WAS SOLOMON, COUNT OF ROUSSILLON, A JEWISH KING OF NARBONNE?

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ABSTRACT

This study supports the hypothesis of Arthur Zuckerman that Solomon, Count of Roussillon, was a Jewish king of Narbonne, but without definite evidence. Zuckerman's further hypothesis that Solomon was identical with Bernard, Count of Auvergne, is rejected.

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Zuckerman (1972) maintained that the Jewish kings of Narbonne were also recognised by the Carolingian kings as Counts and Dukes of Toulouse. The only historical account of the Kings of Narbonne (probably from the 12th century CE) says that they descended from Makhir, a Prince of the House of David and a learned rabbi, sent from Baghdad by the Caliph in the time of Charlemagne. About the same time, a man named Natronai who had been Exilarch, *ie* head of the Jews of the exile, was deposed from that position and removed to the West. Zuckerman maintained that Natronai was the Aramaic name of Makhir (a Hebrew name), a plausible but far from certain identification. I have suggested (Kelley, 1977-78) that they may have been brothers, but that is equally uncertain. It seems reasonably certain that both were of the House of David (as then recognised) and likely descendants of the Exilarch Bustanai, of the 6th century CE, since it was alleged that he was the sole survivor of the Babylonian branch of the family.

Who was Makhir?

Blumenkranz (1971), one of the leading authorities on French Judaism during the medieval period, has a curiously confused and inaccurate account of Makhir in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (sub Narbonne). Our information about Makhir and his descendants derives entirely from the *Chronicle of Narbonne*, a document probably originating in the 12th century CE and inserted into one copy of the *Sefer Ha Kabbala* of Abraham ibn Daud[2]. According to Blumenkranz, this document gives Makhir's father as Judah, but there is no mention of Judah in the *Chronicle of Narbonne*. Blumenkranz goes on to misidentify Makhir of Narbonne with Makhir ben Judah of Mainz. Table I shows that the two men have little in common other than their name and a reputation as Jewish scholars. Zuckerman identified Makhir with Theuderic (whom he miscalls Theodoric, as do many other scholars), ancestor of the Counts and Dukes of Toulouse. Theuderic had been identified as a Count of Narbonne by earlier scholars, and this was accepted by Zuckerman. A study of the Zuckerman hypothesis by Taylor (1997)[3] showed that the evidence making Theuderic a Count of Narbonne was scanty and largely misinterpreted.

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2 Ibn Daud's tendentious and careless work, written in Arabic in Spain, was translated with commentary by Cohen (1967).

3 Taylor shows that alleged hard evidence for Zuckerman's equations is all inadequate or mistaken. His discussion of Zuckerman's use of onomastic evidence and material from the *chansons de geste* is minimal, but it is fair to say that he demonstrates that Zuckerman's use of such materials is unsystematic and uncritical.

Table I. ***Makhir and the Founding of Narbonne***

	A	B
Name of founder	Makhir	Makhir
Place of origin	Baghdad (Babylon)	Mainz, Germany
Ancestry	of the House of David	known to derive from LeMans, France
Parentage	not specified	son of Judah
Known relatives	descendants in the 12th century are the earliest mentioned	brother of Gershom, very famous Talmudic scholar; descendants largely wiped out during the 1st crusade
Principle abode	Narbonne	Mainz (no know personal connection with France)
Date	in the time of Charlemagne	Gershom was born c.950-960, d.1028
Status	royal, noble; called *rex* [king] and *nasi* [prince]; said to have intermarried with local nobility[4]	no known connections to nobility
Arms	descendants used seals with coats of arms from the 12th century on, showing a crowned lion of Judah	no coat of arms
Possessions	royal palace; allodial lands – believed in the 12th century to have received one third of Narbonne – the kind owned over 30 houses when the kingdom was ended	apparently a personal house
Scholarship	Rabbis, expert in the Babylonian Talmud	Rabbis, expert in the Palestinian Talmud
Script used (little survives in Narbonne)	Italian-Babylonian (we have the signature of one kind and rabbi, written Kalonymos ben Todros)	German-Palestinian
Yeshiva or Academy	In the 10th century there were 2 academies in Babylon, one in Palestine, and one in Narbonne. The Rector was called a Gaon. Makhir's first named descendant was both King and Gaon.	Gershom was a very famous teacher but his school was not considered an academy. However two centuries later it probably would have been an academy.

[4] One Frankish noblewoman, probably in the 12th century, became a convert to Judaism and married a member of the royal family of Narbonne.

The crucial factor was probably the further identification of Theuderic's son, William of Orange, of the *chansons de geste*, son of Aimeric de Narbonne and the consequent identification of Theuderic and Aimeric de Narbonne.

Bédier (1926-29) would not have accepted such a simplistic formulation for he maintained that up to 16 Williams may have been the prototype of the epic William of Orange. In the sense that the epic William attracted fragments of story from other historical and epic figures (not necessarily only those named William), there may be some truth in this. However, the key defining characteristics of William of Orange in the *chansons de geste* are those of Charlemagne's supporter, William of Toulouse. It should be emphasised that William was a very rare name in the 8th century CE, although it rapidly became more common. The epic William is associated with Charlemagne's Spanish campaigns, his wife is named Guiborc (or Witburg), and he ends up a monk (albeit brawling and boisterous) at Gellone – all parallels with the historic William. According to the *chansons de geste*[5], William of Orange had a brother, Aimeric the captive, a prisoner of the Arabs at Venice, who ultimately married the daughter of his Arab captor. This Aimeric is also historically attested (Demaison, 1887, pp.cxxiv, cxxv) under the year 810 in the annals of Eginhard. He appears as *Haimricum comitem olim a Saracenis captum*, freed when the Byzantine emperor, Nicephorus, captured Venice and made peace with the Arab ruler and with Charlemagne. Demaison suggested the possibility that this Count might also be the prototype of Aimeric de Narbonne himself. Without additional data this interesting suggestion cannot be further appraised. Zuckerman's suggestion that Aimeric's name might be a corruption of "al-Makhiri" has nothing to recommend it, either textually or linguistically. Supporting evidence for the identification of William's parents as Theuderic and Alda is desirable, since the source of the statements is a copy of a charter which has been substantially altered. Forged charters are not necessarily a more reliable source of information than *chansons de geste* although they are, of necessity, frequently used by Carolingian historians. Zuckerman (1972, pp.180-181) maintained that a document of 791 CE mentioned the contemporary Count of Narbonne as Maghario, although it had previously been read Magnario. He showed that the letters read *–gn-* in the name of the Count varied from the letters read *–gn-* in *regnante.* Maghario would be a linguistically appropriate rendering of Makhir. He maintained that this proved that the Jewish king of Narbonne was also functioning as a Carolingian Count of the city. The original of the rest of the document is not known, so scribal variation elsewhere in it cannot be checked. Taylor (1997, pp.210-211) shows that the letters in the Count's name are within the range of variation of *–gn-* elsewhere and that *–gh-* is usually different in other documents. This makes Magnario slightly more likely from a palaeographic viewpoint, but in my opinion neither interpretation is proven. There is no other evidence of anyone named Magnarius nor any onomastically associated name at Narbonne (except for the use of Magnarius elsewhere as a Frankish equivalent for Manasseh, which is onomastically associated in the bible with Makhir!). There is no other evidence of Makhir as a Count of Narbonne. Whether a Jew might become a count will be considered later.

The name Macaire appears in the *chansons de geste*, but not as a Count of Narbonne. Bryant-Abraham (1996-97) shows how Macaire may be derived linguistically from

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[5] Langlois (1904) provides a magnificent index to those *chansons* to which he had access, allowing easy determination of parallels. In other studies his general degree of recognition and acceptance of historic parallels seems to me far more balanced than Bédier's.

Makhir[6]. His explanation will not apply to the Greek Makarios which has also been suggested as a basis for Macaire, and no-one has offered an explanation showing how Makarios might become Macaire. However I shall make no attempt to use evidence from the *chansons de geste* here.

Isaac the Ambassador

An account of a Jewish delegation to Charlemagne sent by the Jewish King to seek confirmation of the Jewish kingship of Narbonne is preserved in two versions, one the novelistic *Gesta Karoli Magni ad Carcassonam et Narbonam*, or *Pseudo-Philomena* and the other a brief statement by Dumège. In all checkable details Dumège is more reliable. The leader of the delegation was Isaac. The *Pseudo-Philomena* puts the date of the delegation at the time of the conquest of the Islamic rulers of Narbonne in 759. Dumège puts the date at 791. Taylor (1997, p.216) cites the *Pseudo-Philomena* date as an indication of the chronological impossibility of equating Isaac with William. However, there is no chronological difficulty if the 791 date of Dumège and Zuckerman is accepted. Zuckerman (1972, pp.138-139) argues that Isaac was acting as the representative of the Jews for his postulated father, Makhir. His argument that this Isaac is William is partly independent of his proposition that Isaac, who acted as an ambassador from Charlemagne to Harūn-al-rashid, was identical with William. Taylor (1997, pp.207, 214) points out that "most scholars" prefer to date William's conquest of Barcelona in 801 rather than 803 and that this would make it chronologically impossible for William to be identical with Isaac the ambassador. However the astronomical evidence cited by Zuckerman (1972, p.195) from Ermoldus Nigellus is explicit, clear and only possible for 803. "Most scholars" are wrong on the date.

For present purposes my interest is in the Jewish princes rather than the postulated identities with the family of William. In those terms it is reasonable to suggest that Isaac may have been the successor of Makhir, but the evidence is certainly not clear cut.

The Appearance of Solomon

I shall not discuss William's son, Bernard, and Bernard's son, a second William, both identified by Zuckerman as rulers of the Jews of Narbonne. There is some evidence (not discussed by Zuckerman) for Jewishness of each of them. This is complex and depends on *chansons de geste* and hagiographic documents. Use of such materials would involve far too much preliminary justification to be appropriate here. Zuckerman (1972, chapter 11), makes Solomon, Count of Conflent (Cerdagne) and Rousillon, Marquis of Spain, the successor of William as ruler of Narbonne. The onomastic evidence cannot be treated here in detail, but in the 8th and 9th centuries CE a number of Jewish names appeared for the first time in what is now France, often partially equated with particular Frankish names. At that time the Franco-Roman nobility consistently gave names derived from relatives[7]. Named relatives may sometimes be decidedly distant, as in the case of Radbod, Bishop of Utrecht, named for his mother's great-great-grandfather, Radbod, King of Frisia, according to the explicit testimony of his biographer. After the Jewish names first appear, they are inherited thereafter like other names of "French" nobility.

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[6] "*Phonetically the Hebrew/Aramaic name Mākhir would have been rendered in Langue d'Oc as Macaire since the voiceless fricative is not a constituent of the Occitan phonemic inventory and articulation of the final, unstressed shwa is optional.*" (Bryant Abraham, 1996-97, part 4, p.6).

[7] I know of one case among several hundred prior to 750 CE where a Frank was apparently named for a biblical figure.

Some of the names are prominent biblical names; others seem to be Aramaic, or even Persian. One of these unexpected names is that of Solomon, who held such a powerful position in the March of Spain. There would seem to be three primary possibilities as to why he was given the name:

1. that it was given to him simply as a matter of a change in onomastic style and a tendency to adopt biblical names;

2. that he was a Christian of either Jewish or Islamic ancestry;

3. that he was himself Jewish or Islamic.

The evidence of the adoption of Jewish names in the Carolingian empire still seems to me more suggestive of patterns of intermarriage than of a change in style. The choice between regarding him as a Christian or a Jew hinges partly on the question of whether a non-Christian could hold such a hierarchical position as Count, with authority over Christians. Certainly his identity as a King of Narbonne would have been possible only if he were recognised as Jewish by the Jewish community. It is of course possible that he was recognised as a Christian when among Christians and as a Jew when among Jews, but that would have been a very dangerous game to play, even for a person with a great deal of political power. Tournal (1864, cited by Zuckerman, 1972, p.169) maintained that the Jews of Narbonne "*wielded power over ecclesiastical institutions and offices*". Since Conflent included Narbonne at that time, Solomon would have been the effective Count of Narbonne. Tournal's claim cannot be verified from contemporaneous documents known to me, but would seem to imply that some Jews held at least comital powers.

Solomon and Sugnar

In 863-4, Solomon was King Charles' ambassador to Cordova. His relative, Sugnar, had died in Saragossa (itself very unusual, if he were Christian) and Solomon desired to get an order from the Caliph to bring the body back to Conflent. Instead he was given the remains of the martyr Saint Vincent, which Solomon brought back with him. Sugnar (Suniaire, Sanyor, etc) had previously been Count of Roussillon and was a close relative (*parens, consanguineus*) of Solomon. The derivation of the name Sugnar is not known to me, but it does not seem to have a Latin etymology. The name Sugmar is attested among Palestinian Jews by at least the 11th century CE (Gil, 1992) and an *–m-* to *–n-* shift is found in other terms borrowed from Hebrew into Provençal (*cf mamzer*, bastard, found in Provençal as *manser*). Hence the anomaly of Solomon's Jewish name is compounded by the possibly Jewish name of Sugnar, which is not biblical. To me it seems strong support for Zuckerman's basic conclusion.

A substantial segment of Zuckerman's argument for the identification of Solomon as a Jewish leader derives from a pedigree from a Parma MS[8]. This manuscript mentions a Makhir "*of the County of Auvergne, son of Solomon, he who broke in pieces the horn of the scoffer in the Province of Reims by the name of Hincmarus*". This is Zuckerman's translation and there are a considerable number of arguable interpretations. The onomastics strongly suggest a connection with the family of Makhir of Mainz and it seems to me probable that both families derive from the Kings of Narbonne. However the genealogy of Solomon is forced into a fit with the Toulouse family in a way which seems to me quite unacceptable. Zuckerman's additional arguments to equate Solomon with Bernard, Count of Auvergne, also seem to me unjustified.

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[8] Biblioteca Palatina MS Codex de Rossi, No.12 (2004) – Zuckerman (1972, pp.306-308).

Sugnar had been Count of Rousillon as early as 843. The last previously attested Count of Rousillon had been Berengar of Friul, from 832 until his death in 835. Berengar was the successor of Gaucelm, son of William of Gellone, who was deprived of all his offices in 832 and executed in 834. It is possible that Gaucelm was the grandfather of Solomon, which would be in better agreement with Zuckerman's overall position than Zuckerman's own attempt to place him genealogically, since the title *rex* at that time in that area should have passed only in the male line. However the identification of Solomon as a Jewish King of Narbonne is essentially independent of Zuckerman's other identifications and is *a priori* the most probable of his ideas.

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