Solomon Malkho’s Self-Perception as the Biblical Daniel

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Solomon Malkho is one of the most fascinating and enigmatic figures of Jewish history. Many have attempted to decipher his personality, his self-perception, and what was it that motivated him. Born as a New Christian in Portugal around 1500, he returned to his ancestral faith, escaped to Italy, visited the Pope in Rome, was given an audience by Carl V, and ended up a martyr in Mantua in 1532.

In their attempts to reconstruct the puzzle, scholars have pieced together bits of information from archives in the various geographical stops along the route of his short, yet rich biography, along with references to Malkho by contemporary Jews and gentiles. Of particular import in this respect are Malkho’s own writings. A sermon here and a poem there, all in manuscripts, shed some light on his knowledge of Jewish mystical literature and traditions and on his messianic expectations and calculations. The printed material from the 16th century include his thin volume of sermons entitled Sefer ha-Mefoar, and his autobiographical epistle entitled Hayyat Qaneh, both intended to present himself and his knowledge to the rabbinic authorities in Salonica.

Hayyat Qaneh describes Malkho’s factual and spiritual itinerary from his youth until his journey to Rome and his flight (arranged by the Pope himself) from there. It includes several of his mystical visions, to which he assigned great significance, both personal and national. Although scholars have often referred to parts of it, I know of no serious study of this autobiography as a whole. Despite its uniqueness and importance from virtually every angle we look at it, the only twentieth century published edition of it (1939) is that of A. Z. Aescoly

1 As to my spelling of the name, deviating from the customary and widely accepted ‘Molkho’, see appendix below.
2 S. Simonson suggests that Malkho died in the first half of November; see his Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Dukasut Mantova, Jerusalem 1963, vol. 1, p. 17.
who, himself, described it as a tentative and not ‘scientific’. ³ What I would like to illustrate in this paper is that a critical edition, including a detailed apparatus, is an urgent desideratum. I propose to do so by showing how a simple, yet essential, element in Malkho’s self-perception has been overlooked.

Only recently have I interpreted the opening paragraph of the epistle in a way that, so I claim, explains much of Malkho’s behavior throughout his short adult career. This is not a ‘new’ interpretation, it is the first! The basic notion underlying the analysis is that Malkho’s Hebrew is primarily biblical Hebrew. It is saturated with the inlaying of biblical phrases. His opening paragraph, for example, is a marvelous chain of such phrases with hardly an original phrase of his own. I will return to the contents of that paragraph later.

The object of our study here is the first part of Malkho’s visit to Rome including one of his visions. He tells us that, after leaving Verona, he headed towards Bażra, a code name for Rome. When he arrived at the bridge over the Tiber next to the ‘Fort of the Pope’ [mivzar ha-apifior], namely Sant Angelo, he sat there for thirty days, engaging in spiritual preparation among the poor and sick. At the end of that month he was granted a heavenly vision. The following is a partial translation of his account.

And on the fifth day of my trip I saw the place from afar [...]. And I lifted my eyes to Heaven, weeping sore [...] and I said: O Lord of hosts for how long yet will you not have compassion on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah following all the evil which had been done in this city by the carriers in this city, to wrong

³ Ḥayyat Qaneh, A. Z. Aescoly ed., Jerusalem 1939, p. 10. Our citations from the epistle throughout this article are based on this edition.

⁴ Ha-nos’im. They have no knowledge those who carry [הוביא] their wooden image, and pray unto a god that cannot save (Isaiah 45:20) — לא ידעו הנושאים את עץ פסלם ומתפללים אל אל לא יושיע. This code name for Christians must have been common in oral use during the Middle Ages. While some derogatory names for Jesus and Christianity are well-known and well-documented, this one left only rare footprints in Hebrew literature; see D. Berger, The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages, Philadelphia 1979, p. 233. One might add an eleventh century Ashkenazic reference by Meshulam ben Kalonimos in his piyyut התכן for the morning service of the Day of Atonement; see D. Goldschmidt ed., Maḥzor le-Yom ha-Kippurim, Jerusalem 1970.
us and to scatter us away from your land, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people have become a reproach to all that are around us. Now therefore, O our God, hearken unto the prayer of Thy servant, and to his supplication (Daniel 9:16-17). [...] and cause Thy face to shine upon Thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord’s sake (Daniel 9:17), and for Thine own sake, O my God, because Thy name is called upon Thy city and Thy people (Daniel 9:19).

And while I was speaking and praying (Daniel 9:20) in this manner, and my eyes [act] like an overflowing spring, there remained no strength in me and neither was there breath left in me (Daniel 10:17). [But] I was strengthened (Daniel 10:19) and prayed the evening prayer [mikhat "erev] in the field before entering the city. [...] And at the end of my prayer I entered the city and went into the house of an owner of a lodging place [ba'al ma'aneh] [...]. And I passed through the streets of the city until I reached the bridge which is over the River Tiber, close to the Fort of the Pope where the poor and sick stay. And I sat among them as if stricken, smitten of God, for thirty days. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came meat nor wine in my mouth (Daniel 10:3).

And at the end of thirty days, on the tenth day of the month according to the calendar of the Gentiles, on the twelfth day of Adar of the year 290 [i.e. 1530], the young man was addressed. About midnight a deep sleep fell upon me, and behold the old man whom I had seen in the first vision [ba-mar'ah] appeared to me and said: [...] My son, now I came to reveal to you that which will happen to the people amongst whom you live. Come with me to the ruins of Jerusalem where you have been once already. And he took me [...] And he said to me: Raise

5 In Daniel: עדו. Malkho uses: אדין, a word unique to the book of Daniel which is usually translated as ‘then’.
7 See Daniel 10:3.
8 See Zachariah 2:8.
9 See Daniel 10:7.
your eyes towards the left mountain and tell me what you see. And I said: I see the man dressed in white, holding scales in his hand. [...] And the old man said to me: Open your mouth and ask him what is going to be the fate of the nation which I took you from. And I replied: For how can this servant of my lord talk with this my lord (Daniel 10:17), for I am not worthy of it.

Malkho, who while growing up in Portugal presumably would not have been acquainted with more than the Bible, might have simply used it to phrase his prayer before crossing over to the Vatican. There are several personal prayers in the Bible and Daniel’s is one of them. He could have phrased his own in Daniel’s language in his overall attempt to impress the rabbis, trying to show that he is at home with various classical Jewish texts. After all, this was, in a way, an epistle of propaganda.

However, in his description of his month on the Sant Angelo Bridge and of his vision, it is not only the literary style, but also the contents and order of the matters narrated that point to the conclusion that he perceived of himself as a ‘second’ Daniel. This is not to say that he is not hinting at his messianic mission, as is quite obvious from the use of Isaiah 53 and the identification with the Suffering Messiah who, according to the Midrash, was sitting at the ‘gates of Rome’ (BT Sanhedrin 98a). This has been pointed out by several scholars, and is generally accepted; I do not question it. However, we shall put forward here the thesis that Malkho’s self-perception is a mosaic, in which the image of Daniel, so conspicuously present in the text, has been overlooked. I will further suggest that the affinity to Daniel, felt by Malkho, should be explained in light of the striking similarities between the careers of the two personalities.

Let us, then, review Daniel’s biography, as presented by the Bible and Malkho’s career as we know it. Daniel was taken as a boy to the court of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to be raised there and eventually to serve him:

10 I would stop short of suggesting that Malkho felt that he was the incarnation of Daniel. The numerical value of their non-Jewish names are close, but not close enough (Daniel’s foreign name = 632, and מלקה פירש, Malkho’s Portuguese name = 620). The Hebrew names are closer in their numerical value (דניאל = 95, and מלכו = 96).
And the king spoke to Ashpenaz his chief officer, that he should bring in certain of the children of Israel, and of the seed royal and of the nobles, youths in whom was no blemish, but fair to look on [ve-tovei mar'eh], and skillful in all wisdom, and skilful in all knowledge, and discerning in thought, and such as had ability to stand in the king's palace, and that he should teach them the learning and tongue of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed to them a daily portion of the king's food and the wine which he drank, and that they should be nourished three years; that at the end thereof some of them might stand before the king. Now, among these were, of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Daniel 1:3-6).

We are told that Daniel and the other three Judean boys were given new, Chaldean, names. It is further related that Daniel, who had a religious problem with eating the king’s food, purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king’s food nor with the wine which he drank (1:8). And God granted Daniel mercy and compassion [le-ḥesed ule-raḥamim] in the sight of the chief of officers. This chapter in his biography ends with the summation that Now, as for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams (1:17). He and the other three boys were chosen to remain at the court and stand before the king [la-‘amod lifnei ha-melekh] (1:19), a common biblical, as well as medieval, Hebrew expression for serving as courtiers.

In court Daniel remains steadfast in his faith, and even though this involves a grave risk to his very life, he prays to the one and only God, following the belief on which he had been brought up as a child before being taken to the king’s court. As a punishment he is thrown into the lions’ den but is miraculously saved.

As a young, yet mature man, Daniel is described by the term איש חמודות (9:23, 10:11, 10:19), commonly translated as ‘a man greatly beloved’. Other translations are: favored man, vir desideriorum. An exhaustive understanding of the term is found in the modern commentary Da’at Miqra: Daniel, Jerusalem 1994, p. 235. All of these interpretations can be summed up in one word: charismatic.
At a certain stage, the king asks him to interpret a dream for him (5:16). Daniel’s interpretation is extremely bold. He rebukes the king for not exercising humility and for *lifting up himself against the Lord of heaven*, and instead of realizing His greatness, the king praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood and stone, which see not, hear not, know not [...] (5:22-24). The consequence of it is his downfall and his kingdom being given into the hands of Persia and Medes. As a reward for the interpretation, harsh though it was, Daniel is appointed as the ruler over a third of the kingdom (5:29).

Chapter 6 contains Daniel’s famous martyrdom episode. It starts with people disclosing to the king that Daniel is praying to the God of Israel despite Darius’ royal prohibition to do so (6:14). In a happy conclusion, Daniel is saved through a miracle from the lions, which instead devour those who had accused him (6:25). This episode causes the king to realize that the God of Daniel is *the Living God, and steadfast for ever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end* (6:27). A similar case is told about Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah who were informed against for not worshipping the idol, contrary to Nebuchadnezar’s decree. Here too, the king realizes that the God of Israel is the mightiest God and that *His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion is from generation to generation* (3:29-33). With time, Daniel becomes not only an expert interpreter of dreams but a visionary himself. He sees apocalyptic visions of the End. Indeed, the Book of Daniel has become the main sourcebook for Jewish messianic calculations throughout the ages.

We turn now to Malkho’s biography. As pointed out above, this is known to us in part from outside sources, in part as told by Malkho himself in *Hayaq Qaneh*, his autobiographical epistle, sent by him as a letter of introduction to the rabbis of Salonica. Malkho was born in Portugal around 1500 to parents who were baptized, probably in 1497, during the mass forced-conversion of Portuguese Jewry; he grew up as Diogo Pires. On another occasion I analyzed the opening paragraph of his epistle in which he alludes to the spiritual struggle he went through as an adolescent:12

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12 The following analysis is based on my book: *Spirituality and Law: Courting*
Turn your ears to listen to the words of a worm and no man, a shoot out of the stock of the members of the exile who came out of our adversaries, who lived in the forest and in the wilderness, in the place of briers, thorns, and thistles. There he grazed and lay down, because his mother and father had forsaken him; he walked in the darkness, having no light. By night on his bed, he sought the way the light is parted, for the dayspring to know its place; [attempting] to avoid walking in the paths of the violent, [but] to walk the paths of the Lord, to obtain from Him wisdom, and to hear the word of truth. And he was concerned and anxious at all times to save his soul from the pit, that he might be enlightened with the light of the living, to strengthen God on the Right and reject the Left. In [times of] trouble he would raise his voice on high and say Holy, in order to build a tabernacle of Peace. For it is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man, since they are sea-monsters and will perish, while He will stand forever.

Through the vague style and scriptural allusions we learn from this opening paragraph about Malkho’s early life in Lisbon. Malkho describes the religious conditions of his life from the perspective of a Marrano as a ‘forest and a wilderness’. It is difficult to determine conclusively what he means by complaining that his parents had ‘abandoned’ him. He alludes to them through the verse: For though my father and my mother have forsaken me, the Lord will take me up (Psalms 27:10). But such a use of Scripture certainly does not empty his reference of biographical content, and should not be read as the mere rhetoric of a convert who suddenly saw the light. The possibilities are two: either his parents had died while he was very young; or, they had cut themselves off completely from Judaism after the forced-conversion of the Jews in Portugal in 1497. Indeed, the latter might explain the fact that Malkho, born as Diogo Pires into a New Christian family, ca. 1500, was not circumcised at birth, even though the Marranos of Portugal had not yet been subjected to the intense pressures and existential fears characterizing the later Inquisition.13

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13 To date we have no information about Malkho’s parents. Among the forced
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Malkho describes his early period as a walk in the ‘darkness’, probably alluding to the religious aspect of his early life, and clearly expresses the constant grueling dilemma which accompanied him in his youth: what was the right path towards the salvation of his soul.\textsuperscript{14} While young Diogo might have tried to be on guard and transgress Jewish law as little as possible, his inability under the regime of religious oppression, to fully live as a Jew, clouded his life. Apart from this religious challenge, it seems that nothing could stand in Diogo Pires’ way to fame and success. He is described by all sources as an outstandingly talented person, very handsome, from whose post-Portugal life story one learns about the charm and charisma which won him the hearts of Jews and Gentiles alike. His multiple talents and magnetic personality explain his meteoric rise in the king’s court in Lisbon. Contemporary documents tell us that until 1521 he was a member of the king’s state legal authority, serving as a judge in civil matters in the Court of Appeals. In that year he bought (for money) the rights of the secretarial offices of that Court including the right to appoint a judge in his stead. The letter of appointment given to him by King Manuel was renewed by his successor, João III, in 1524.\textsuperscript{15} The road to a glorious career as a courtier seems to have been fully paved.

converts of 1497 we find one Jerónimo Pires, alias Moisés Gualite, who is mentioned in a document from 1506; see M. J. Pimenta Ferro Tavares, \textit{Os Judeus em Portugal no Século XIV}, II, Lisboa 1984, p. 885. If we may identify Malkho with the Gualite family, he belonged to a leading and influential family in the Jewish community of Lisbon; see \textit{Os Judeus em Portugal no Século XIV}, I, Lisboa 1982, p. 328. A son of this family served as a rabbi along with Rabbi Moses ben Joseph \textit{Hayyun} in 1490 (\textit{Os Judeus}, I, p. 131).


\textsuperscript{15} E. Lipiner, ‘Iyyunim be-Parashat David ha-Re’uveni u-Shelomoh Molkho’, in: A. Z. Aescoly ed., \textit{Sippur David ha-Re’uveni}, Jerusalem 1993, pp. lvii–lxi. According to Lipiner, Malkho received his first appointment as a judge when he was barely 20 years of age (The fact that he was uncircumcised proves that he could not have been born before 1497). It is not known how he arrived at the king’s court in the first place. It is highly likely that his exceptional personality had something to do with it.
Already at this stage one detects certain parallels between the two characters. Malkho, just like Daniel, embarks upon a career as a courtier. He cannot be described but as a charismatic person, איש חמודות, just like Daniel. Otherwise one finds oneself at loss trying to understand Malkho’s success among Jews and Christians alike, including the Pope who was captivated by his charm.

Both men face a problem of living a Jewish life under dangerous circumstances. To an extent, Daniel could be a biblical Marrano prototype, although his Jewish origin was known, unlike, for example, Esther about whom we read, Esther had not made known her people or her descent (Esther 2:10). Though I could not find evidence that Daniel was a religious symbol for the Marranos, there exist several Marrano prayers which refer to God’s response to Daniel’s prayer, begging for God’s help.16

The Jewish uprightness of the heroes in facing the authorities and the king himself is a salient theme in the Book of Daniel. Daniel’s stand in the king’s court, reflecting a proud insistence on his Jewishness, could not be duplicated by Malkho in Lisbon due to the different circumstances of forced-conversion. However, when he surfaced in Italy, living still under Catholic dominion, Malkho acted publicly, Church officials’ warning notwithstanding, in a manner that risked his very life. He preached to mixed crowds, engaged Churchmen in religious polemics, debating problematic issues such as God’s unity, fearlessly.

Consequently, Malkho suffered from informers throughout the Italian chapter of his life. He tells us that as soon as he landed in Verona: ‘Immediately I was surrounded by a company of evil-doers ['adat mere'im sevavuni'] saying: how is it that I dwell with the gods of Kedar18 and now I am peace [ani shalom] (Psalms 120:7).’19 After that

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17 Malkho is playing on the 2 parts of the verse in Psalms 22:17 and changing כלבים for מרים.
18 Malkho, using Psalms 120:5, switches אלהי קדר (Gods). It is worthy of note that the numerical value of אלהי קדר is 314, while ישו (Jesus) is 316. Again, if this is not Malkho’s invention, then it is possible that we have here another derogatory code name for Jesus, which, to my knowledge, has not been recorded elsewhere in Hebrew literature (see above, n. 4).
19 Hayyat Qaneh, p. 17; that is to say, I live peacefully.
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he had to face the persecution by Rabbi Jacob Mantino who reported him to the Portuguese ambassador. According to Malkho, the latter answered him: ‘Informing is not accepted by us [...]’. The term used here is לַהֵי הַלְוִי הָרְלָי, translated in Leviticus 19:16 into Aramaic as לא תיכול קורצין, an expression identical to the Aramaic in the Book of Daniel. From there Mantino went to the ‘judges’ (of the Inquisition?) and after he presented them with Portuguese witnesses condemning Malkho, they wrote an accusation against him [ketav sitna]. Mantino’s ‘crusade’ against Malkho continued with is going to the cardinals in an attempt to stir them up against the Pope who had granted Malkho a unique letter allowing him to return to Judaism, his ancestral faith, despite being raised as a Christian. Malkho relates also of David Reuveni: ‘Upon him too was poured the cup of Slander [informing] by the hands of the wicked of our people’. The motif of informing has, indeed, become a central one in Malkho’s life.

In a very suggestive passage, Malkho tells of his heavenly source of information, not available to others:

And let me inform you that from the day I traveled from Portugal I have been shown visions in my dreams [...]. And sometimes I see now an academy of scholars [yeshivat hakhamim] with open books in front of them and they study Torah [...] and I learn something from them. And since I had neither studied nor become familiar with Hebrew [leshon ha-qodesh] I did not understand everything. Yet, what I was taught in that holy academy I use in my answers to those who ask me to interpret verses and sayings [pesuqim u-ma’amirim] which the scholars of our generation find difficult to comprehend. [...] And I have permission to answer all questions related to the twenty four [books of the Bible], save for the book of Daniel, the interpretation of which I have been [only] hinted at [...] and I was ordered not to reveal any detail of it for the time being.

20 That is to say, it is against the ethical code in diplomatic circles.
21 See Ezra 4:7.
22 גוֹמֶל עַל מָנוּ הָלֵשָנָה מַרְשָׁעִי (Hayyat Qaneh, p. 25).
23 Idel, ‘Rabbi Shelomoh Molkho’ (above, n. 14), pp. 206-207.
Of course, this book is traditionally considered as the one holding the secrets of calculating the dates of the Redemption, the most valuable information sought by all. Therefore it is only natural that the book would be singled out by Malkho. Yet, the secrets of the book of Daniel are in Malkho’s hands. He is their only trusted keeper. He holds the key to the ‘Daniel Code’. Thus the personal connection between Malkho and Daniel is reinforced.

**Summary**

The ‘Danielite’ findings in Malkho’s letter start with objective similarities of biographical parallel elements between extra-ordinary talented and charismatic young men who were *en route* to brilliant careers at the courts of their respective kings and who consequently faced situations of religious conflicts. Additional events in Italy, such as instances of informing, may have strengthened Malkho’s identification with the biblical image of Daniel. Another similarity, this time a subjective one, is expressed in Malkho’s confident and proud stand in facing powerful Church and State officials. Malkho’s choice of Daniel’s supplication for his own prayer alongside the usage of a similar style in describing his stay on Sant Angelo Bridge, indicate, in my opinion, a profound awareness of Daniel’s example, even to the point of impersonation, which does not seem to have been for the sole sake of impressing the rabbis to whom the letter was addressed. From here onward this route leads into Malkho’s subconscious world of visions, containing motifs similar to those of Daniel’s, such as the angelic beings which lead him and reveal secrets to him.

Recently I suggested that Malkho’s reputed attempt to influence Carl V in theological matters did indeed take place; we know of similar endeavors by monks striving to influence Moslem rulers, including Sultans, to convert to Christianity. However, I am now in a position

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24 Christian hope for the conversion of Moslem rulers drove Franciscans and others to go to Islamic territories and preach to kings and sultans. Among the most famous personalities involved in such adventures we find St. Francis. According to Ramon Lull’s report, Raimundus Martini also engaged in such a mission; see H. Hames, ‘Approaches to Conversion in the Late 13th Century Church’, *Studia Luliana* 35 (1995), pp. 79-80. In other words, the hope for a far-reaching religious achievement, through a single daring and dangerous act of personal witness, was something that fired the imagination of certain missionary Christian circles.
to suggest that we need not look for external, Christian missionary history, to explain this episode, since this is exactly what takes place in the book of Daniel, where two kings become convinced that the God of the Jews is the only God, though they do not convert to Judaism.25

However, Carl V was no Darius, who became a believer after his dream was interpreted by Daniel. The biblical miracle of the furnace which did not scorch the clothes of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah did not make a reappearance to save Malkho from the inquisitorial pyre in Mantua. It is here that we must remind ourselves that even if the first part of the biographies of Daniel and Malkho is objectively similar, there is still a crucial difference between them. Daniel is depicted as an upright Jew devoted to the commandments, whereas Malkho is not.

It is quite possible that Malkho did indeed try to imitate Daniel’s upright religious posture in dealing with Christian authorities, Church and secular alike. However, it is not unlikely that the guilt-feelings which accompanied Malkho until his death at the stake were intensified due to his not living up to the courageous example set by Daniel. It is even possible that walking up to the pyre Malkho envisioned Daniel in the lion’s den and Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in the fiery furnace. Perhaps he still hoped for a similar miracle. But what seems clear is the fact that he resolved to bravely face the fire because, contrary to Daniel, he had not been able to evade living a double-life as a Marrano. Thus, he may have seen it as an expiation of his sinful youth. The last scene of his life, facing the public martyrdom in Mantua, has been related by a Jewish contemporary historiographer. Malkho’s last words seem to bring his life to a full circle. The thread running through his entire life is profoundly colored by the theme of sin and expiation:

For living in that religion my heart is sullen and displeased. So

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25 I do not rule out the possibility that the inspiration for his venture was rooted in Abraham Abulafia’s mission to the Pope; see, for example, Aescoly, Ha-Tenu’ot ha-Meshšiyot be-Yisrael, Jerusalem 1988, p. 218.
now do [to me] as you wish, and my soul will return to its Father’s house as in the days of its youth, for then it fared better than now’. And they became furious at him, threw him on the wood over the fire, and they sacrificed him as a burnt-offering wholly made to smoke unto the Lord.26

Appendix

Molkho-Malko-Malkho?27
Three scholars deal with the surname which Diogo Pires used after openly returning openly to Judaism in Italy. A. Z. Aescoly’s point of departure is the famous magical-messianic legend about Yosef de la Reina which in the 17th century was attributed to Malkho.28 He suggests that it had to do with the similarity in the meaning of the names – both de la Reina (in Spanish) and מַלְכָּה mean queen. This assumes the punctuation of the Hebrew as in the above, as well as a confusion of the name in its Ashkenazic pronunciation with ‘Molkho’.29 This seems far fetched, and indeed Moshe Idel expresses his reservation. Idel himself postulates a very early connection between the de la Reina legend and Malkho. He conjectures that Malkho himself was aware of the legend when still in Portugal, identified with its magical character, and eventually this was the reason he adopted the name מַלְכָּה (Molkho) similar in meaning to de la Reina.30

While this cannot be utterly refuted, I want to suggest another interpretation, based on Malkho’s biblical mindset and frame of

26  Rabi Joseph ha-Kohen, Divrei ha-Yamim le-Malkhei Zarfat u-Malkhei Beit Otoman ha-Togar, II, Lemberg 1859, p. 23a. After completing the article I discovered that Rachel Elior has recently made a short general observation about Molkho, ‘who re-experiences the redemption vision of Daniel’; see her introduction to R. Shatz-Oppenheimer, Ha-Ra’ayon ha-Meshi’i me’az Gerush Sefarad, Jerusalem 2005, p. 13.
27  This appendix is the payment of a debt. In a recent publication, Spirituality and Law (above, n. 12), pp. 59-76, I used the spelling ‘Malkho’ instead of the universally accepted ‘Molkho’, without properly explaining the reason for it.
28  For a detailed analysis, see Idel, ‘Rabbi Shelomoh Molkho’ (above, n. 14), pp. 194-202.
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reference. While the Sefardic surname מולכו (Molkho) existed in the 16th century, Solomon himself spelled it מלקה (Malkho). This is evident from the acrostics of his name in the opening of Sefer ha-Mefo’ar. Most of the sixteenth century references to him spell his name the same way.

There are two biblical appearances of מלקה:
1. And He will give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed [meshiho] (1Samuel 2:10) – ויתן עז למלכּו וירם קרן משיחו.
2. A tower of salvation is He to his king, and shows mercy to his anointed [li-meshiho] to David and his seed for evermore (2Samuel 22:51; cf. Psalms 18:51) – מגדל ישועות מלכּו ועושה חסד למשיחו לדוד ולזרעו עד עולם.

Both contexts are ‘messianic’, namely, in the use of the root משח, and therefore could be interpreted as alluding to the future Messiah. The second verse refers to the line of David and could thus be understood as alluding to the Messiah from the House of David only, while Malkho probably saw himself as the Messiah from the House of Joseph (or: Ephraim). Yet, splitting the verse would allow it to be interpreted rather comfortably as referring to both Messiahs.

Yet, maybe the odd, non-Hebrew, spelling of the surname מולקא (Molqa-Molqo), as it appears in the writings of the contemporary Yiddish speaking courtier Joseph of Rosheim, might be quite close to Solomon’s intentions. While unaware of any possible Hebrew meaning of the name, he preserved at least one way it was pronounced by some. This would be even more likely if we accept Kaufmann’s conjecture that מולקא should be amended to מאלקו (Malqo). Like David Kaufmann, I believe that מלקה (Molkho) ought to be rejected. And yet, was it Malko, as we seem to learn from the Rosheim reference, or

31 See, for example, S. Rosanes, Divrei Yemei Yisrael be-Togarma, vol. I, Tel Aviv 1930, p. 272.
32 David Kaufmann, the first to discuss Solomon’s surname, suggested the second out of the two verses which refer to David. In his view, Malkho’s first name, Solomon, was intended to show his gratitude and indebtedness to David Re’uveni, to the extent that he considered himself as his son; see D. Kaufmann, ‘Comment faut-il prononcer le nom de Salomon מלאך’, REJ 34, 1897, p. 126.
33 Kaufmann, p. 126. Aescoly follows this suggestion with a question mark (Hayyat Qaneh, p. 6.)
34 Kaufmann, p. 127.
Malkho? While talking and writing about impending redemption, Solomon was very careful and never more than hinted at his ‘official’ messianic role. I doubt he used the biblical word as is. A blurred, vague hint seems more in accord with the manner he conducted his messianic mission and could serve it better in his relationships with Jews and Church officials. As to his Jewish contemporaries – they might have referred to him in all the forms mentioned above, including מולקו.

To sum up, the Hebrew מולקו could be pronounced Malko-Malkho-Molkho. It is probable that people used any of the three. However, in introducing himself, or when asked: ‘What is your surname’, Solomon probably replied ‘Malkho’.

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35 This suggestion is based on the premise that he adopted his surname simultaneously with or after assuming his messianic role. It makes sense that it happened while he was still in Lisbon along with his self-circumcision, and the visions and revelation of mystical ‘secrets’ that accompanied it according to his description (Hayat Qaneh, pp. 13-14). However, he believed he was destined for greatness even before his physical act of conversion, since in self-circumcision he was acting upon a prior multi-vision experience by means of which he had been commanded to do it, according to his report.