandfather, came to rule the entire *regnum Francorum* toward the end of his life. When Chlothar II died in 628, he left his kingdom to his eldest son Dagobert, who allowed his younger half-brother Charibert II to take possession of Gascony and Aquitaine. This Charibert indeed ruled from Toulouse, as Ha-Kohen reports, and when he died in 632 — probably assassinated by Dagobert's henchmen[62] — his brother took over his kingdom and treasure. So, when Ha-Kohen writes that Charibert succeeded Chlothar and was, in his turn, succeeded by his own brother Dagobert, he was partially correct, although he did mistakenly create a collage of two men who lived

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כבש את הרימי ואת האישבישי ויתנם למס עובד: וגם עם האשכנזים נלחם קלודוביאו ויפלו תחת רגליו ... :Clovis

ויאסוף אנשי חיל וילחם עם הבורגוניוני ועם האיקויטאני ועם הגוטי וימחצם ויפלו תחת רגליו. The name of Childeric's enemy Aegidius is corrupted in the *GCh* as Gilon and in Sabino as Gillone, providing further evidence of influence.

[61]   *DH* 2: ויחלק מלכותו לארבעת בניו וילחמו וילחמו ביניהם: וימותו מהם במלחמה ומהם כלה הזמן, לא נשאר מהם כי אם אחד.

[62]   Ian N. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751* (London, 1994), 149.

almost seventy years apart. The reason for this blunder is obvious: Ha-Kohen was building on the *Vite*, which contains the same mistake.

The account of Dagobert opens with a direct translation of Sabino's report, which focuses on the king's generosity toward Saint-Denis, burial place of the first king of the Franks:

> Dagobert, his [i.e., Charibert's] brother on his mother's side succeeded him; he built up the temple of St. Dionysius, where the first king of the Franks was buried.[63]

And in Ha-Kohen:

> Charibert died in Toulouse and Dagobert his mother's son succeeded him. He built Dionysius's altar of the Ba'al where the first king who ruled France was buried.

As in previous instances where his Christian source uses standard pietistic language, Ha-Kohen intervenes. Here, Sabino's *tempoi di santo Dionysio* becomes במת הבעל דיאוניזיו, an awkward phrasing best translated as "Dionysius's altar of the Ba'al." While this is almost surely just a formulaic expression of derision for Christianity, it is tempting to wonder whether Ha-Kohen was making a pun by equating St. Denis, whose name means "of Dionysus," with the Canaanite deity Ba'al, given the similarities between some of their attendant mythologies.

Dagobert is a point of some importance on the regnal continuum for Ha-Kohen. Dagobert's tenure was marked by relative stability, allowing him to develop a fruitful relationship with the Byzantine emperor Heraclius once the latter was able to stabilize his empire after the near-catastrophe of the Persian war. Contacts with Constantinople brought about, sometime around 632, a treaty of cooperation between the Franks and the Empire. The motivation behind it probably was, as Stefan Esders has shown, to jointly address the mounting threat of the Avars, who were wedged in central Europe between Frankish and Byzantine spheres of influence.[64] A curious consequence of the negotiations seems to have been a Byzantine requirement to forcefully baptize Jews living under Dagobert's rule and a Frankish acquiescence to this demand, which most of our sources dutifully report. Heraclius's petition stemmed from his misinterpretation of an astrological portent that warned of the imminent Muslim conquests, but which the emperor mistook as referring to the Jews.

While it was previously rejected as fantasy, Dagobert's behavior on this issue may actually have some basis in history. Heraclius's anti-Jewish policies have left their traces not only on works produced within the Byzantine world, such

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[63] Sabino, *Vite*, 3: "Successegli [Chariberto] Dagoberto fratello da parte di madre, el quale edificio il tempoi di Santo Dionysio, dove il primo Re di Francia fu sepulto."

[64] Stefan Esders, "The Prophesied Rule of a 'Circumcised People': A Travelling Tradition from the Seventh-Century Mediterranean," in *Barbarians and Jews: Jews and Judaism in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Yitzhak Hen and Thomas F. X. Noble (Turnhout, 2018), 119–54.

as the *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati*, which tells the tale of a Jew who had recently been forced to accept baptism under Heraclius, only to realize the validity of his new faith.[65] They left a mark also on Arabic compositions, the earliest of which is Ibn Isḥāq's eighth-century composition, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*,[66] and on eastern Christian sources, such as the tenth-century Arabic composition by the Egyptian bishop Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʻ.[67] In western sources, the Heraclius story became an established part of Dagobertian lore. Originating with *Fredegar*, it found its way into such compositions as the *Gesta Dagoberti*, composed in the 830s by an anonymous author bent on legitimizing the claims of St. Denis to independence from episcopal jurisdiction.[68] There, the story is told from Dagobert's perspective, although the influence of *Fredegar* is indisputable.[69] Likewise, the Heraclius story was incorporated into the *Gesta Francorum*, from which it leapt on to the *Grandes chroniques*, and finally to Ha-Kohen.

Ha-Kohen included his version of this event not only in *Divrei Hayamim* but also in the *Vale*, which focuses on the Jewish experience of these fateful times. His information could only have come down through the *Grandes chroniques*, since, as we have seen, Sabino's account of Dagobert says nothing of Heraclius or the Jews. In fact, the account is a direct borrowing from the *Grandes chroniques*,[70] itself a close copy of Aimoin's rendition of the plot found in *Fredegar*. As

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[65] *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati*, ed. and trans. Vincent Déroche, *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (Paris, 1991), 69–219.

[66] *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, ed. and trans. Alfred Guillaume (Oxford, 1955), 1561, p. 654. See also mentions in *Continuatio Byzantia Arabica a. DCCLXI* 12 and *Continuatio Hispana a. DCCLIV* 6, both in MGH AA 11, ed. Theodor Mommsen (Berlin, 1894), 336–37. See treatment in Esders, "Prophesied Rule."

[67] See also Thomas J. MacMaster, "The Pogrom that Time Forgot: The Ecumenical anti-Jewish Campaign of 632 and Its Impact," in *Inclusion and Exclusion in Mediterranean Christianities, 400–800*, ed. Yaniv Fox and Erica Buchberger (Turnhout, 2019), pp. 217–235.

[68] Maximilian Diesenberger, "Hair, Sacrality and Symbolic Capital in the Frankish Kingdoms," in *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artefacts*, ed. Richard Corradini, Maximilian Diesenberger, and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden and Boston, 2003), 173–212 at 202.

[69] *Gesta Dagoberti I. regis Francorum*, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH SRM 2 (Hanover, 1888), at chap. 24, 409: "Cum autem esset Eraclius imperator litteris nimium eruditus, peritissimus ad ultimum astrologus efficitur. Qui cognoscens in siderum signis, quod a circumcisis gentibus divino nutu eius imperium esset vastandum, ad Dagobertum regem Francorum dirigit, petens, ut omnes Iudaeos regni sui secundum fidem catholicam baptizari praeciperet. Rex vero Dagobertus hac occasione nactus et Dei zelo ductus, cum consilio pontificum atque sapientium virorum omnes Iudaeos, qui regenerationem sacri baptismatis suscipere noluerunt, protinus a finibus regni sui pellere iussit."

[70] The other humanist source identified by Bonfil — Paolo Emilio's *De rebus gestis Francorum* — contains the Heraclius-Dagobert story and all of its major components, but its syntax and structure are very different from the one found in either the *Grandes chroniques* or *Divrei Hayamim*: "Sunt qui ferant eosdem legatos verbis Heraclii retulisse metum

a result, the passages from *Fredegar* are very similar in content to Ha-Kohen's version, which retains most of *Fredegar*'s original syntax and structure. The few dissimilarities that we do find are nothing if not intentional. The original Fredegarian passage reads:

> Being very learned in letters, he became an astrologer. With God's help he discerned that his empire would be devastated by circumcised peoples. So he sent a delegation to the Frankish king Dagobert, requesting him to order all the Jews of his kingdom baptized to the Catholic faith; this Dagobert fulfilled promptly. Heraclius decreed that the same should be done in all the imperial provinces.[71]

Aimoin's *Gesta Francorum* contains this account:

> Because he was thoroughly educated in the study of letters, he eventually became an astrologer. He therefore recognized in the signs of the stars that his empire would be devastated by a circumcised people, and having affirmed it to refer to the Jews, sent messages to Dagobert, king of the Franks, and asked him that he order all those of Jewish descent who are subjects in his provinces to become Christian; and that those who refused would be punished by exile or death, which Dagobert willingly carried out, having driven away from the boundaries of Francia all of those who would not submit to baptism.[72]

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ingentem impendere Christianis imperiis a gente circuncisa: quicquid eorum hominum in Gallia esset, cogendos effici Christianos. In Gallia, & cæteris ab Asia magno intervallo disiunctis regionibus, Iudæorum vetus mos cognoscebatur: Mahumetis vero Saracenorumque gliscens circumcisio ignorabatur: cuius vim Christianis formidandam, fortes, an magicae vanitates, an Mathematici per ambages Heraclio cecinisse feruntur: qui sibi etiam a Saracenis, sed alio, reor, consilio caverat." On Paolo Emilio's work, see Katharine Davies, "Late XVth Century French Historiography, as Exemplified in the *Compendium* of Robert Gaguin and the *De Rebus Gestis* of Paulus Aemilius," (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1954), esp. 159–255. On Emilio's use of Gregory of Tours, see Maike Priesterjahn, "Zurück zu den Quellen: Gregor von Tours als Autorität für die französische Historiographie um 1500," *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Vindobonensis* 16 (2018): 549–58.

[71] *Fredegar* IV.65, p. 153: "Cum esset litteris nimius aeruditus, astralogus effecetur; per quod cernens a circumcisis gentibus divino noto emperium esse vastandum, legationem ad Dagobertum regem Francorum dirigens, petens ut omnes Iudeos regni sui ad fidem catolecam baptizandum preciperit. Quod protenus Dagobertus emplevit. Aeraglius per omnes provincias emperiae talem idemque facere decrevit…."

[72] Aimoin, *Gesta Francorum* IV.22, col. 783: "Cumque litteraris abunde esset instructus, ad ultimum astrologus efficitur. Agnoscens itaque in signis siderum, imperium suum a circumcisa gente vastandum, et autumans id de Judaeis fuisse praemonstratum, per inter nuntios Dagobertum rogavit regem Francorum, et cunctos Judaiae stirpis, qui in provinciis illi subjectis manebant, Christianos fieri praeciperet; eos vero qui nollent aut exsilio aut morte damnari. Quod Dagobertus volens effecit, omnes qui noluerunt baptisma suscipere procul a finibus eliminans Franciae."

The *Grandes chroniques* contain a similar, though by no means identical, account:

> And because he was a great scholar and had a profound literary knowledge, at last he became an astrologer. He understood from the signs of the stars that his empire would be destroyed by a circumcised people, and because he thought that it would be the Jews, he requested through messengers that Dagobert, the king of France, have the Jews of all the provinces of his kingdom baptized, and that all those who would refuse should be condemned to exile. And this King Dagobert did, and thus all those who did not want to receive baptism were exiled and chased out of the kingdom of France.[73]

And finally, Ha-Kohen's version, which runs like this:

> Heraclius grew very wise in astrology (lit. wisdom of the zodiac), and in his wisdom, he saw the rule of Rome fall in his own day under the feet of the circumcised; and the scoundrel[74] said in his heart: God will not deign to grant this honor to none but the Jews, because they are circumcised. And he raged against them and ordered that in all the cities of his rule those Jews that refuse to convert and turn away from God be killed. He sent messengers to Dagobert king of France so that he would do the same evil deed and Dagobert obeyed him and many converted. Many were put to the sword in France in those days.[75]

The first sentence is indeed a faithful replication of *Fredegar,* but here the stories begin to diverge ever so slightly, in fact as well as in emphasis. Ha-Kohen's Heraclius is a "son of Belial" (בן בליעל), literally a scoundrel, but more likely meant as idolater, perhaps a remark on the emperor's promotion of Marian iconography or on his Monotheletist initiative. Allusions to Heraclius as בן בליעל predate Ha-Kohen. In fact, the seventh-century Jewish apocalyptic composition known as *Sefer Zerubbabel,* which was written in the aftermath of the Persian-Byzantine wars, identifies its main villain, Armilos, as בן בליעל.[76] The Antichrist figure Armilos was often seen as a thinly veiled indictment of Heraclius, especially since the monstrous Armilos's father was Satan himself and his mother a

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[73] GCh X: "Et pour ce que il estoit granz clercs et de parfonde lettreure, devint-il au derannier astronomiens. Bien cognut par les signes des estoiles que ses empire devoit estre essilliez par un pople circoncis, et pour ce que il cuida que ce deust estre par les Juis, proia-il par ses messages Dagobert, le roi de France, que il feist baptizier les Juis de touts les provinces de son royaume, et que tuit cil qui ce refuseroient fussent dampné par essil. Ensi le fist li roi Dagoberz, car tuit cil qui baptesme ne vorent recevoir furent essillié et chacié dou roiyaume de France."

[74] On Heraclius as a scoundrel in Jewish writings, see below.

[75] *DH* 2: ויתחכם איראקליאו בחכמת המזלות מאד וירא בחכמתו את מלכות רומי נופל בימיו תחת כפות רגלי הנימולים: ויאמר הבליעל בלבבו לא יחפוץ האלוהים לעשות היקר הזה כי אם אל היהודים כי מולים הם: ויחר אפו עליהם ויצו בכל ערי מלכותו להמית את כל היהודים אשר ימאנו להמיר את כבודם לשוב מאחרי ה': ומלאכים שלח אל דאגובירטו מלך צרפת לעשות גם הוא כדבר הרע הזה וישמע אליו דאגובירטו ורבים המירו את כבודם. ורבים הוכו לפי חרב בצרפת בימים ההם.

[76] For the text of *Sefer Zerubbabel,* see Israel Lévi, "L'apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi de Perse Siroès," *Revue des études juives* 68 (1914): 129–60.

marble statue, clearly meant to evoke in the reader the image of Marian iconography, which the author of *Sefer Zerubbabel* refers to as ראש לכל עבודה זרה, or "the zenith of all idolatry."[77]

In Ha-Kohen's version, Heraclius refuses to give the Jews the pleasure of having that which God deemed them worthy to receive and decrees that any Jew who refuses baptism be put to death. In his treatment of the Heraclius account, Ha-Kohen's assumption that a providentially guided history can only conclude in Jewish temporal dominion makes a subtle first appearance. The punishments apportioned to reluctant Jews undergo evolution — from complete ignorance in *Fredegar*, exile or death in the *Gesta Francorum*, and exile in the *Grandes chroniques*, to death in *Divrei Hayamim*, which in Ha-Kohen occasioned mass executions. He ends his account with a quote from Deut. 32:43: "for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries." Although the story as it is related in the *Vale* is an exact copy of the one found in *Divrei Hayamim*, the biblical quotation is missing; considering the *Vale*'s overall consolatory tone, it is rather a surprising absence. Yet in *Divrei Hayamim*, the quotation serves to signal the end of one narrative strand (the Persian-Byzantine wars) and the beginnings of another (the conquests of the Muslims), while at the same time underscoring the eschatological aims of the composition.[78] More importantly for us, this lengthy account also serves as the ultimate piece in the second thematic block — Merovingian stasis and conflict. It is no wonder then that "the good king Dagobert," purportedly the last effective Merovingian, concludes this section of the plot.

The last few paragraphs are concerned with the heirs of Dagobert, who are soon revealed as veritable *rois fainéants*. Clovis II is dispensed with in one sentence, containing the length of his kingship and the fact that he had three sons. Of those, Chlothar III fares no better and is said only to have been the eldest and that he ruled four years but produced no heirs. The plot then moves to the events of the 670s, which it chronicles with some detail, all of which is concerned with the disintegration of Merovingian authority. Theuderic III becomes king, while

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[77] Lévi, "L'apocalypse," 136, n. 8: והיא תהיה ראש לכל עבודה זרה, although this phrase appears only in the D recension (Bodleian MS Heb. fol. 27 [formerly 2642], edited by Wertheimer). See Wout Jac van Bekkum, "Jewish Messianic Expectations in the Age of Heraclius," in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. Gerrit J. Reinink and Bernard H. Stolte (Leuven, 2002), 95–112, at 109, which echoes the arguments of Lévi, and (albeit in a more reserved manner), Paul Speck, "The Apocalypse of Zerubbabel and Christian Icons," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 4 (1997): 183–90. Armilos also makes an appearance in the *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati*. On this, see John C. Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postrabbinic Jewish Apocalypse Reader* (Atlanta, 2005), 19, 59.

[78] See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Messianic Impulses in Joseph Ha-Kohen," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard Dov Cooperman (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 460–87.

his brother Childeric II is said to have been banished to Austrasia. This is another mistake that Ha-Kohen took from Sabino, since, as we gather from the *LHF*, Childeric was invited to ascend to the Austrasian throne. We then learn that:

> Theuderic became very proud, and the Franks said: what have we done in that we anointed this villain to be our king; they conspired against him and banished him from their presence.[79]

The calamitous tenure of Childeric II is explored in the following sentences, including his callousness and his disrespect for the aristocracy, which culminated with his decision to have one of his courtiers — the *LHF* reveals the man's name was Bodilo — flogged publicly.[80] He is then murdered, alongside his wife, while returning from a hunting expedition. Theuderic, then a "priest unto his god" (Hebrew: כומר לאלהיו), referencing his forced tonsure and incarceration in Luxeuil, is recalled and reinstated.[81] Theuderic's sons are given a short and programmatic treatment:

> Clovis his eldest son succeeded him: three years Clovis reigned and had no sons and died: his brother Childebert succeeded him for several days: Childebert died at the beginning of his reign and Dagobert his son, who was a small boy at the time, succeeded him: this boy died without issue: he did not leave after him any heirs in the land.[82]

Here we find another mistake that Ha-Kohen adopted from Sabino. Childebert III's reign was not a brief one, lasting in fact seventeen fruitful years. Childebert III is a favorite of the *LHF* author, who refers to him as a famous man (*vir inclytus*) when he reports his ascent and calls him "the glorious and just lord King Childebert of good memory" (*bonae memoriae gloriosus domnus Childebertus rex iustus*) when he tells of his passing.[83] Interestingly, in the latter chapter the *LHF* also relates the murder of Grimoald, son of Pippin II, by a pagan named Rantgar, who receives the epithet "son of Belial."[84] The point about the inefficacy

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[79] *DH* 2: ויגבה לב טיאודוריקו מאד ויאמרו הצרפתים מה זאת עשינו כי משחנו למלך את הנבל הזה עלינו ויקשרו עליו קשר ויגרשוהו מאתם.

[80] On the treatment of this event in early medieval hagiography and chronicle, see Jamie Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography in the Merovingian Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2014), 77–79.

[81] On the monastic incarceration of Theuderic III see M. de Jong, "Monastic Prisoners or Opting Out? Political Coercion and Honour in the Frankish Kingdoms," in *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Mayke de Jong and Frans Theuws (Leiden, 2001), 291–328 at 318–22.

[82] *DH* 2: וימלוך קלודוביאו בנו הבכור תחתיו: ושלוש שנים מלך קלודוביאו ובנים לא היו לא וישכב עם אבותיו וימלוך תחתיו אחיו קידילבירטו ימים אחדים: וישכב קידילבירטו בראשית מלכותו עם אבותיו וימלוך דגוברטו בנו תחתיו והוא נער קטן בעת ההיא: וימות הנער הזה מבלי חפץ: ולא הניח אחריו מכלים בארץ דבר יורש עצר.

[83] *LHF* chap. 49–50, p. 324.

[84] *LHF* chap. 50, p. 325: "Cedendum enim tempore, egrotante Pippino principe, genitorem eius, dum ad eum visitandum accessisset, nec mora in basilica sancti Landeberti martyris Leudico peremptus est a Rantgario gentile, filio Belial."

that has taken hold of the Merovingian line is elaborated further is Sabino and Ha-Kohen:

> Lacking thus in the royal line, a certain Daniel, who was a priest, was elected king and came to be called Chilperic.[85]

This is arguably also the cutoff point for the third thematic strand. It is here that Charles Martel first appears as Chilperic's enemy on the field of battle. Martel is victorious and Chilperic escapes, only to be graciously reinstated by his adversary. Martel is thenceforth given the title "constable" and proceeds to rule the Franks. After Chilperic dies without issue, Martel, on the counsel of his leading men, appoints Theuderic IV, "who was, in their eyes, like a saint."[86] Tellingly, Ha-Kohen uses קדש, which, when used in this context, is likely a pun. Phonetically, the word closely resembles the Hebrew word קדוש, or saint, but actually means fornicator or idolater. His snipe at Theuderic, on all accounts a rather mediocre figure, can only be explained as a critical response to the favorable portrayal we find in Sabino's *Vite*:

> Mostly through the efforts of Martel, Theuderic was created king, who was held to be saintly by majority opinion, and is said to have been reared by some monks from nearby Chelles.[87]

Shortly after, Ha-Kohen abandons the Merovingians and turns his attention to the ascending Carolingians. He returns, much like Sabino, for one last sentence at a later point in the text, in which he relates the deposition of Childeric III, wrongly identified, here and in Sabino, as Theuderic:

> Theuderic's laziness made him loathsome in the eyes of the peoples. Pope Zacharias anointed Pippin king and Theuderic returned to worship his idol as he once did.[88]

And thus, the curtain is drawn over the Merovingians. That this was perceived as the starting point of a new thematic block is made evident by Sabino's decision to return to the topic of conquest. Unlike their Merovingian puppets, both Charles Martel and his son Pippin energetically continued the expansion of the

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[85] Sabino, *Vite*, 3: "Manchando dunque la stirpe Regale fu eletto Re un Daniele che era Sacerdote, el quale si fece chiamare Chilperico." The *DH* is a verbatim translation: ויהי כי אפס זרע המלוכה, ויבחרו השרים בדניאל, והוא כומר לאלוהיו בעת ההיא: וימליכהו עליהם למלך ויקראו שמו קילפריקו עד היום הזה.

[86] *DH* 2: ויבחרו שרי צרפת ומארטילו הקונדישטאבלי בטיאודוריקו אשר היה בעיניהם כקדש.

[87] Sabino, *Vite*, 3: "massime per opera di Martello fu creato Re Theodorico, quale era in grande opinione di Santita, e dicevasi essere stato allevato da certe monache appresso a Calese."

[88] *DH* 3: ויהי טיאודוריקו לעצלותו לנבזה בעיני העמים: וימשוך האפיפאור זאקריאה את פיפינו למלך וישוב טיאודוריקו לעבוד פסלו, כאשר בהיותו שם.

kingdom of the Franks, a project that has been neglected in the *Vite* since the days of Clovis. Naturally, Ha-Kohen followed suit.

<div align="center">CONCLUSION</div>

Though it is at times difficult to ascertain which compositions Ha-Kohen exploited for each segment of his work, he undeniably had access to and made frequent use of a variety of Christian historiographical compositions. The accessibility of a flourishing book trade in Genoa must have been very beneficial to him,[89] and indeed Sabino's 1525 printed edition likely arrived through this channel. As for the *Grandes chroniques*, the French conquest of northern Italy could have made the composition accessible in Genoa. Despite Ha-Kohen's commitment to write for a Jewish audience, his dependence on Christian sources cannot be overestimated. His decision to compose a world chronicle, moreover, sets him outside the historiographical horizons of his Jewish contemporaries, betraying his humanist influences. Ha-Kohen moved between these two poles, never settling comfortably in either tradition, and *Divrei Hayamim* reflect this duality throughout.

Ha-Kohen's adherence to a tripartite narrative model with regard to the Merovingians is primarily the result of his reliance on Sabino's work. Sabino was a partisan of the French, and many of the authorial decisions he made as a result reflect his political leanings. Loyalism, in this case, was expressed by adopting a narrative espoused by compositions like the *Grandes chroniques*, although whether Sabino actually worked with the text is impossible to say. Yet Sabino's humanist perspective, which favored a flowing, politically themed narrative as opposed to the *Grandes chroniques'* belabored, religiously inspired prose comes through clearly in his work. It is likewise a perspective adopted by Ha-Kohen, albeit in the service of a slightly different agenda.[90]

Ha-Kohen does not reveal himself in the first few chapters of *Divrei Hayamim* to be an especially innovative or groundbreaking historian. He mostly follows Sabino, and when he does depart from the *Vite*, it is usually to turn to older sources like the *Grandes chroniques*. In this sense, *Divrei Hayamim* was not subversive historiography. Yet Ha-Kohen does teach us something about the ways historical narrative and authorial structures traveled between cultures. While his world chronicle is infused with the humanist worldview of his Italian contemporaries, his relationship with the humanist perspective is noncommittal; when it ceases to suit him, he has no qualms about making alterations to the text or about using other sources. What emerges is no doubt an eclectic whole. It is nevertheless a composition that attempts to subtly harmonize Ha-Kohen's affinity to humanist historiography with his Jewish cultural sensibilities. Ha-Kohen's

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89 Jacobs, "Sephardic Migration" (n. 16 above), 523.
90 Jacobs, "Joseph ha-Kohen, Paolo Giovio" (n. 16 above), 78.

Merovingians are equally composite figures. Much like earlier renditions in medieval chronicles and early modern histories, the Merovingians' narrative arc of expansion-stasis-decline in *Divrei Hayamim* serves as scaffolding into which contemporary commentary may be injected.

Bar-Ilan University
yaniv.fox@biu.ac.il