

CHAPTER 7

The Maiden Possessed

One day, exhausted from crying at her mother's grave, Hannah Rochel fell asleep in the cemetery. Upon waking in the evening, the girl looked around and saw that she was alone. In terror, she started to run home, zigzagging through the tombstones of the "holy men of old,"¹ until she tripped and collapsed on one of the graves. Hearing her cry, the caretaker of the cemetery ran to see what had happened. After helping Hannah Rochel to her feet, the caretaker accompanied her home, where she fell into a coma. For several weeks, Monesh Verbermacher kept a vigil at his daughter's side. He brought in expert doctors and *ba'ale shem*, but no one could help the girl.

Eventually everyone except for Monesh gave up hope in her recovery. In desperation, Monesh prayed at his wife's grave for merciful intercession, but even this brought no change in his comatose daughter. Finally Monesh decided to travel to Mordechai of Chernobyl, since "he who gave the blessing to his wife to give birth to his daughter — will also give one for her recovery." The zaddik of Chernobyl received Monesh, and after hearing his story responded, "Return home, your daughter will recover and you will receive from her great comfort but also great sorrow."² Monesh returned to Ludmir and resumed his vigil. A few days later, Hannah Rochel suddenly opened her eyes and spoke the following words to her father, sending a chill down his spine: "Just now I was in

heaven, in a meeting of the supreme *bet din*, and there they gave me a new, very lofty soul.”³

There was good reason for Monesh Verbermacher to be both amazed and troubled by his daughter’s simple sentence. As a pious Jew, Monesh had probably heard tales of rabbis whose souls had ascended to heaven and observed the heavenly court while their bodies remained on earth. Indeed, the Baal Shem Tov himself had described ascending to heaven in a letter written to his brother-in-law, Gershon of Kutów, which the Besht’s disciple, Jacob Joseph of Polonne, had first published in 1781.⁴ The hagiographical collection *Shivhei Ha-Besht* also related how during a Yom Kippur service the Besht’s soul had ascended to heaven while his body underwent horrible convulsions in the synagogue.⁵ Although a rich precedent existed for Hannah Rochel’s heavenly ascent and vision, the people who accomplished such ascents were famous rabbis and mystics, like Rabbi Ishmael and the Baal Shem Tov, while Hannah Rochel was a thirteen-year-old girl. To confuse matters even further, Hannah Rochel also claimed that she had received a new, sublime soul. Monesh Verbermacher may have known that pious Jewish men could receive new and higher souls according to the Kabbalah, but he was undoubtedly aware that young Jewish women on the verge of marriage, like his own daughter, were the typical victims of dybbuk possession.

In Horodezky’s work, Hannah Rochel’s description of her vision constitutes a single — albeit highly provocative — sentence. Indeed the words quoted above are the only ones Horodezky attributes to the Maiden of Ludmir. While some authors basically repeat this concise version of the heavenly vision, others provide a much more detailed description of the event. David Mekler and, following him, Mordechai Biber both portray the vision as at once an internal struggle within Hannah Rochel and a heavenly trial conducted by opposing sets of angels. Hannah Rochel and the heavenly jurists are troubled by the same thing: the tension between her “male” religious behavior — Torah study and prayer — and her “female” romantic longing.

The prosecuting and defending angels in Hannah Rochel’s trial function like two sections of a Greek chorus, each offering a different evaluation of the girl’s life. In this debate, the angels may represent rabbinic authority, a phenomenon with a precedent in the early Jewish mystical texts known as Merkabah or Hekhalot literature. David Halperin has argued that in this literature, the angels who oppose the heavenly ascent of the Merkabah mystics represent their earthly rabbinic opponents.

Halperin identifies the mystics themselves as members of the nonrabbinic group called the *'am ha-aretz*, or “people of the land.”⁶ In both cases, social conflict on earth has been transposed into a heavenly setting, where a disenfranchised individual (the Maiden of Ludmir) or group (the Merkabah mystics) is portrayed as ascending to heaven and triumphing over their elitist angelic/rabbinic opponents.

Although the Maiden of Ludmir’s trial occurs in the heavenly court (*bet din*), God does not serve as the judge (interestingly, God is likewise absent from most of the Hekhalot texts). Instead, the angels call on Mordechai of Chernobyl to decide the fate of the girl, since his blessing was responsible for her birth. As we will see in chapter 9, the heavenly trial foreshadows the future struggle between the Maiden’s opponents and defenders in Ludmir, a struggle in which the Chernobler Rebbe will also play a decisive role. In contrast to this later episode, however, in the heavenly trial the Chernobler Rebbe abdicates his authority in favor of the Maiden herself. Thus the Maiden is both defendant and judge in her own trial, a detail suggesting that, on one level at least, her vision reflects an internal psychological conflict. Consequently both God and the Chernobler Rebbe are relieved of responsibility for the trial’s provocative — and, from a number of perspectives, problematic — outcome.

Let us now turn to Mekler’s description of Hannah Rochel’s heavenly trial:

I was just now in heaven and was taken in front of the heavenly family [*familia shel ma'alab*]. It was having a trial about whether I should remain alive or die. Defenders came for me and declared my merits. They declared what a good and pious Jewish daughter I had been, how [I] had done more than the law had required from a woman, had learned and prayed. And how I had been pure in my thoughts as in my actions. But accusers also came and declared my wrongdoing. I was not a woman like other women, they argued, and it is not according to the way of nature [*ke-derekh ha-teva*] that I should do things which only men must do. Learning Torah and devoting myself to worship is not women’s business. My love for Dovidl, they said, indicated that I was still no more than a woman, with a woman’s heart and soul [*neshamah*], and it is a desecration of God’s Torah that there should be a constant struggle in my heart between the female and the male: there must be a clash between the higher duties, which I alone had taken upon myself, as if I were a man, and the duties of a wife, whose task is only to do the will of her husband.⁷

The angelic defenders and accusers struggled back and forth, with the former arguing that the Maiden should return to life, marry, and have children, while the latter argued that the Maiden must die:

Long were the claims argued by both sides, and I can barely relay that which was said about me. I only knew and felt that both sides spoke the truth. On the one hand my heart inclined me to a higher life — to a life for men, given over to Torah and worship. However, on the other hand I am no more than a sinful woman, whose heart bursts from a man's glance, whose entire desire expresses itself in wanting to speak a few words with her beloved. Apparently the heavenly court was in great perplexity and didn't know how to judge. It occurred to one of the court that they must ask the Chernobler Magid. By his merit was my soul sent to this world, that one said. He must declare what they must do with me now. The Chernobler was asked in a dream what his decision was. The Chernobler did not want to be depended on [in this matter]. He did, however, give a suggestion that strongly pleased the heavenly family. His advice was that they must ask me alone. . . . They called me before the heavenly family and posed the question to me, namely, what do I want to be done with me — whether I should return to health or die. I did not think for long and shortly gave my answer: I began with a biblical verse from King David: "I will not die but will live and declare the work of God." I also cited the biblical verse "The dead do not praise God." I want to live, I said, not to enjoy idle pleasures of the sinful world. I won't even enjoy that which is usual for flesh and blood to enjoy, I said. If I live it is only to be able to continue learning God's Torah, to delve more deeply into the secrets of the Yotser (Creator) and the Yetsirah (Creation) and I will fully renounce all pleasures of the world. I am punished, however, in that I have the soul of a woman. I cannot elevate myself. I am limited. I would like to be given a new soul, a lofty soul, a soul that must be able to raise itself higher than its surroundings and must be able to tear out from my heart all the sinful and worthless thoughts. I want a soul that must thirst for God's word, that must only find pleasure [*ta'anug*] in God's Torah and that must forget the material world and its pettiness . . .

From the beginning my words had a strange effect. It was evident that I had confused the heavenly judges. Perhaps they had never heard such a thing.

That will be against the way of nature, they said. It will mean going against the order of the world [*seder ha-olam*], and that cannot and must not be permitted . . .

However, I already felt my power. The ruling was still left over to me; I could decide as I wanted, I thought. But to be fair, I said I would take a lofty and great soul, but would tear out from my own heart all the things that a woman feels: that with my own powers I would raise myself over everything and would only live in the world of emanation [*olam ha-atsilut*] (in a spiritual world) . . .

My judgment was enacted. It was decided that I must receive altogether a lofty soul. And with this I woke up.⁸

Although Mekler's detailed account shares the basic conclusion of Horodezky's more succinct version — Hannah Rochel receives a new, higher soul — the "transcript" of the trial introduces a number of important elements. Significantly, Hannah Rochel agrees with the charges lev-

eled by the prosecuting angels: she has embraced the religious lifestyle of a Jewish man, while still possessing the erotic longings of a woman. In short, she is guilty of leading an androgynous existence. The charges leveled by the angels reflect a number of cultural assumptions concerning the relationship of sexuality and spirituality. The first assumption, which Hasidism inherited from earlier traditions, identified women with the body and sexuality and men with the spirit. The second assumption, that physical desire was an obstacle to spiritual perfection, emerged in certain Hasidic circles under the influence of kabbalistic and *musar* literature.

It is easy to see how these assumptions could be combined into an ascetic, dualistic doctrine in which women — as embodiments of sexuality and materiality — were identified as the chief barrier to men's spiritual relationship with God, while remaining incapable of attaining spiritual heights themselves. Nahman of Bratslav, a rebbe best known for his profound tales, represents the apex of this tendency within Hasidic thought. Nahman argued that for the "true zaddik," sexual intercourse with a woman should be an incredibly painful experience. Nahman thus went beyond ascetic figures such as Menahem Mendel of Kotsk and the Magid of Mezeritch, who merely argued against feeling physical pleasure during sexual intercourse.

This dualistic tendency may be contrasted with the more dialectical position of Hasidic figures such as the Baal Shem Tov, who, drawing on another tendency within the Kabbalah, argued that physical pleasure was the first step on the path to love of Torah and God.⁹ Even those who espoused the dialectical position, however, asserted that physical desire ultimately had to be abandoned or transcended. As David Biale has written, "the only legitimate function of the physical is as a vehicle for its own elimination."¹⁰ As I have argued above, the dialectical view underlies depictions of the Maiden's romantic awakening in which desire for her fiancé inspired her to more intense study and religious devotion, even to the point of achieving *devekut*, according to one author. By contrast, in Mekler's account of the heavenly trial, Hannah Rochel's erotic desire for her fiancé is not portrayed as a stepping-stone to heightened spirituality but as an obstacle.

Because physical desire was not considered an integral part of being male, Hasidic men could successfully transcend or transform it, as in a famous Hasidic parable in which a prince dismisses a girl of flesh and blood in order to unite with the Shekhinah, the supernal feminine aspect of God. In social practice, this took the form of long periods of sexual abstinence, combined with attempts to transcend physical pleasure dur-

ing sexual intercourse or even to feel pain during the act. By contrast, the Hasidic identification of women with physical desire was inherent and seemingly inescapable. Unlike the prince in the parable, a Hasidic woman could not dismiss the girl who stood in the way of *devekut* with God, because she *was* the girl.

The same Hasidic sources that condemned pleasure during sexual intercourse depicted *devekut* in highly erotic, even sexual terms. Calling this phenomenon a “displacement of desire,” David Biale has argued, “Instead of human sexuality serving as the hand-maiden of the *hieros gamos*, one senses a kind of competition in Hasidism between the sexual demands of the divine and the sexual demands of one’s wife.”¹¹ Within this system, Hasidic women were marginalized in two ways. First, they competed with the divine for the erotic attention of men. Second, because *devekut* was conceptualized as the heteroerotic union between a male Hasid and the female Shekhinah, women were theoretically excluded from *devekut* because of their gender. As mentioned above, there is no literary evidence that Hasidic women or men developed an alternate understanding of *devekut* in which women could unite with one of the male *sefirot* (divine aspects) or with the Shekhinah itself.

With these observations in mind, let us return to Mekler’s description of Hannah Rochel’s heavenly trial. Rather than reject the traditional Hasidic link between women and physical desire, the girl explicitly affirmed this view, according to Mekler. Her own “female” desire, she confessed, was at odds with her “male” desire to live a life devoted to Torah and God. By acknowledging the incompatibility of these impulses, the girl implicitly rejected the view that women as women could hope to transcend physical desire. Beyond her spiritual limitations as a woman, the girl also referred to another, more practical problem: “There must be a clash between the higher duties which I alone had taken upon myself, as if I were a man, and the duties of a wife, whose task is only to do the will of her husband.”

Married Hasidic women were responsible for taking care of their husbands, children, and, often, older relatives as well. In a large number of Hasidic families, women were also the chief breadwinners, since many men spent long periods at their rebbe’s court or engaged in study. This left most women with precious little time to devote to prayer, learning, or the fulfillment of other commandments. By contrast, Hasidic men were encouraged to devote themselves as much as possible to prayer and learning. This social reality was justified by rabbinic teachings that exempted women from “positive time-bound” commandments, such as

thrice daily prayer, because it might interfere with their duties to their husbands, as the following quote by David ben Joseph Abudarham, a fourteenth-century Spanish rabbi, indicates:

The reason women are exempt from time-bound positive *mitzvot* is that a woman is bound to her husband to fulfill his needs. Were she obligated in time-bound positive *mitzvot*, it could happen that while she is performing a *mitzvah*, her husband would order her to do his commandment. If she would perform the commandment of the Creator and leave aside his commandment, woe to her from her husband! If she does her husband's commandment and leaves aside the Creator's, woe to her from her Maker! Therefore, the Creator has exempted her from his commandments, so that she may have peace with her husband.¹²

In Mekler's account of the vision, therefore, Hannah Rochel does not challenge the traditional position of women within the spiritual and social hierarchy of Hasidism. Indeed, her words essentially reinscribe Hasidic views on gender, sexuality, and spirituality. Instead of claiming the right as a woman to devote herself to God, the girl argues that she should be allowed to receive a new and lofty soul, "which must thirst for God's word, which must only find pleasure [*ta'anug*] in God's Torah and which must forget the material world and its pettiness." With such a soul, the Maiden would be able to eliminate "all the things that a woman feels" and "would only live in the world of emanation (*olam ha-atsilut*)," a kabbalistic reference to the realm of divine potencies, or *sefirot*.

According to Mekler's account, Hannah Rochel sought to transcend her spiritual limitations as a woman by receiving a "new and lofty" soul, but it is not obvious whether she became a spiritual male (that is, possessing only a male soul), a spiritual androgyne (that is, possessing a male and a female soul), or whether she transcended gender altogether. Later in this chapter, I will examine the Maiden's incarnational claim in light of kabbalistic theories of reincarnation and spirit possession. For the present, however, it is important to note that in none of the accounts — from the most conservative to the most dramatized — does the Maiden explicitly describe her new soul as male. This is a significant omission, since, as we will see below, souls are always gendered according to Jewish tradition.

In Mekler's view, therefore, Hannah Rochel did not consciously reject traditional gender roles, at least at this stage of her life. Nor did she view herself as exempt from the spiritual limitations of being a woman. Instead the girl sought a way to transcend these limitations by undergoing a spiritual transformation, or more precisely, an incarnation. The void left by the death of her mother may have shown Hannah Rochel how much

work a typical Hasidic woman performed in the household. Unwilling to give up the intense piety she had engaged in since childhood, the Maiden, according to Mekler, chose to receive a new soul, one that allowed her to reject marriage and embrace a lifestyle completely devoted to God and Torah.

Readers with even a passing awareness of what has become known as “women’s religion” will be struck by the parallels between descriptions of the Maiden of Ludmir’s visionary experience and those of women from other traditions. Scholars have noted the importance of visions in the lives of many holy women — from the Catholic saints of the Middle Ages and the Quaker prophetesses of seventeenth-century England to the Vodoun priestesses of contemporary Haiti. It is tempting to understand these experiences as examples of a shared women’s religiosity, one transcending historical and geographical borders. Yet this approach ignores significant differences between the visionary women of various cultures. Many men have also experienced religious visions, suggesting that visions may not be a defining feature of women’s spirituality per se, but of ecstatic religious experience in general.

Without arguing for a single model of women’s visionary experience, it is nevertheless important to stress that visions have often played a similar role in the spiritual and social lives of women from different cultures. Perhaps most important, visions have frequently empowered women with an authority that they would have otherwise lacked in male-dominated societies. After experiencing visions, many women claimed the right, even the duty, to assume a public religious role.¹³ While visions may have played a similarly empowering role for men from lower social strata, they often functioned as a *sine qua non* for women in patriarchal societies to achieve a public religious voice. Ironically, however, the voices that these women assumed were often attributed to external spiritual forces that had entered their bodies during their visions. The frequent connection between visions and incarnation complicates any attempt to describe visions as empowering for women as women, since holy women (and/or their followers) often claimed that by virtue of such visionary incarnations they had transcended womanhood.

In a number of important respects, the circumstances of the Maiden of Ludmir’s childhood vision and its consequences resemble accounts of visionary women from other religious traditions. This does not mean, however, that the Maiden’s story should simply be understood as a Jewish version of a cross-cultural phenomenon. There are profound differences between the Maiden’s visionary experience as a Jewish woman

and those of women from other cultural backgrounds. For example, medieval Christian women's visions typically involved union with Christ, a critically important and culturally specific feature of their religiosity that is completely absent from the Maiden's experience. By contrast, since she was a Jew the Maiden's vision of the heavenly court is linked by her biographers to a desire to follow all the commandments, or *mitzvot*, a detail that reflects the nomocentric focus of Jewish mysticism. This striking difference supports Gershom Scholem's assertion: "There is no mysticism as such, there is only the mysticism of a particular religious system. . . . We cannot, therefore, expect the physiognomy of Jewish mysticism to be the same as that of Catholic mysticism, Anabaptism or Moslem Sufism."¹⁴

Significantly, none of her biographers suggest that the Maiden's visionary experience resulted in an erotic union with God, though Mekler does mention the "pleasure" which she sought in God's Torah. This stands in sharp contrast to the hagiographical accounts of medieval Christian women visionaries. Concerning these women, Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff has written, "The process of visions taught women not to sacrifice their desire but to transform it, to strengthen it by purifying it, so that finally all their most conscious desire might be directed toward union with the divine."¹⁵ Whereas the theological structure of Christianity allowed women visionaries to heteroerotically unite with Christ, descriptions of the Maiden of Ludmir's visionary experience were apparently conditioned and constrained by the androcentric Hasidic model of *devekut*, in which only men could unite with the female Shekhinah.

It is also important to point out the ways in which accounts of the Maiden of Ludmir's vision resemble hagiographical accounts devoted to male Hasidic figures. For example, the experience attributed to the Maiden of Ludmir closely resembles the coma, spiritual ascent, heavenly trial, and physical recovery of the son of Michel of Zlotchov:

The youngest son of the holy *mn*, Rabbi Michal of Zlotchov, Joseph by name, was once taken seriously ill . . . the sick boy fainted, fell into a deep sleep . . . and seemed dead. Three days later perspiration appeared, and his soul returned to his body. When he had recovered somewhat, he recounted all that had happened. "As soon as my soul departed [he said], an angel took it and brought it to a chamber which he himself could not enter, but into which I was permitted. I stood near the door watching the heavenly court in session. I also saw two messengers bringing a book which weighed heavily upon them and in which were inscribed my transgressions. Another angel soon appeared with the book of my good deeds. The good deeds were not equal to the transgressions, so a third book was brought in which were the sufferings I had undergone, and many of my trans-

gressions then disappeared. Nevertheless, because the remaining transgressions still outweighed my good deeds, they wanted to condemn me to death to write out the decree. . . . Then the sound of a great roaring was heard, as the roaring of all the worlds, proclaiming, 'Make way, the Besht is approaching!' The Besht entered, saw me standing near the door, and asked, 'Joseph, what business have you here?' I answered him . . . 'I begged my father and the rabbi of the holy community of Polnoy to intercede in my behalf, but they forgot about me. So I ask your most holy honor to do so.'" The Besht requested the court to let me go in peace, and they ordered me to return home.¹⁶

The many parallels between this Hasidic tale and Mekler's account of the Maiden's vision suggest that no matter how closely depictions of the Maiden of Ludmir may resemble hagiographical accounts of non-Jewish holy women, the specifically Jewish context of her life and literary *after-lives* cannot be ignored. Thus any attempt to force the Maiden of Ludmir into a preexisting category of visionary women — no matter how extensive the parallels — will inevitably fail to account for the unique and the stereotypically Jewish elements of her story.

Despite this important caveat, the rich body of literature on women visionaries from other traditions can still help to illuminate important features of the Maiden of Ludmir's biography. Most strikingly, many medieval Christian holy women are also depicted as experiencing loss, illness, and symbolic death as a prelude to the transformative visions that empowered them. Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff has noted that a "surprising number of biographies and autobiographies tell of an apparent dying, often when a teenager, of being taken for dead and perhaps even put in a coffin, but then miraculously coming back to life, often with an explicitly visionary message for the world." In such cases, Petroff writes, visions "gave an individual woman a voice and a belief in herself as chosen to speak and also gave her an experience of inner transformation that she felt compelled to communicate to others."¹⁷

Two of the non-Jewish holy women whose lives most closely resemble the story of the Maiden of Ludmir were Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) and Christina of Saint Trond, called *Mirabilis* (1150–1224).¹⁸ Born into a devout Spanish family, Teresa of Avila suffered the loss of her mother when she was twelve years old. Later she became seriously ill and entered a coma for three days. After being given up for dead, Teresa miraculously revived. This experience was a turning point in Teresa's spiritual life and a prelude to the visions that inspired her to assume a public religious role.¹⁹ Like the Maiden of Ludmir and Teresa of Avila, Christina *Mirabilis* also experienced great loss as a child — in her case, both parents died.

Christina's hagiographer, Thomas de Cantimpré, wrote that "after these events she grew sick in body by virtue of the exercise of inward contemplation and she died." While a requiem mass was being recited over Christina's body, she suddenly sprang back to life. After returning home from church, Christina declared that her soul had ascended to "Paradise, to the throne of the Divine Majesty," where she was offered two choices: either remain with God or return to her body and through her sufferings and pious life, redeem the souls of others, only then returning to God "having accumulated . . . a reward of such great profit." Without hesitation, Christina chose the second option and her soul was restored to her body.²⁰

Why do these and other Christian hagiographies share so many parallels with accounts of the Maiden of Ludmir? Did all these women actually experience a similar set of events? Or were these episodes invented by male hagiographers, constituting a standard set of tropes that could be drawn on by different authors? While the second possibility may explain why so many Christian accounts resemble one another, it does not adequately explain the striking similarities between them and the story of the Maiden of Ludmir, whose Jewish authors were almost certainly unaware of these medieval Christian traditions. Moreover, some of the medieval women's lives are autobiographical in character. Although these women authors may have employed hagiographical tropes in writing their own life stories, we must take seriously the possibility that their accounts accurately depict the events of their lives. It is even possible that some women actually experienced certain events under the influence of existing hagiographical traditions. In other words, some women may have experienced illness, comatose states, and visions because they considered these part of the accepted narrative of a holy woman's life.

We cannot definitively say what details a hagiographer invented and what actually occurred in the life of a particular holy woman. Yet this fact should not prevent us from trying to understand why the existing narratives of so many holy women resemble one another. Instead of asking whether these women actually experienced similar events, however, we may rephrase the question as follows: Why did this particular narrative resonate with so many individuals (holy women and hagiographers alike), and what are its underlying issues?

I would like to argue that these women's stories — including that of the Maiden of Ludmir — reflect the conflict between a desire to lead a pious life devoted to God on the one hand and the spiritual limitations traditionally placed on women by their families and societies on the other. The

sudden death of a loved one encouraged women to focus on the world beyond and frequently destabilized their surviving this-worldly relationships. Such a loss practically and symbolically severed a critical link between a woman and her family, while opening the door to a closer relationship with God.

An even more common motif than the death of a loved one in the lives of these holy women was the experience of intense and transformative illness.²¹ In some cases, such as with the Maiden of Ludmir and Christina Mirabilis, the death of a parent (or parents) preceded, intensified, or even precipitated a period of illness. Illness may be understood as a somatic response to the emotional and spiritual conflict that holy women experienced at the beginning of their lives. Often, through deprivation and even self-mortification, women appear to have induced the conditions for illness themselves, perhaps as a form of punishment or purification.

If illness functioned as a physical sign of an internal conflict, then a coma represented the inability to continue in such a conflicted state, a shutting down of the body. Women who entered comas transcended the struggle between social expectations and religious devotion, but only at the expense of consciousness. In discussing the comatose state of the Maiden with me, one former Ludmir resident employed the phrase “near-death experience.” Her interpretation highlights the symbolic connection between comas and death in the lives of many holy women. In the Maiden of Ludmir’s story, this link is further suggested by her collapse in the cemetery. Since comas approximate death so closely, they are an ideal context for the spiritual ascents more typically associated with post-mortem experiences. This combination of events occurs in the Maiden of Ludmir’s story as well as in the lives of Teresa of Avila, Christina Mirabilis, Julian of Norwich, and other holy women. The sudden recovery from a coma was frequently taken as a sign of physical and spiritual rebirth.

Women who experienced visions while in a coma not only gained new confidence in themselves, but they also achieved the respect and devotion of others, since visions were perceived as links to the world beyond. Because they signified contact with a higher authority, visions empowered women to challenge this-worldly norms and structures and, at the same time, it encouraged others to interpret potentially deviant behavior as ordained by God. For many holy women, therefore, visions functioned as a critically important turning point in their spiritual lives, one with a dramatic impact on their self-perception and the perception of others. As the preceding discussion has revealed, however, visions should not be viewed in isolation, but as part of a longer process of spiritual develop-

ment. While visions often signaled the beginning of a holy woman's public career, they generally represented the culmination of many years of private devotion, often punctuated by loss and illness. This is certainly the case with the Maiden of Ludmir, who is described as intensely praying, studying, and even practicing some form of seclusion while still a child.

We have seen that accounts of the Maiden of Ludmir's vision recall hagiographical descriptions of non-Jewish holy women and Jewish holy men alike. But were any other Jewish women described as visionaries, or is the Maiden of Ludmir unique in this respect? Despite the common stereotype that women were completely absent from the history of Jewish mysticism — a view inscribed in Gershom Scholem's voluminous writings — a variety of literary sources depict Jewish women as experiencing mystical visions.

The sages of the Talmud wrote that after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem we “pay no attention to heavenly voices,” but in typical rabbinic fashion they also declared that prophecy had been taken from the prophets and given to the sages or, according to yet another rabbinic tradition, to fools and children.²² In the following centuries, ecstatic visions and speech were cultivated within certain Jewish circles. Among the individuals described as visionaries, we find a number of women. One of the best documented (because of Inquisition transcripts) and most poignant cases involves a girl named Inés of Herrera del Duque, popularly known as the prophetess of Extremadura.²³ Born in 1488 to a *converso* (crypto-Jewish) family in western Castile, Inés's prophetic ability soon became apparent. Like those of the Maiden of Ludmir, Inés's visions were, in the words of the scholar Haim Beinart, “intimately connected with her mother's death,” which occurred when she was still a young child.

Between 1499 and her arrest by the Inquisition in 1500, Inés experienced a series of visions exhorting her and her fellow *conversos* “to believe in the Law of Moses” and promising the imminent arrival of the messiah. According to Inquisition transcripts, in one of these visions Inés described ascending to heaven with the help of her mother. Inés's prophetic mission was confirmed by another *conversa* named Mari Gómez Chillón, who also declared that she had ascended to heaven, where she saw Inés along with several biblical figures, including the Patriarch Jacob's granddaughter.²⁴ In response to these visions, many *conversos* became devoted followers of the young prophetess and, like her, began to carefully observe the Sabbath and other Jewish rituals, fully expecting the advent of the messianic age. Tragically, as Beinart writes, “The girl who instilled hope in the hearts of the *conversos* did not see that hope

fulfilled. A marginal note made by the court's notary on the trial documents of Juan González, date August 3, 1500, states that by that time Juan Esteban's daughter, the child prophetess of Herrera, had been burned."²⁵

Women visionaries also appeared among the Jews who chose to leave the Iberian Peninsula rather than become *conversos*. Literary accounts from sixteenth-century Palestine refer to numerous Jewish women who experienced ecstatic visions. The richest source on these women is the *Book of Visions*, an autobiographical work by Hayim Vital, the most prominent disciple of Isaac Luria Ha-Ashkenazi (Ha-Ari), the founder of Lurianic Kabbalah. In its pages, Vital writes that in the same year (1565) he met his teacher, "I saw a woman who was an expert in divining by dropping oil into water and she said to me: I was very frightened by what I saw in this oil — you will undoubtedly rule over all of Israel in the future." A few years later, in 1570, Vital mentions visiting "a wise woman who foretold the future and was also expert in oil-drop divination. She was called Soniadora ["female dreamer" in Judeo-Spanish]. I asked her to cast a spell over the oil as was customary, concerning my comprehension of kabbalistic wisdom. She did not know what to answer me until she assumed a 'spirit of jealousy' [Num. 5:30], and strengthened her incantations. . . . I again asked through an incantation over the oil about the wondrous dream that I dreamed on Friday night, 8 *Tevet* 5326 [1566]. She said to me: Am I Daniel to explain your dream? Nonetheless, I will explain it to you. And she told me most of the dream."²⁶

Later in his memoir, Vital mentions Francisca Sarah, a "pious woman" living in the kabbalistic center of Sefad, "who saw visions in a waking dream and heard a voice speaking to her, and most of her words were true." Francisca Sarah's existence is confirmed by the seventeenth-century author Joseph Sambari, who describes her as "wise and great in deeds" possessing a "magid who spoke to her and informed her of what would be in the world. The sages of Safed tested her on several occasions to discover if there was substance to her words and everything that she said came to pass."²⁷ Vital also devotes several pages of his diary to the unnamed daughter of Raphael Anav, a resident of Damascus, who fell into a coma and thereafter "returned to complete health, but she said that she sometimes has visions, both while awake and dreaming, of souls and angels . . . what amazed me was that all her words were only about repentance, fear of God, and words of moral rebuke."²⁸ According to Vital, other women in his circle experienced visions while awake, including his own wife, Hannah, and "Simha, the sister of Zabda, the wife of Cuencas,"

or had prophetic dreams, such as a woman named Sa'adat in Damascus, as well as his second wife, Jamilla, and her aunt.

In one of the decisive pronouncements for which he became famous, Gershom Scholem declared, "There have been no women Kabbalists. . . . The long history of Jewish mysticism shows no trace of feminine influence."²⁹ But what of the many women described by Vital? The Kabbalist frequently testifies to the veracity of these women's visions and mentions that he sought out a woman diviner to help his "comprehension of kabbalistic wisdom." Doesn't the very fact that Vital describes these women undermine Scholem's claim that not even a "trace of feminine influence" may be found in the history of Jewish mysticism? Indeed, should some of these women be considered Kabbalists in their own right? Or should we simply dismiss this possibility because of what Scholem referred to as the "demonization of the feminine" in the Kabbalah on the one hand and the fact that none of these women produced any writings of their own on the other? These complicated questions deserve a lengthy study of their own, something beyond the scope of this book. Nevertheless, it is important to interrogate Scholem's dismissal of women's involvement in Jewish mysticism. As we will see below, accounts of the Maiden of Ludmir's life in Palestine further destabilize this claim.

In the wake of the Lurianic Kabbalah, both Sabbateanism and Frankism, its eighteenth-century Eastern European offshoot, valorized the role of women visionaries, or as they were known in these heretical circles, "prophetesses." I will discuss these pneumatic women in chapter 9, including their possible relationship to the Maiden of Ludmir. For the present, let us turn to the Hasidic movement. To some extent, Hasidism resulted in the democratization of the *ruah ha-qodesh*.³⁰ Exemplifying this phenomenon was the Magid of Mezertich's claim that prophesy was more accessible in his day than it was in the time of the Temple. The view within certain Hasidic circles that prophetic revelation and, in particular, possession by the *ruah ha-qodesh* was attainable by more than a select few opened the door to the possibility of women pneumatics within Hasidism.³¹

A small number of Hasidic holy women are described as possessing prophetic vision and speech. This group includes Edel, the daughter of the Baal Shem Tov, Gittel, the wife of Abraham the Angel, and Hannah Hayah of Chernobyl, about whom her father, Mordechai of Chernobyl, is said to have declared, "She has the holy spirit 'from the womb and from birth.'"³² Edel's daughter Feige, the granddaughter of the Baal Shem Tov

and mother of Nahman of Bratslav, is described as possessing *ruah ba-godesh*, which allowed her mystically to see the Baal Shem Tov at the wedding celebration of her own granddaughter (Nahman's daughter).³³ And as we saw in chapter 3, several sources mention anonymous Hasidic women visionaries, for example, the "kosher woman in the town of Ludmir who foretold the future" and "a young woman who was a wonder-worker, whom people considered to be a prophetess" — references that may or may not be to the Maiden of Ludmir.

The most famous Hasidic woman visionary was known as Yente the Prophetess (Yente di Neviehte), a woman from a humble Galician background whom tradition depicts as living during the lifetime of the Baal Shem Tov. While many details of Yente's story are clearly apocryphal, its basic outlines probably refer to a historical figure. Whether or not the stories concerning Yente are historically accurate, however, their transmission — as well as the transmission of the traditions concerning the other women mentioned above — suggests a certain openness within Hasidic circles to women visionaries. As in the case of women leaders, the existence of a handful of women visionaries does not indicate an egalitarian Hasidic attitude toward women in general. Instead, it seems more likely that individual women benefited from the democratization of the holy spirit, just as a relatively small number of women benefited from the development of the dynastic principle. Indeed the Hasidic women described as visionaries were almost invariably related to important male figures.

On the basis of her vision alone, therefore, the Maiden of Ludmir should not be seen as an isolated case in the history of Judaism. Indeed, any attempt to understand the Maiden's story must acknowledge her place within a long chain of Jewish women pneumatics. What makes the Maiden of Ludmir a unique figure, however, is that her visionary experience appears within literary accounts devoted exclusively to her life story, whereas other Jewish women visionaries are only briefly mentioned in other accounts. Let us now turn to another aspect of her vision: Hannah Rochel's claim that she received a new and higher soul as a result of her heavenly ascent.

One of the most striking features of the Maiden of Ludmir's story is the wide range of claims that she was possessed. Hannah Rochel herself declared that she had received a "new and lofty soul" during her ecstatic vision. Later, after she became a public figure, the girl's supporters viewed her as a vessel for the holy spirit (*ruah ba-godesh*), while her opponents accused her of being possessed by a malevolent soul or dybbuk.

According to Jewish tradition, positive spiritual incarnation did not eliminate the agency of the possessed individual. Instead such a person retained a sense of self. By contrast, dybbuk possession resulted in the complete silencing of the individual's voice. Thus, underlying the competing claims concerning the Maiden of Ludmir's spiritual possession is the question of how much agency she retained. Was she merely a puppet, whose behavior was orchestrated by a male dybbuk, or was she a holy woman who had merited special spiritual guidance?

Once again, it is tempting to view this feature of the Maiden of Ludmir's biography through the lens of non-Jewish religious traditions. Some scholars consider spiritual possession — like the frequently related phenomenon of ecstatic visions — to be a defining feature of women's religiosity.³⁴ While possession has indeed played an important role in the spirituality of women from a variety of religious traditions, there are also significant cross-cultural differences that cannot be ignored. In her study of ecstatic prophesy in seventeenth-century England, Phyllis Mack has argued that men frequently envied women for their "natural" predisposition to possession: "The characterization of the female visionary as an empty vessel reflected an attitude that was far more complicated than simple misogyny, for the defects of rationality and the attuned intuition of visionary women were actually viewed with respect even envy, by those philosophers who felt alienated from God by their compulsive, prideful reliance on the power of their own reason."³⁵

We might expect a similar attitude on the part of Jewish men, with knowledge of Torah taking the place of reason, yet Jewish sources reveal a very different perspective on spiritual possession. While women were far more likely to become victims of negative (that is, dybbuk) possession, men had the potential to experience a wide range of positive forms of possession from which women appear to have been largely or even completely excluded. Studying Torah did not make it more difficult for Jewish men to become spiritually possessed, as did exercising reason for seventeenth-century English men. On the contrary, it actually facilitated certain forms of possession. Indeed, the very fact that women were traditionally excluded from studying Torah meant that they were *de facto* eliminated from positive forms of spiritual possession. In chapter 9, I will examine the accusations of dybbuk possession made about the Maiden by her opponents in Ludmir. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore the matrix of Jewish mystical traditions concerning positive possession that may have influenced the Maiden of Ludmir's self-conception, the perception of her devotees, and the writings of her biographers.

In the second half of the thirteenth century, Kabbalists developed a doctrine known as “the secret of impregnation,” *sod ha-ibbur* or *ibbur*, for short. Whereas in reincarnation (*gilgul ha-neshamot*) a soul entered the body at birth, in *ibbur* a soul entered an individual later in life. This new soul did not replace the soul the person already possessed but instead inhabited the body alongside the original soul.³⁶ The doctrine of *ibbur* became popular in the circle of Isaac Luria, the leader of the sixteenth-century kabbalistic revival in Sefad that later had a powerful impact on the Hasidic movement. Hayim Vital described the two reasons for *ibbur* in his work *Shaar ha-Gilgulim* (The gate of transmigrations). In the first scenario, the soul of a dead zaddik entered a living man’s body in order to help him fulfill the commandments. Vital describes this form of *ibbur* as occurring for the sake of the living individual. In the second scenario, the soul of a dead zaddik entered the body of a living man in order to fulfill a commandment that it had been unable to perform in its own body. According to Vital, this form of *ibbur* occurred for the sake of the zaddik’s soul.³⁷

Almost without exception, cases of positive *ibbur* involved a righteous male soul entering a male body. When male souls entered female bodies, as they frequently did, they were malevolent dybbukim, not righteous souls. Very rarely a female soul entered a female body through positive *ibbur*. This occurred in the complicated case of a woman who was barren because she possessed the reincarnated soul of a man who had engaged in homosexual acts during a previous incarnation. To help her conceive, such a woman also received a female soul.³⁸

The doctrine of *ibbur* reveals how Jewish men were willing to appropriate certain biologically female characteristics, in this case pregnancy, if they viewed them as positive (another example from Hasidic sources is the zaddik who “nurses” his disciples with the “milk” of his wisdom). From one perspective, these biologically female activities appear to have been transposed onto a spiritual plane, where they are performed by men. Yet it is also possible that the stridently androcentric Kabbalists who employed these images actually viewed nursing and pregnancy as spiritually male activities that were only secondarily, that is, biologically, performed by women. Phrased differently, it is not men who are feminized when they spiritually nurse their disciples or are spiritually impregnated, but women who are masculinized when they engage in physical versions of these functions.

Despite the apparent lack of precedent in kabbalistic and folk traditions, the Maiden of Ludmir and/or her biographers may have under-

stood her experience of spiritual incarnation as a case of positive *ibbur*. In Mekler's account, for example, the Maiden explicitly declares that her new and lofty soul will allow her to fulfill more of the commandments, a claim that resonates with Vital's first reason for *ibbur*. If she did see herself as undergoing *ibbur*, then it is also likely that the Maiden thought of her new soul as male, although it should be recalled that none of the accounts mention this detail. Since spiritual impregnation resulted in the new soul occupying the individual's body alongside the old soul, this process would have transformed the Maiden of Ludmir into a spiritual androgyne. Consequently the Maiden may have felt that it was spiritually unnecessary or even wrong for her to marry, since according to the Kabbalah, marriage was viewed as the reunion of two soul halves that had previously constituted an androgynous whole before being divided and placed in male and female bodies, respectively.

During the same period in which *ibbur* was emerging as a popular doctrine, Kabbalists began to cultivate a practice known as *yibudim*, or the "communion of souls." The goal of *yibudim* was to join one's soul with the soul of a dead zaddik. For this reason, holy graves in Palestine became particularly popular sites for the ritual. Kabbalists would prostrate themselves on a zaddik's grave and concentrate on "arousing" the soul of the zaddik. If successful, both souls would simultaneously ascend to the upper realms. The Kabbalist Moses Cordovero describes this process as follows: "This is the meaning of 'soul bound up with soul' — this is when he 'pours' his soul upon the grave of the *zaddiq*, cleaving soul to soul, and speaks with the soul of the *zaddiq*."³⁹

Intriguingly, in an oral tradition attributed to Horodezky by Mordechai Biber, the Maiden of Ludmir is explicitly described as engaging in *yibudim* after immigrating to Palestine. There are also a number of parallels between the Maiden of Ludmir's experience in the cemetery and the practice of *yibudim*. First, she is depicted as collapsing on a "holy grave." Second, in the wake of this incident, she is described as experiencing a heavenly ascent and spiritual incarnation. Perhaps Hannah Rochel believed that her intense devotion in the cemetery had approximated the "contemplative intention" experienced during *yibudim*, thereby arousing the soul of a zaddik that cleaved to her.

The third kabbalistic doctrine that may shed light on the Maiden's incarnational experience is known by the Hebrew acronym *NaRaN*, signifying the division of the soul into three parts — *nefesh*, *ruah*, and *neshamah*. This doctrine was first introduced into Judaism by medieval Jewish philosophers such as Abraham ibn Ezra and Abraham bar Hiyya,

under the influence of older Greek traditions.⁴⁰ Although its first formulation was philosophical, the doctrine underwent a mystical reinterpretation among thirteenth-century Kabbalists. The Zohar explains the hierarchical relationship of the soul parts as follows:

“Soul” [*nefesh*] and “spirit” [*ruah*] are not two separate grades, but one grade with two aspects. There is still a third aspect which should dominate these two and cleave to them as they to it, and which is called “higher spirit” [*neshamah*] . . . “Soul” [*nefesh*] is the lowest stirring, it supports and feeds the body and is closely connected with it. When it sufficiently qualifies itself, it becomes the throne on which rests the lower spirit [*ruah*], as it is written, “until the spirit be poured on us from on high” (Isaiah 32:15). When both have prepared themselves sufficiently, they are qualified to receive the higher spirit [*neshamah*], to which the lower spirit [*ruah*] becomes a throne, and which is undiscoverable, supreme over all. Thus there is throne resting on throne, and a throne for the highest.⁴¹

Only after an individual possessed all three soul parts was he “called holy, perfect, completely devoted to God” by the Zohar.⁴² In the later kabbalistic work *Shaar ha-Gilgulim* Vital wrote that most people never came close to attaining this exalted spiritual state.⁴³ Instead they lived their entire lives with a *nefesh*, which all human beings receive at birth and were unable to receive the higher soul parts of *ruah* and *neshamah*. Nevertheless, some individuals were able to progress from one level to the other, typically achieving the levels of *ruah* and *neshamah* at the ages of thirteen and twenty, respectively:

When a person is born and goes out into the world, his *nefesh* enters him, and if his actions are sanctified, he is deemed righteous and the *ruah* enters him at the completion of his thirteenth year. And from then on, he is called a complete man as is known. And if his actions are further sanctified from that point on, the *neshamah* enters him at the completion of his twentieth year . . . but if he does not rectify his *ruah* completely, then his *neshamah* does not enter him, and there will only be a *nefesh* and *ruah* within him, and if he doesn’t rectify his *nefesh* completely, he only possesses a *nefesh*, and he remains without a *ruah* and *neshamah*.⁴⁴

Although kabbalistic texts imply that the tripartite structure of *NaRaN* applied to all members of Israel, the means by which an individual received the levels of *ruah* and *neshamah* appears to have excluded women, since one had to perform all of the mitzvot, study the written and oral Torah, and, finally, immerse oneself in the secrets of the Kabbalah.⁴⁵ Kabbalistic sources do not explicitly reject the possibility of women achieving these higher souls, but their silence on the topic indicates that they do not take this possibility seriously.

With this important caveat in mind, we may consider the prospect that the doctrine of *NaRaN* may nevertheless have informed the Maiden's self-conception and/or the understanding of her biographers. Most strikingly, the view that an individual received a new soul at the culmination of one stage of spiritual development and the beginning of another echoes descriptions of the Maiden of Ludmir's experience. Hannah Rochel claimed that she had received her new soul when she was approximately thirteen, that is, precisely the age when the Kabbalah states that pious individuals typically receive their second, loftier soul part. As we will see in the next chapter, biographers also depict the Maiden as undergoing a further spiritual transformation when she was approximately twenty (building her own *beys medresh*, for example), the age when a worthy individual typically received the third soul part, according to the Kabbalah. Like *ibbur* and *yibudim*, therefore, the doctrine of *NaRaN* provides a theoretical framework for understanding the Maiden of Ludmir's incarnational experience. All three doctrines are limited, however, in that they do not explicitly address the possibility of a woman receiving a new soul. Thus we are left guessing whether the Maiden or her biographers, who do not mention *ibbur*, *yibudim*, or *NaRaN*, understood her in light of any of these kabbalistic traditions.

Unlike the doctrines that I have discussed thus far, the final mystical phenomenon that I will explore in this chapter was explicitly applied to the Maiden of Ludmir. Writing in the *Pinkas Ludmir*, two former residents of the town, Yehoshua Melzer and Rabbi Ephraim Fishel Mamet, both described the Maiden as the reincarnation of a male soul. According to Melzer, "she was the reincarnation of a great zaddik," while Mamet writes that "they said that she was the reincarnation of some great soul, concerning which it had been decreed that it should repair the sins that it had committed in its first incarnation [by transmigrating] into the body of this female virgin."⁴⁶ This view also appears in Horodezky's account, in which Mordechai of Chernobyl himself speculates that the soul of a dead zaddik has transmigrated into the body of the Maiden of Ludmir, a situation that he considers to be a source of great pain for the male soul.

These claims are based on a theory of reincarnation that first appeared in early kabbalistic circles, but like the other doctrines that we have already examined, it was more fully developed within the Lurianic Kabbalah. While *ibbur* and *NaRaN* took place later in life and resulted from learning and good deeds, *gilgul* occurred at birth. According to kabbalistic sources, there were two common reasons for reincarnation. The first was the soul's failure to fulfill a particular commandment in a previous life,

one that had to be performed in a new incarnation. The second was a transgression in a previous life that had to be punished and rectified. According to Vital, the bodies of men, women, animals, and even inanimate objects such as water and stones served as hosts for reincarnated souls.

Except in rare cases, however, only male souls actually transmigrated from one body to another — whether human, animal, or inanimate. As Vital writes in *Shaar ha-Gilgulim*, “Know that the measure of reincarnation applies to males and not to females.”⁴⁷ The souls of Jewish men participated in the cycle of transmigration because they could not atone for their sins in Gehennom (a place akin to Purgatory), for as Vital writes, “Since men fulfill the commandments and study Torah, they cannot enter Gehennom, for the light of Gehennom does not rule over them. . . . And therefore they are required to transmigrate, to cleanse their sins in place of Gehennom.”⁴⁸ By contrast, “Women, who do not involve themselves with Torah, are able to enter Gehennom to cleanse their sins and do not need to transmigrate.”⁴⁹

According to the Kabbalah, one sin in particular caused a male soul to transmigrate into the body of a biological female: *mishkav zakhar*, or homosexual relations.⁵⁰ This belief, which goes back to the writings of the thirteenth-century Kabbalist Ezra of Gerona, was fully developed by Vital, who offers the following explanation: “Also know that sometimes the man reincarnates in a female body, due to a certain sin, for instance homosexual relations [*mishkav zakhar*] and the like.”⁵¹ By engaging in homosexuality in its previous incarnation, the male soul was forced to inhabit a woman’s body, a severe punishment for the intensely androcentric Kabbalists.⁵² Male homosexuality, therefore, resulted in a type of androgyne — a male soul in a biologically female body.

Struggling to find accurate language for this phenomenon, Vital refers to such a figure as “female” (*nekavah*) or “woman” (*isha*) but also states that such a “woman is male like her husband” (*ha-’isha hi zakhar ke-ba’ala*) and describes her as barren, unable to conceive because of the male soul that occupies her body. As will be discussed more extensively in the next chapter, the standard contrast between biologically determined sex and socially constructed gender must be amended in the case of the Kabbalah, since alongside these categories there also existed what may be termed spiritual gender. In some individuals, biological sex and spiritual gender were not identical.

Although there is no evidence that the Maiden of Ludmir was barren, her adamant refusal to marry combined with her masculine religious

behavior convinced some observers that she possessed the reincarnated soul of a male zaddik. Presumably, the soul of this zaddik had committed a serious transgression in its previous incarnation, most likely the sin of homosexual relations. To atone for this sin, the zaddik's soul had transmigrated into the body of a woman, thereby producing an individual — the Maiden of Ludmir — who was biologically female but spiritually male.

Unlike other Hasidic holy women, the Maiden of Ludmir was not related to a powerful male leader. In the absence of a biological link, the doctrine of reincarnation established a spiritual connection between the Maiden of Ludmir and a male zaddik. Yet this connection was problematic, since it had probably resulted from the male soul's transgression in a previous life. In a way that was subtler than the accusation of dybbuk possession, therefore, the claim of reincarnation also treated the Maiden of Ludmir as the passive receptacle for a deviant male soul.

Although a few Jewish women are described as channeling the *ruah ha-qodesh*, they appear to have been excluded from other positive incarnational experiences and were typically involved in negative forms of possession, in which they constituted the majority of cases. In this respect, premodern Eastern European Jews differed from their Christian counterparts, who viewed women as more likely to be possessed by holy as well as unholy spirits. While witches were accused of demonic possession, female saints were described as vessels for the holy spirit. In such an atmosphere, determining whether an individual woman was a victim of Satan or an instrument of God became an important task, particularly since similar phenomena — visions, prophetic speech, unusual behavior — could be attributed to either cause. As we will see in the following chapters, a similar phenomenon emerged in the case of the Maiden of Ludmir.