Wout van Bekkum, Some Thoughts on the ‘Secularization’ of Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in Pre-Modern and Modern Times

In this article a few thoughts are shared on the historical range of attitudes towards Hebrew liturgical poetry or *piyyuṭ*, from the highly religious point of view to the more historical and scientific approach in pre-Wissenschaft and Wissenschaft times. Substantial contributions to a new understanding of *piyyuṭ* were made by Wolf Heidenheim and Leopold Zunz, each within their own framework of time and historical circumstances. These and other Jewish intellectuals reflect in their exploration and judgment of *piyyuṭ* the contemporary understanding of Judaism. As being a modern Jew seemed to require adapting to the culture of the environment without actually assimilating into it, what of Jewish worship should be adapted to new standards? On this issue in particular German Jews came to disagree among themselves when it came to the evaluation of *piyyuṭ* according to the norms of Spanish-Hebrew religious and secular poetry. The historical discussion of *piyyuṭ* as a dynamic literary phenomenon within Judaism is part of an amplification process of Jewish self-awareness in the modern world.

Shlomo Berger, From Philosophy to Popular Ethics: Two Seventeenth-Century Translations of Ibn Gabirol’s *Keter malkhut*

During the seventeenth century two Yiddish translations of Solomon ibn Gabirol’s *Keter malkhut* were published: one (in verse) was published in 1600 in Venice, the second (in prose) in 1673 in Amsterdam. The text that served as the basis of both Yiddish versions was the one found in the prayer book for the Day of Atonement according to the Sephardi rite. Although a masterpiece of Hebrew medieval poetry, both translations were conceived as a liturgical text intended for women and simple men. Thus, instead of remaining a poetical exercise of philosophical-theological ideas, the Yiddish versions turned the Hebrew poem into a sort of a prayer, a supplication, or an ethical treatise whose aim was to assist the Jews in conducting a pious life. The difficulties in finding Yiddish equivalents for various philosophical and other terms highlight the process of transferring the Hebrew poem into the Ashkenazi world of ideas.

Shmuel Feiner, From Renaissance to Revolution: The Eighteenth Century in Jewish History

In this contribution I argue that quite a few of the conundrums of the Jews’ tremendously significant transition from the old world to the modern world can be under-
stood in a new way if the scholar takes in a broad, synchronic and multi-voiced view of the entire eighteenth century. The historian who listens to the various voices of the eighteenth century, who reads the texts and attempts to distinguish between processes of renewal on the one hand and desperate attempts to hold on to the old world on the other, can no longer be completely satisfied with the concepts that are offered by Jacob Katz’ model of modernization. In lieu of Katz’ ‘Tradition and Crisis’ model, it would be best to interpret the Jewish eighteenth century through the insight of complex and multifaceted Jewish modernization. In this century elements of the old and the new worlds were intermixed and sometimes engaged in a struggle. It was an unstable century, which perhaps may be called a ‘melting pot’ of the modern Jewish world. Everything began in it, and nothing actually ended in it, a fascinating century of many innovations, contradictions, disputes, uncertainties and hesitations. When we focus the historian’s spotlight on the intellectual elite, we may discern, amidst the complex events affecting European Jewry in this century, a renaissance manifested by the early Haskalah and a revolution wrought by the maskilim in the last two decades.

Resianne Fontaine, Natural Science in Sefer ha-Berit: Pinchas Hurwitz on Animals and Meteorological Phenomena

This contribution studies the relation of two sections of Pinchas Hurwitz’s encyclopaedia Sefer ha-Berit (1797) to thirteenth century Hebrew encyclopedias of science and philosophy by examining Hurwitz’s use and evaluation of (i) medieval views; (ii) modern scientific theories, and (iii) traditional Jewish and kabbalistic sources. Although Hurwitz considers medieval views to have been superseded by modern scientific discoveries and inventions – which he describes in great detail – and despite his general preference for traditional and kabbalistic teachings, medieval views and sources appear to play a role in Sefer ha-Berit. Moreover, Hurwitz’s ambivalent attitude towards modern science and philosophy (medieval and modern) can be seen as a continuation of similar tendencies displayed by certain medieval and early-modern authors who, while convinced of the need to disseminate secular learning, were at the same time sceptical about the validity of rational knowledge.

Carlos Fraenkel, Maimonides, Spinoza, Solomon Maimon, and the Completion of the Copernican Revolution in Philosophy

Maimon once described the philosophical project underlying his Essay on Transcendental Philosophy as an attempt ‘to unify Kantian philosophy with Spinozism’. However, in the only reference to Spinoza in the Essay, he stresses that Spinoza was not the source of his argumentation. The thesis for which I will argue in this paper is that, notwithstanding the disclaimer, Maimon’s solution for the problems that in his view haunted Kant’s theory of knowledge was indeed significantly influenced by Spinoza, as well as by the medieval Jewish Aristotelian Maimonides. Since the key concept in this solution is the metaphysical doctrine of the ‘infinite intellect’, my focus will be on clarifying how this doctrine is related to Maimonides’ doctrine of the divine intellect, and to Spinoza’s doctrine of Deus sive Natura. My main contention is that
Maimon’s doctrine of the ‘infinite intellect’ may be described as a Spinozistic interpretation of Maimonides’ doctrine of the divine intellect.

Gad Freudenthal, Hebrew Medieval Science in Zamosc, ca. 1730: The Early Years of Rabbi Israel ben Moses Halevi of Zamosc

This paper studies the life and work of Israel b. Moses Halevi of Zamość up to the publication of Neşah Yisra’el in 1741. It is shown that Israel was a self-made early maskil, whose non-conformist positions derive from the supreme authority he ascribed to science, itself due to his commitment to the philosophy of Moses Maimonides. Nearly all of Israel’s scientific information derived from medieval Hebrew sources. The formation of Israel’s frame of mind is set in the local context of the town of Zamość, where Israel had important ‘allies’ who are here identified. It is suggested that a Sephardi tradition of science study may have survived in the town. Grounding some of his Talmud interpretation in mathematical science, Israel felt entitled to criticize venerated Talmudic scholars, making Neşah Yisra’el into a text subversive of entrenched authority. Paradoxically, Israel’s outdated medieval Hebrew science was an instrument for promoting progress. This study shows that the tradition of Polish scholars of Halakhah with mild sympathies to Maimonides’ philosophy contributed to the autonomous emergence of early Haskalah in Poland.

Steven Harvey, The Introductions of Early Enlightenment Thinkers as Harbingers of the Renewed Interest in the Medieval Jewish Philosophers

This paper concerns itself with certain underlying themes of the present volume: to what extent were the authors of the early Jewish Enlightenment familiar with the medieval Jewish philosophers? To what extent did they cite them? How did they understand them? I address these questions with regard to several thinkers, including Israel Zamosc, Naphtali Hirsch Goslar, Judah Loeb Margolioth, and Pinchas Elias Hurwitz, on the basis of their introductions to their own works The paper is intended to suggest that their introductions may be viewed as heralds of a renewed interest in the medieval Jewish philosophers. It begins by providing evidence for the view that there was relatively little interest in the classic works of medieval Jewish philosophy from roughly the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-eighteenth century. It then illustrates various ways in which the introductions of the early maskilim signal a renewed interest in the medieval Jewish philosophers.

Warren Zev Harvey, Mendelssohn and Maimon on the Tree of Knowledge

Regarding the Tree of Knowledge, Moses Mendelssohn and Solomon Maimon were both influenced by Maimonides, but rejected his view that moral rules are merely ‘generally accepted opinions’ and argued that they are known by reason. Developing ideas of Judah Halevi and Nahmanides, Mendelssohn held that eating from the Tree of Knowledge increased the faculty of desire, and thus broke the prior equilibrium between reason and desire. Sin is born when desire overpowers reason. Developing a Kantian idea, Maimon held that eating from the Tree of Knowledge represents the preoccupation with relative good and evil (i.e., things that are not good or evil in
themselves) instead of natural good and evil (i.e., things that are good or evil in themselves). Sin is born when means are confused with ends.

Albert van der Heide, The Be’ur in Progress: Salt and Spices at a Medieval Banquet

The decisive role of Moses Mendelssohn’s Be’ur project in the history of the Haskalah is universally known and widely acclaimed. Yet the first thing that strikes the competent reader of the Be’ur proper, i.e., the commentary accompanying the German translation of the biblical text written by several collaborators and supervised by Mendelssohn, is its traditional, ‘medieval’ character and content. Although it can be shown that Mendelssohn was fully cognizant of contemporary biblical scholarship, the commentary is almost exclusively based on the views of rabbinical and medieval Jewish authorities. A detailed inventory of the exegetical strategies employed in the commentary on the chapters Genesis 22 and Exodus 19 and 20 shows the extent to which the Be’ur would rely on traditional sources. Occasionally, however, these familiar dishes had to be ‘salted and spiced’ with Mendelssohn’s own views.

Raphael Jospe, Moses Mendelssohn: A Medieval Modernist

Mendelssohn’s religious thought is traditional, reflecting Saadia Gaon, Abraham ibn Ezra and Judah Halevi on issues such as Jewish particularity, historical truth, revelation, the superiority of the Hebrew language, biblical poetry and oral communication. His introduction and commentary to the Torah reflect medieval exegesis; his silence on critical questions (in Ibn Ezra) is deafening. By contrast, Mendelssohn’s political philosophy in Jerusalem is radically modern. Instead of the medieval notion of the state as embodying absolute religious truth and fostering spiritual salvation, Mendelssohn affirms a modern instrumental view of the state as concerned with practical, temporal matters, tolerating and encouraging religious diversity. Judaism is the positive religion closest to natural religion. Judaism’s rationality and pluralistic inclusivism (‘the righteous of all nations have a portion in the world to come’) go beyond Locke’s and Lessing’s toleration and foster genuine pluralism. Judaism is thus not merely compatible with modernity; it is ultimately the most modern religion.

Thomas Kollatz, Under the Cover of Tradition: Old and New Science in the Works of Aron Salomon Gumpertz

Aron Salomon Gumpertz (1723-1769) was one of the few Jews who participated in the eighteenth-century scholarly world and its exchange of ideas. Gumpertz published three works which prove his interest in the contemporary scientific discourse: a (Latin) doctoral thesis on the ancient doctrine of the four humours, a (German) revision of Loeseke’s best-selling compendium on pharmaceutics, and a (Hebrew) supercommentary on a medieval bible commentary. In his best-known work, Megalleh sod, a supercommentary on Abraham Ibn Ezra’s commentary on the five megillot, Gumpertz took Ibn Ezra’s medieval knowledge as a starting point for introducing eighteenth-century scientific discoveries into Jewish discourse. In a similar way he tended, in his other works, to supplement, augment and occasionally even modify tra-
ditional concepts. Thus insights of contemporary scientific research spread among Jews (through the supercommentary) and non-Jews (through his thesis and the Loeseke revision) through Gumpertz’ mediation.

David B. Ruderman, The Impact of Early Modern Jewish Thought on the Eighteenth Century: A Challenge to the Notion of the Sephardi Mystique

This paper raises certain questions about the conference’s basic assumption of the critical impact of medieval Jewish thought on eighteenth-century Jewish thinkers. While the eighteenth century paid homage to Jewish medieval thinkers like Maimonides and Ibn Ezra, in many respects they were proving inadequate as sources of knowledge and insight. In the area of natural philosophy they were obsolete. In search of a traditional pedigree for their strong scientific proclivities, eighteenth-century writers on nature rather turned to the early modern writers whose physics had already been divorced from an outdated and repudiated Aristotelian metaphysics. Similarly, in the areas of history and apologetics, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jewish thinkers read with great interest the literary creations of their early modern ancestors. As in the case of science, their own interests coincided more directly with the latter, whose social and cultural concerns were indeed closer. For some, medieval and early modern kabbalistic thinking was even compatible with modernity, certainly more so than medieval philosophy. Although anchored in a remote past, its epistemological pliability and its correlations with other philosophies, ancient and modern, allowed for a creative dialogue between the Jewish tradition and modernist thinking. Medieval Sephardi thinkers become more important as cultural icons for their modern Jewish counterparts than as actual sources of knowledge and insight. At least with respect to science, history, apologetics, and Kabbalah, early modern Jewish thought, especially in Italy, left a more significant mark on their thinking. If I am correct in calling for a reevaluation of the impact of early-modern Jewish thought on the eighteenth century and beyond, perhaps such a reevaluation also calls into question the originality and the overall intellectual creativity usually associated with the Haskalah in Jewish historiography. Here I am asking: Why is the ideational world of the Haskalah traditionally perceived as a radical break from the past, iconoclastically shaping a new secular consciousness, a new intellectual elite, and a new construction of Jewish identity? How novel, how revolutionary indeed was its intellectual production? From the perspective of the dynamic intellectual universe of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the eighteenth century in Jewish thought seems less spectacular in the novelty of its formulations than previously assumed.

Andrea Schatz, Returning to Sepharad: Maskilic Reflections on Hebrew in the Diaspora

This essay asks how the evocations and explorations of Sepharad in maskilic writings on the Hebrew language differ from the seventeenth-century interest in contemporary Sephardi communities and from the nineteenth-century fascination with medieval Sepharad. The *maskilim* referred to medieval texts as well as to contemporary practices, examined them critically and integrated them into a complex set of traditions
that would allow them to create their own version of a modern Jewish culture. It was not imitation they had in mind, but transformation and adaptation. For this reason, later moments in history, which could be interpreted as successful renewals of Sephardi political and cultural traditions – notably the examples of Italy, Amsterdam, and the Ottoman Empire – sometimes seemed to be more important than medieval Sepharad itself. At the end of the eighteenth century, however, it became questionable whether it was feasible to return to Sepharad in order to make it part of the genealogy of Jewish modernity. According to Judah Leib Ben Ze’ev, the very conditions that seemed to indicate that Sepharad might remain relevant – tolerance, commerce, open-mindedness – created a radical historical discontinuity. Thus, the world of Sepharad receded into the distant past – a precondition for the emergence of both historical analysis and the imaginative ‘Sephardi Mystique’.

Emile G.L. Schrijver. Saul of Berlin’s Besamim rosh: The Maskilic Appreciation of Medieval Knowledge

Saul of Berlin’s Besamim rosh, published in Berlin in 1793 at the press of the Jüdische Freyschule, is a cause célèbre in the history of Haskalah literature and has been dealt with quite extensively in the recent literature. It contains 392 responsa, ascribed to Asher ben Yeiel and other sages and, according to the title-page, collected by Isaac de Molina. Saul of Berlin only claimed to have prepared them for the press and to have added a commentary. The article examines the historical background of the publication and its discussion in the relevant scholarly literature. It confirms that Saul of Berlin was, as is generally believed on the basis of their controversial content, the actual author of the responsa, and comments some common conceptions of its background. Saul’s choice for Isaac de Molina as the assumed author indicates his peculiar character, since Isaac is not only fairly unknown, but also had a rather negative reputation. Saul’s claim that he published the responsa from a manuscript indicates his and his contemporaries’ appreciation of manuscript sources, whereas his choice for Asher ben Yeiel, a scholar of Ashkenazi descent, who was active in Sepharad, represents a true case of ‘Ashkenaz in Sepharad’. The article is followed by an appendix listing manuscripts relevant to the topic ‘Sepharad in Ashkenaz’ that once belonged to famous Haskalah libraries and were auctioned in Christie’s in New York on 23 June 1999.

Adam Shear, Judah Halevi’s Sefer ha-Kuzari in Early Modern Ashkenaz in the Early Haskalah: A Case Study in the Transmission of Cultural Knowledge

In the eighteenth century, Judah Halevi’s twelfth-century Sefer ha-Kuzari attracted the interest of crucial figures of the Berlin Haskalah. Later, their understandings of the work were disseminated to a wider audience in Central and Eastern Europe. This ‘maskilic Kuzari’ was a vehicle for education and a text cited to justify philosophical study, while asserting the superiority of Judaism. However, the maskilic interest did not emerge ex nihilo. Before the middle of the eighteenth century, some Ashkenazi Jews read and cited the Kuzari. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the work was primarily a source of information. By the beginning of the eighteenth cen-

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tury, we detect a shift toward a more programmatic approach in which the work was cited as an example of worthwhile literature in arguments for educational reform. This set the stage for the mobilization of the work in support of the Haskalah’s cultural agenda.

Irene E. Zwiep, Jewish Enlightenment reconsidered: the Dutch eighteenth century

In modern historiography, Jewish Enlightenment in the Netherlands generally has been equated with Jewish political and social emancipation on the one hand, and with epigonic, Haskalah-inspired literary culture on the other. In my contribution I wish to question these simple equations, by exploring the eighteenth-century, local, antecedents of these – essentially nineteenth-century – phenomena. During the second half of the eighteenth century, a set of new cultural practices and strategies (rather than concepts and beliefs) arose among the Jews in the Republic, which together betray a budding, if always cautiously voiced, modernity on their part. This ‘modernity clad in tradition’ expressed itself in: (i) the new Hebrew, part religious, part secular, canon that was nurtured by the Sephardi semi-elite in Amsterdam; (ii) various innovative publications fostered by varying constellations of Dutch and international, Ashkenazi as well as Sephardi, ‘early maskilim’; (iii) the intellectual eclecticism of the local rabbis, who seem to have experienced a moderate ‘enlightenment by proxy’; (iv) the strikingly ‘linguistic’ dimension of many Dutch-Jewish enlightened enterprises; (v) a new ‘library awareness’ that can be witnessed among scholars and collectors alike. Whenever possible, the survey draws attention to the parallels between eighteenth-century Sephardi and Ashkenazi intellectual life, highlighting the modest yet productive dynamic that would occasionally develop between the two cultural spheres.