Renaissance Philosophy in Jewish Garb

Foundations and Challenges in Judaism on the Eve of Modernity

Giuseppe Veltri

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For Lucie

CONTENTS

PREFACE

Scholarship loses its human dimension and research may not even be feasible, unless it is motivated by a genuine curiosity for the subject, enthusiasm for the challenges presented by the past and the present, and an unrestrained passion for the pure pursuit of knowledge. My enthusiasm for Renaissance and early modern studies has a long history, dating back to my youth, when, as a Gymnasium student in Siena, 1976–1978, I first began to appreciate the world of humanist culture and history. The world of the Renaissance made an enduring impression on me, as I marveled at the size and beauty of Tuscany's monumental cathedrals, at the magnificent sculptures, the breathtaking paintings, the handsome buildings, and the geometrically perfect squares and narrow winding streets of its cities.

A decade later, when I had already begun to pursue Jewish studies in Berlin, I came across a learned article by Joanna Weinberg dealing with the Mantuan scholar, Azariah de' Rossi. Thus was I introduced to the most singular intellectual figure of Renaissance Italy. Azariah was an avid reader, deeply versed in both Jewish and Christian sources, and open to new hermeneutics and intellectual innovation. He had succeeded in establishing himself as a mediator between religious cultures, and his unique place in the pantheon of scholarship was recognized by Christian and Jewish intellectuals alike, if for differing reasons. For myself, Azariah took on the role of a virtual guide to humanist scholarship, with all its challenges and discoveries.

This book is a first installment drawn from the years I have devoted to the study of Jewish thought in the Renaissance; a second volume, a handbook of Jewish philosophy, is in preparation and will appear, hopefully, in the not too distant future. Some of the chapters in the present volume were published previously, in German, Italian, or English, over the course of the last decade. These I have reworked, however, adapting them to focus more strongly on the central question: the foundations and the challenges embodied by what is commonly called the "(pre)modern era." Debate over the Jewishness of philosophy, the introduction of poetry into philosophical speculation, the philosophic value of history, utopian and "real" political developments in the Jewish community, as well as the discussion of the new status of Judaism

in Christian polemics and "ethnographical" literature—these are all elements that contributed to the construction of the intellectual world of a Renaissance Jew.

As with every other work of my academic life, this book would not have taken its present form without the support of many friends. For the English editing, I am indebted to Hal Wyner, who also translated the first chapter from the original German. The chapter on Azariah was originally translated by Gesa Bruns, while the chapter on Sara Copio Sullam was rendered into English by Bill Templer. Four of the themes touched on in the book were the subject of lectures I delivered in March 2008 at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, at the invitation of Professors Sylvie Anne Goldberg and Maurice Kriegel. Michiel Klein Swormink, acquisitions editor at Brill (Leiden/Boston), showed great interest in the book and supported me throughout; his assistant Jennifer Pavelko was of great help in all production matters.

I owe a very special debt of gratitude to my wife, Lucie, for her patience in both listening and discussing, her irreplaceable help in improving nearly all of the pages that follow, and her enthusiasm for a chapter in Italian and Jewish history that is intriguing, widely unknown, still unexplored, and thus, fascinating. This book is dedicated to her.

Halle, June 1, 2008

INTRODUCTION

IN SEARCH OF A JEWISH RENAISSANCE

In a letter dated April 7, 1797, German poet and dramatist Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller wrote to his compatriot, the polymath Johann Wolfgang von Goethe:

> Among various Kabbalistic and astrological works that I have taken out of the library here, I have also come across a "Dialogue on Love," translated into Latin from the Hebrew, which I find not only very entertaining, but which has also greatly enhanced my knowledge of astrology. The mixture of things from the realms of chemistry, mythology, and astrology has been taken to major proportions here and is truly available for poetic use. I am having some astonishing and richly connotative comparisons between planets and the human limbs copied out for you.[1]

Schiller's reference was to the *Dialoghi d'Amore* by Leone Ebreo.[2] The Latin translation he most probably read was printed in the first volume of the *Artis Cabalisticae: hoc est, Reconditae Theologiae et Philosophiae, Scriptorum*…by Pistorius, published in Basel in 1587. It is likely that Schiller had come across Leone's *Dialoghi* in the course of his preliminary studies for *Wallenstein*,[3] a work in which he presents man—entirely in keeping with Goethe's view—as being "close to nature and firmly intentioned."[4] Leone's presentation of the doctrine of microcosm and macrocosm must have made a deep impression on Schiller. All of these elements were available here, as he himself put it, "for poetic use" as the ingredients, the building blocks of poetic inspiration.

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[1] Cited by Carl Gebhardt, ed., *Leone Ebreo. Dialoghi d'amore. Hebräische Gedichte* (Heidelberg: Curis Societatis Spinozanae, 1929), 107–108: "Unter einigen kabbalistischen und astrologischen Werken, die ich mir aus hiesiger Bibliothek habe geben lassen, habe ich auch einen 'Dialog Über die Liebe,' aus dem Hebräischen ins Lateinische übersetzt, gefunden, der mich nicht nur sehr belustigt, sondern auch in meinen astrologischen Kenntnissen viel weiter gefördert hat. Die Vermischung der chemischen, mythologischen und astrologischen Dinge ist hier recht ins Große getrieben und liegt wirklich zum poetischen Gebrauche dar. Einige verwundersam sinnreiche Vergleichungen zwischen Planeten mit menschlichen Gliedmaßen lasse ich Ihnen herausschreiben."

[2] For further details on Leone, see below, pp. 60–72.

[3] Schiller's dramatic trilogy on the betrayal and murder of the Bohemian general Albrecht von Wallenstein during the Thirty Years' War was completed in 1799.

[4] According to Gebhardt, ed., *Leone*, 108.

In his autobiographical *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Poetry and Truth), Goethe describes three episodes involving the "Wandering Jew." The third concerns a visit of the Wandering Jew to Spinoza, which Goethe "outlined, as a worthy subject for a poem," but on which he failed to elaborate. Here, too, as with Schiller, we encounter the idea that each single element of reality, or of the imagination, is nothing but an element at the poet's disposal for use in his works, just as a painter makes use of his sketches and colors.

Both of these literary anecdotes touch upon the question of the attitude of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century (German) intellectual world toward the Jewish philosophical tradition of the Renaissance and early modern period. The question of whether Jewish thought was considered in any way relevant to the perceptions and values of this intellectual community can be answered only in the negative. While, particularly at the end of the nineteenth century, the Italian Renaissance came to be seen as *the* measure of humanity, humanism, and theories of individuality, Jewish scholarship and Jewish traditions were marginalized, if not totally ignored or even proscribed. It is not my intention to deal here with the historical background, the ideological reasons, and the fatal consequences of the scholarly dismissal of Jewish philosophical literature. The Enlightenment, the increasing Protestantization of culture and philosophy, incipient race theories, and the political predominance of so-called "Western civilization" are only some of the columns on which the temple of "humanism" was built, a temple devoted to a faith in reason that excluded all minorities from the social, political, cultural, and educative discourse.

Even today, the situation has not entirely changed. The intellectual history of humanistic Jewry in Italy is a chapter in cultural and philosophical history still largely unexplored, although since the pioneering work of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Germany and the later efforts of Cecil Roth[5] in Britain and the United States, a number of studies have tried to shed some light on the impact of the Renaissance on Judaism, and on the contribution of the Jews to that Renaissance. The German "science of Judaism" showed a particular interest in the

[5] Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959); on Roth see David Ruderman, "Cecil Roth: A Reassessment," in *The Jewish Past Revisited*, ed. David N. Myers and David Ruderman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 128–142.

cultural history of humanism, a tendency probably best interpreted as an attempt by its adherents to discover in the arsenal of their own history a foundational act for the emergence of the new "critical" sciences. It was not by chance that the founder of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the literary historian Leopold Zunz, wrote a biography of the humanist scholar Azariah de' Rossi, who had directly attacked the reliability of the aggadah in the face of non-Jewish sources and scientific discoveries. Renaissance Judaism was an object of keen interest in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century German-Jewish scholarship, not least in response to the new "Geist" that had been infused into historiography by Jacob Burckhardt and his epoch-making work on Renaissance culture.[6]

At the same time, knowledge of humanist Jewish culture was quite limited among German scholars, who were, however, amenable to change: the successive editions of Burckhardt's work contain a number of additions and corrections added by Ludwig Geiger at Burckhardt's own request. The emendations were, however, entirely deleted from editions published after the 1920s.[7] A parenthetical remark on Cecil Roth's interest in Renaissance studies is also in order here. His enthusiasm seems to have been the result of a backward projection onto the Renaissance of the experiment that had so unmistakably and so dramatically failed in Germany in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In his own words: "There has never been any other period in history when Jews achieved so successful a synthesis between their ancestral Hebraic culture and that of the environment." What the Jewish-German symbiosis failed to achieve is here portrayed as having been already been fully realized in the Renaissance. Roth's statement, historically inaccurate, squares entirely with nineteenth-century Romantic enthusiasm for an idealized vision of humanist Italy and its scholarship.

Despite the enthusiasm mirrored in the scholarship of the past fifty years, early modern Judaism can still be considered a field of study that has remained largely untilled. Let me recall two general obstacles that also affect the study of the history of Jewish science and philosophy.

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[6] Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* (Leipzig: Seemann, 1869).

[7] See, for example, the edition edited by Wilhelm von Bode (Berlin: Th. Knaur, 1928). Wilhelm von Bode was the general director of the Königliche (later Staatliche) Museen Berlin between 1906 and 1920. On his life and career, see Wilhelm von Bode, *Mein Leben*, ed. T. W. Gaethgens, B. Paul, et al., 2 vols. (Berlin: Nicolai, 1997). On the entire question, see Klaus Hermann, "Ludwig Geiger as the Redactor of Jacob Burckardt's *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien*," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 10 (2003): 377–400.

A large number of literary works from the period spanning the two centuries from 1450 to 1650 are still available only in manuscript form or in rare printed editions scattered throughout the world. This situation is due, among other things, of course, to the numerous burnings of Jewish books and documents, the censorship of the Inquisition, and the practice of unscrupulous librarians who used folios of Jewish manuscripts to construct the covers of Christian volumes. To this day, there is no catalogue of Hebrew European manuscripts comparable to Kristeller's *Iter Italicum*. As other scholars have already noted, we cannot seriously treat Jewish attitudes to the sciences without an analysis of the material at our disposal, which implies, in the main, the charting of a map of all extant manuscripts and prints, including such secondary sources as Christian notices, Inquisition acts, the *index librorum prohibitorum*, etc.

The main question, however, is whether we can even speak of Jewish humanism, or a Jewish Renaissance, at all. If we define Renaissance culture in Romantic terms—that is, if we allow ourselves to be guided by the idealistic conclusions of Jacob Burckhardt (and, similarly, of Cecil Roth) concerning the humanist spirit of freedom, the origins of individualism, and the birth of sciences—we run smack up against the obvious reality: the Jews of the Renaissance were neither freer nor more individualistic than in earlier centuries; then as before, they constituted an alienated minority. If, on the contrary, we define the spirit of the Renaissance as more or less autonomous reflection on the sources of knowledge (the Bible, science, the classical sources), embodied in a cult of letters and scholarship, we find in Judaism a timid, but nevertheless demonstrable affinity, shrouded though it may sometimes be in the traditional "orthodoxy" of the fathers. Perhaps one of the most evident expressions of the new spirit was, as Ruderman has remarked, the rise of a new class of intellectuals that grew out of the large numbers of Jewish students who studied medicine together at university during this period.[8] Cross-pollination between the scattered Jewish communities and their Christian environment was much furthered with the help of Jewish physicians (and their itinerant lifestyle) and Jewish intellectuals who served as advisers to publishing houses and scholars.

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[8] See his *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

Although they were initially very hesitant and infrequent visitors to the *respublica litteraria et philosophica*, the Jewish intellectuals contributed to, or at least mirrored, some of the ideas, concepts, and movements that came to serve as the coordinates of European philosophical maps of this "new" era. Among these concepts, ideas, and intellectual discourses are the inclusion of poetry in the philosophical discourse, conceptions of history and historical truth, the challenges of modern geography, the new sciences and scientific discovery, political philosophy and conceptions of the city, the debate on the immortality of the soul, and the legal definition of religion and religious ceremonies. All of these find their reflection in Jewish intellectual discourse on the eve of so-called modernity.

Based on several years of research on Jewish intellectual life in the Renaissance, this book tries to distinguish the coordinates of "modernity" as premises of Jewish philosophy, and vice versa. In the first part, I am concerned with the foundations of Jewish philosophy, its nature as philosophical science and as wisdom. The second part is devoted to certain elements and challenges of the humanist and Renaissance periods as reflected in Judaism: historical consciousness and the sciences, utopian tradition, the legal status of the Jews in Christian political tradition and in Jewish political thought, aesthetic concepts of the body, and conversion.

In this volume, the term "foundations" refers only to the premises underlying the philosophical interpretation of Jewish tradition, with explicit reference to the humanist and Renaissance periods. An important result of my research is the demonstration that it was not until this period that the adjective "Jewish," used in connection with philosophy, first took on the meaning that became characteristic in the modern period. It was at this time that Jewish philosophers, far removed from the universities, began increasingly to refer to a specifically Jewish theology, in contrast to a Christian/universal worldview, as a means of grounding and defending their own significance in the history of the world. In the Middle Ages and the early modern period, the Jews were still a part of the general philosophical discourse. By the nineteenth century, that was no longer the case. A second, very important, foundation on which Jewish philosophy rested was the inclusion of poetry as an act of inspiration similar, or equal to, that of the prophetic mind. While this was, of course, no special prerogative of Jewish philosophy, it was a central element, the origins of which also belong to this period.

Chapter 1[9] will thus be concerned with the modern definition, or conception, of "Jewish" philosophy and its roots in the humanist and Renaissance periods. We will deal with the question of the historic use of the term "jüdische Philosophie" in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, and address the question as to the nature of the terminology in its dual historical sense as both Jewish wisdom and Jewish theology. We will observe that a decisive role in the creation of this perspective was played by the "little" history of Jewish philosophers by the Venetian rabbi Simone Luzzatto, who was the first to attempt to define the nature of what was "Jewish" about philosophy. We will also discuss the question as to how central, or peripheral, to this process of self-identification was the perception of Christianity.

Chapter 2 deals with the introduction of poetry (and mysticism) into philosophical speculation, as both a medium and a goal of knowledge, beginning with the works of Immanuel of Rome.[10] The focus on poetry as inspired and, thus, as a medium of knowledge was a debate that emerged in the thirteenth century, reaching its climax between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries with Petrarch and Ficino, in Christianity, and later with Leone Ebreo, in Judaism. This period can be characterized as an epoch of intellectual and practical inclusion of almost all elements in a universal conception of humanity and, paradoxically, as a period of exclusion of unity—a consequence of the political individualization of states, the rise of autonomous cities, and the increasing criticism of religion and its exclusive claims on the sources of truth. The new epoch shows a strange and precarious balance between the established scholasticism of the universities and the incipient tendencies of (Neo-)Platonic schools to include mysticism and emotions in their considerations, as cognitive acts of individuals—a conception in which prophecy, too, plays a role as an act of "inspiration." Emotion and inspiration are also the interpretative keys to the works of Leone

[9] This chapter is based on my articles "Die humanistischen Wurzeln der jüdischen 'Philosophie': Zur Konzeption einer konfessionellen Ontologie und Genealogie des Wissens," in *Die philosophische Aktualität der jüdischen Tradition*, ed. Werner Stegmaier (Frankfurter a. M.: Suhrkamp 2000), 249–278; and "Von der 'philosophia iudaica seu hebraeorum' zur 'jüdischen Philosophie': (Ver-)Wandlungen eines Begriffes im Kontext der *Kabbala Denudata*," *Morgen-Glantz Zeitschrift der Christian Knorr von Rosenroth-Gesellschaft* 16 (2006): 323–341.

[10] Previously unpublished.

Ebreo, who is the subject of chapter 3.[11] A Neoplatonist in his soul, and a humanist in his style, Leone succeeded in making philosophical ideas understandable, a task at which Ficino had failed entirely. Cosmic love, as emanated in the world of creation, is nothing but the kiss of the lover and the beloved, a kiss that leads back to the Godhead with the death of the individual.

The second part of the book is devoted to the intellectual challenges of the humanist and Renaissance periods, as mirrored in Judaism. The first two essays focus on the bases for historical and philosophical research and on the status of science, two issues that are closely interrelated: criticism of the canonical status of ancient and recent sources of knowledge (in medicine, astronomy, astrology, physics, etc.) is the premise for accepting new scientific discoveries and facing the challenges of the new epoch. This is also an aspect of the new interest in philology and historical criticism, which takes on interesting connotations if we consideration the pansophic attitudes of the seventeenth century, manifest also in the so-called scientific community.

We begin, in chapter 4, with a consideration of this new historical consciousness as it is reflected in the works of Azariah de' Rossi.[12] De' Rossi's contribution to scholarship was wide-ranging, including critical analysis of the aggadah, a theory of Bible translation, critical analysis of Philo, research in *piyyut* and Jewish chronology, and so forth. The novelty of his achievement, however, lies elsewhere: what sets Azariah apart is his methodological approach. The distinction he draws between the "essence" and the "side issues" of tradition, that is, between the constant and its variants, introduces a new element into Jewish self-perception. This new element is that of the possibility of autonomous judgment, based on the state of the sources.

Azariah's positive attitude toward the new sciences and philosophy and his criticism of the aggadah subjected him to attacks by his

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[11] A former draft of this chapter was published in "Philo and Sophia: Leo Hebraeus' Concept of Philosophy," in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, ed. David Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004): 55–66. I thank the publisher for permission to reprint the article.

[12] First published as "The Humanist Sense of History and the Jewish Idea of Tradition: Azaria de' Rossi's Critique of Philo Alexandrinus," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2 (1995): 372–393. See also my "Il *Lector Prudens* e la biblioteca della sapienza antica: Pietro Colonna Galatino, Amato Lusitano e Azaria de' Rossi," in *Hebraica Hereditas. Studi sulla storia e la cultura ebraica dell'Italia meridionale in onore di Cesare Colafemmina*, ed. Giancarlo Lacerenza (Napoli: Herder, 2005): 367–383.

contemporaries. Chapter 5[13] focuses particularly on the challenges represented by the sciences and the arts, and the Jewish reaction to them: the inclusion of the sciences in the educational curriculum, the role of antiquarian and encyclopedic works in disseminating the sciences, and the new hermeneutic accent on the relationship between the sciences and the Torah. The central figure in this chapter will be the Jewish theologian Rabbi Löw of Prague, who in many ways epitomizes what we can call the exegetical reaction to and hermeneutic transfiguration of the new challenges and discoveries that typified the early modern period. Here hermeneutics is the key word that will enable us to penetrate his holistic view of the world and to understand the theoretical premises of his interpretive scholarship.

Very closely linked to both the scientific discoveries of the early modern period and to the apologetic attitude toward Judaism's biblical past are Jewish speculations on musical theory and their resonance in Christianity. This is the subject of chapter 6.[14] The exegetical approach of the Maharal, in which the *prisca theologia* is seen as the hermeneutical key to understanding the new discoveries, is also the method followed by Abraham Portaleone and his reader Athanasius Kirchner, enabling them to establish the connection between theology and music. Kircher considered music as a branch of mathematics, tracing its origins to a hermetic-Pythagorean conception of numbers as symbols of an intrinsic mystical, and universal, harmony. As expressions of the universal harmony, the numbers themselves take on a mystical and cosmological significance, symbolizing the most intimate connections and correspondences between the four worlds.

A further facet of Renaissance scholarship was the development of new directions in political thought. Three aspects will be examined here: the utopian dimension of Jewish history, the Christian legal perception of Judaism, and the reflections of Simone Luzzatto on the condition of Jews in the new concept of the city-state.

Utopian thought is, by nature, always both creative and explosive. Often it is also subversive, or at least perceived as such: the myth of

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[13] The first part of the chapter is previously unpublished; for an earlier version of the second part, on Rabbi Löw, see my article "Science and Religious Hermeneutics: The 'Philosophy' of Rabbi Loew of Prague," in *Religious Confession and the Sciences in the 16th Century*, ed. Jürgen Helm and Annette Winkelmann (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 119–135.

[14] Published first as "Jewish Musical Theories and their Aftermath in the 'Prisca theologia': On the Sources of Athanasius Kircher's Musurgia Universalis," *EAJS-Newsletter* 13 (2003): 18–26 (coauthored with Gianfranco Miletto).

the "Ten Lost Tribes," to which is linked the idea of Judaism as "oriental" wisdom, was interpreted during this period in the context of a political preoccupation with potential, or purported, Jewish military might. The legend of the Ten Tribes of Israel, which had a particular impact on Sephardic Judaism, came to be used as a kind of military propaganda. As such, it functioned as both the utopian construction of an alienated minority and as the means of that same minority's political deconstruction by the surrounding, dominant culture. This is treated in chapter 7, which deals with the struggle between identity, past glory, and utopian thought.[15]

The legend of the Ten Tribes played a dominant role particularly in the intellectual and geographical space of Sephardic Jewry. Among the Jews living in German-speaking and Protestant regions, intellectual interest tended to focus mainly on questions of their legal and political status and on matters relating to rites and ceremonies. In chapter 8, we will look into the reasons for the growing production of commentaries on Jewish rites and customs in these regions. More precisely: What was it that made Jewish laws and practices on the observance of Shabbat, on circumcision, ritual purity, temple cults, and the like, of such great popular interest as to occasion the writing of entire tractates, and chapters of more general books, devoted exclusively to their description and elucidation? In order to explain this profusion of writing on Jewish traditions and customs, some scholars speak of an ethnographic interest among Christians in non-Christian ideas, customs and beliefs. I would like to show here that the reduction of Jewish legal tractates to a compendium of rituals and ceremonies was not primarily the result of an interest in Jewish ethnology, but rather the expression of a political decision aimed at undermining the authority of Jewish law.

Not surprisingly, a major preoccupation of Jewish thinkers in this period was to find their own place in society. The Venetian rabbi Simone Luzzatto provides an interesting example of this endeavor (chapter 9). His political thesis is both simple and daring: Venice can put an end to its current political decline by offering the Jews a monopoly on foreign trade, and thus reap the benefits from the fact that the Jews are more "well suited for trade" than others. Luzzatto was the first to define

[15] First published as "'The East' in the Story of the Lost Tribes: Creation of geographical and political Utopias," in *Creation and Re-Creation in Jewish Thought*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Rachel Elior (Tübingen: Mohr, 2005): 249–269.

Judaism in terms of its economic and social functions in society, ignoring the classic analysis of Judaism in terms of its status in the history of the world as a (privileged or hated) religion.

Chapter 10[16] deals with the question of conversion and identity as reflected in an exchange between Sara Copio Sullam and two high ecclesiastics, again in Venice, at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Sara's exceptional physical beauty and artistic gifts played an important role in this debate, as a complement to the philosophical views concerning the immortality of the soul, on which it centered. Beauty of the body, it is agreed, is nugatory unless bound up with morality of the soul, which for Christians is possible only through the sacrament of baptism. This becomes the central line of argument, constantly reiterated in the numerous attempts to convert Sara. It expresses the underlying principle of Christian aesthetics and anthropological attitudes, according to which the conversion of the soul is prerequisite to the healing of the body. For Jews, the question of the individual soul remained controversial. Sara appears rather to believe that all Israel will be healed and saved in its entirety, which is why she excludes the alternative of personal, individual conversion. The philosophical conviction suggested here is that body and soul (in Judaism) constitute a *synholon*, an essential composite guaranteeing the continuity of Judaism even beyond the span of human life. In his novel *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, Giorgio Bassani speaks, in reference to Sara Copio Sullam, of "a grand woman," describing her aptly as "the honor and pride of Italian Jewry at the height of the Counter-Reformation."

[16] An earlier version of this chapter was published as "Die 'schöne Jüdin' und die Unsterblichkeit der Seele: Ein philosophisch-apologetischer Wettstreit im Venedig des 17. Jahrhunderts," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 32 (2005): 53–71.

CHAPTER ONE

JEWISH PHILOSOPHY: HUMANIST ROOTS OF A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS

The concept of "Jewish philosophy" is, by definition, a contradiction in terms. From a purely historical perspective, it can be understood as the expression of a conflict between cultures. At the root of that conflict, however, lies another fundamental question, one that has been debated since antiquity: the genealogy of knowledge. There is, of course, no fixed definition for the term "philosophy." Its content, object, and purpose are in constant flux, varying over time, space, and social context. Nevertheless, as an abstract term, it invariably evokes that specifically Greek view of the world which first gave rise to the very concept of philosophy.[1] This is a view that, as the *communis opinio* to this day would have it, is diametrically opposed to that of specifically Jewish thought: Athens and Jerusalem are standing metaphors for what are considered irreconcilable opposites.[2] Any scholar venturing into the debate over Jewish philosophy can thus easily find himself in the position of a sailor navigating between Scylla and Charybdis, hoping against hope that he will get through in one piece.

For a historian to use the term "Jewish philosophy" reflects a certain lack of rigor on his part. It represents an attempt to classify Jewish literary and cultural history along philosophical-historical criteria, without

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[1] See Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in idem, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; London: Routledge, 1978), 79–153, with a reference to Martin Heidegger, *Was ist das—die Philosophie?* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1956), 6–7. Cf. also Leo Strauss, "Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis in Western Civilization," in idem, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, ed. Kenneth H. Green (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 87–136, esp. pp. 104ff. (lectures first delivered in 1952 and published posthumously in *Modern Judaism* 1 [1981]: 17–45 and *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 3 [1979]: 111–118).

[2] Consider the strong position taken by the influential church historian Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 1, *Die Entstehung des kirchlichen Dogmas*, 4th ed. (1886; repr., Tübingen: Mohr, 1990), 54: "In Christ's day, Judaism and Hellenism stood in opposition to each other not only as disparate, coherent, and equal sources of authority; rather, the latter, having developed in the midst of a small people, had become a *universal* spiritual force" (emphasis in the original). Unless otherwise mentioned, all translations in the footnotes of this chapter are by the translator, Hal Wyner.

first having resolved the *contradictio in adiecto* inherent in the terminological construct "Jewish philosophy." Does not the claim of universality that characterizes philosophical thought, and with it all human knowledge, prohibit its localization as specific to a restricted segment of human society with its own individual cultural history? Gershom Scholem once ridiculed the title of Immanuel Löw's monumental work *Die Flora der Juden*, wondering aloud whether such a thing as "Jewish flora" could even exist![3] Should not a similar degree of ridiculousness (as a philosophical category, or counter-category, of human knowledge) be attached to the use of the term "Jewish philosophy"?

The comparison with Jewish flora is not nearly as incongruous as it might, at first glance, appear. Löw saw his research as a contribution to the study of ancient flora (and fauna). In this he was responding to one of the fundamental demands of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as formulated by Leopold Zunz and Immanuel Wolf: the study of all facets of Judaism as a means of demonstrating its contribution to general human (but, in fact, more particularly Christian) intellectual and cultural history.[4]

This apologetic attitude is explicable within the context of the political and social standing of the Jews in the nineteenth century, a time when Jewish culture was considered vastly inferior to that of Christianity, and the founders of the new *Wissenschaft* were struggling to "gradually elevate the understanding of Judaism to the level of a science."[5] Naturally, this approach was somewhat problematic, if only for the

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[3] Gershom Scholem, *Von Berlin nach Jerusalem* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 220: "Löw, at the time [was] one of the grand old men of the scientific study of Judaism.… [He] was a scholar of encyclopedic knowledge, but above all a specialist in botany, in rabbinic literature, and an enthusiastic student of all Jewish natural science. He is widely known even today as the author of the five-volume work *Flora of the Jews*, and I believe I am the only person who ever had a laugh at this odd title."

[4] Löw expressed this as follows: "My *Flora* is the first attempt to draw a nearly complete picture of the relationship of the Jews to the Plant Kingdom." Immanuel Löw, *Die Flora der Juden*, vol. 4 (Vienna: Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1934; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1967), 2.

[5] Zacharias Frankel, *Vorstudien zu der Septuaginta* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1841), viii. On the Romantic influence that marked the beginnings of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, see Selma Sara Täubler-Stern, "Der literarische Kampf um die Emanzipation der Juden in den Jahren 1816–1819," *Monatsschrift zur Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 83 (1939): 645–666.

use of the term "contribution." Judaism did not, after all, contribute to European culture. It is European culture.[6]

In order to further explore the question of the existence of, and the justification for, a specifically "Jewish" philosophy, a method will be employed that Friedrich Nietzsche both criticized and mocked, but which, nevertheless, retains its heuristic value. Reminiscent of the walk of a crab, this is the so-called "historical method," by means of which its adherents claim to be able to move backwards from the present to the very roots of time, back to the mystical foundations of history (and of the historical tradition). The first part of this exploration will thus be concerned with the modern definition, or conception, of "Jewish" philosophy. The second deals with the question of the historic use of the term in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums.* In our search for the assumptions underlying this linguistic usage, we will also address the way in which the nature of "Jewish philosophy" is conceived, in its dual historical sense as both Jewish wisdom and Jewish theology.

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[6] The idea of the individual dissolving into an undifferentiated collectivity is untenable for both ontological and practical epistemological reasons. This renders the term "contribution" all the more problematic. In this context, Leonard H. Ehrlich has not long ago pointed out the implicit contradiction therein: "If there is in fact a Jewish contribution to philosophy—i.e. to non-Jewish philosophy—does this contribution remain Jewish? Is it possible to contribute anything to philosophy that need not be considered as already a part of the very essence of philosophy? And is not therefore philosophy, as such, by nature no less definable as Jewish than as anything else? In this sense, Jewish philosophy would lend expression to something that is, as such, already contained in philosophy—and vice versa. And yet, the phenomenon of reciprocal cancellation must also be taken into account. And if Jewish philosophy is something that is in any way capable of contributing to philosophy, does that not mean that it already constitutes philosophy in its own right? And would not that then make philosophy, as such—and so also Jewish philosophy—something that is composed of contributions, i.e., elements, and thus a construct?" Leonard H. Ehrlich, "Philosophie, jüdische Philosophie und ihre Geschichte," *Archivio di Filosofia* 61 (1993): 2. Yeshayahu Leibowitz also lends his own (polemical) scholarly support to philosophy's claim of universality when he declares categorically: "Ethics can be neither Jewish nor non-Jewish, neither religious nor irreligious. Ethics is ethics." Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Yahadut. 'Am yisra'el, u-medinat yisra'el* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1979), 16. On the problematic identification of philosophy and ethics (*philosophia sive ethica*), as discussed by Constantin Brunner, see George Goetz, *Philosophie und Judentum. Vorträge und Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1924–1968* (Husum: Hansa-Verlag, 1991).

1.1 *The Question*

The question as to the existence of "Jewish" philosophy, and its essence, was first raised in nineteenth-century Germany by the founders of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.[7] By so doing, they drew attention to a separate but intimately related question: Judaism's perception of itself. To put it more precisely: the more a Jewish approach to philosophy is emphasized, or denied, and thus becomes a prominent object of academic debate, the more radically it forces the question as to the essence, identity, and continuity[8] of Jewish culture as compared to culture in general.[9] It is thus not surprising that this question is most widely discussed in the Diaspora, where, at least since the arrival of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, assimilation remains a constant danger, threatening to dissolve Jewish identity into an indistinguishable universality.

It was, presumably, an awareness of the dialectical relationship between the universal—into which all experience of reality flows, at least as a precondition to human communication—and the particular—through which the identity of the individual is created—that led to the inclusion in the philosophic discourse of a number of those aspects of Jewish intellectual and cultural history that were seen as being "specifically" Jewish. Foremost among these was Jewish mysticism: Hekhalot literature, the Kabbalah, Hasidism, magic, etc. This tendency can be traced back as far as the Renaissance. It was the Romantics, however, who, by adopting certain Kabbalistic terms and themes, brought it into greater prominence.

This is not the place to elaborate on all of the various and partly contradictory movements that availed themselves of the term "Jewish

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[7] Discussed in more detail below, pp. 19 and ff.

[8] As already noted by Johann Maier, "Intellektualismus und Mystik als Faktoren jüdischer Selbstdefinition," *Kairos* 27 (1985): 230.

[9] Daniel H. Frank, who is quite conscious of this dilemma, attributes it more too a generalized contemporary (Jewish?) feeling of uncertainty: "At present everything seems unsettled. Little wonder, then, that the question before us 'what is Jewish philosophy?' appears particularly timely." Daniel H. Frank, "What is Jewish Philosophy," in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank et al. (London: Routledge, 1997), 1. The problem of definition has been a widely discussed aspect of "Jewish" philosophy; see, e.g., Joel D. Gereboff, "Can the Teaching of Jewish History be Anything but the Teaching of Myth?" in *Seductiveness of Jewish Myth: Challenge or Response?*, ed. S. Daniel Breslauer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 43–69; Jonathan Cohen, "Enacting the Eclectic: the Case of Jewish Philosophy," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 30 (1998): 207–231.

philosophy" for the purpose of dissolving the specifically Jewish into the universal or, conversely, for emphasizing the genuinely Jewish aspects of knowledge as distinguished from universal knowledge. Two examples will suffice to illustrate the opposing tendencies. On the one hand there is Werner Sombart, not an unknown and quite clearly an intellectual heir to Heinrich Grätz, who, in 1911, speaks of the "tinkering with numbers and signs" on the part of "Kabbalists," who had no part in the essence of (Orthodox) Judaism and who had never had any "practical influence on life."[10] On the other hand, there is Georges Vajda, who in his 1950 bibliography of Jewish philosophy added the qualification "including mysticism" or "not including mysticism" to each item—thus clearly indicating the criterion he considered necessary for judging whether or not a given treatment of Jewish philosophy was "complete."[11]

The latest stage in this development can be observed in the recently published collection, *History of Jewish Philosophy*, in which various authors illuminate the historical, sociological, and intellectual background of Jewish thought from antiquity to the present.[12] Here not only is mysticism included, but also historical understanding, Zionism, and the Holocaust are treated as belonging to the history of Jewish philosophy. The term is employed in so broad a sense that its meaning becomes entirely diluted—to the point of losing all historical-philosophical consistency.

There can be no doubt that Gershom Scholem's influence contributed strongly to this tendency. As far as the status of "Jewish" philosophy is concerned, Scholem was active on two fronts. On the one hand, he was intent on bringing about a philosophical rehabilitation of Jewish esoteric literature (early Jewish mysticism, Kabbalah, and magic). On the other hand, he was determined to "re-Judaize" certain philosophical, or cultural-historical, elements in the works of such Jewish authors as Walter Benjamin and Franz Kafka.

Scholem's interest in Jewish mysticism was profoundly influenced by the Romantic and idealist intellectual traditions. His partiality for

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[10] Werner Sombart, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1911), 237. See Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, "Werner Sombart's *The Jews and Modern Capitalism*. An Analysis of its Ideological Premises," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 21 (1976): 87–107; Hartmann Tyrell, "Kapitalismus, Zins und Religion bei Werner Sombart und Max Weber," in *Shylock? Zinsverbot und Geldverleih in jüdischer und christlicher Tradition*, ed. Johannes Heil and Bernd Wacker (Munich: Fink, 1997), 189–216.

[11] Georges Vajda, *Jüdische Philosophie* (Bern: Francke, 1950), 6.

[12] Frank and Leaman, eds., *History of Jewish Philosophy* (see above).

the mystical and the mysterious, the fragmentary and the imperfect, in which he believed to have recognized the essential motive of (Jewish) existence, is reminiscent of cosmological and linguistic ideas of Neoplatonic and Hermetic provenance.[13] As regards the question of the development of the concept of the micro-macrocosm and the rise of the mystical-magical trends that culminated in early Jewish mysticism and the Kabbalah, Scholem's interest extended to every remotely imaginable genre of Jewish esoteric literature.[14] By means of this return to Hermeticism and Neoplatonism, the mysticism and magic that were rejected by such rationalists as Maimonides regained their philosophical respectability.[15]

The second track that Scholem followed can be seen in his analysis of the works of Walter Benjamin. In a 1964 lecture,[16] Scholem places particular emphasis on Benjamin's early skepticism toward the (Kantian) "systematic ideal" that had "fixed the traditional philosophic canon."[17] At the same time, he makes much of the fact that Benjamin had turned his attention to a commentary on major philosophical works "as a preliminary to a commentary on sacred texts." It is worth noting that this conforms precisely to the paradigm of hermeneutic rabbinic and, later, Kabbalistic thought. In that same lecture, a little further on, Scholem states: "If we ask ourselves wherein the man and his work are recognizably Jewish, then it is entirely suited to the intractable nature of Walter Benjamin's personality that the Jewish element, of which

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[13] The Neoplatonic tendency of Scholem's terminology is first recognizable in his letter to Franz Rosenzweig, *Bekenntnis über unsere Sprache* (1926). The text is provided in Michael Brocke, "Franz Rosenzweig und Gerhard Scholem," in *Juden in der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Walter Grab and Julius H. Schoeps (Stuttgart: Burg, 1986), 148–150. On Scholem's later observations on language, see his "Der Name Gottes und die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala," *Neue Rundschau* 83 (1972): 470–495, reprinted in *Judaica III. Studien zur jüdischen Mystik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp), 7ff.

[14] For a more extensive treatment, see Giuseppe Veltri, *Magie und Halakha* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1997), 12–16.

[15] Having read Molitor's *Philosophie der Geschichte*, Scholem writes: "This gave me the idea to write not the history, but the metaphysics of the Kabbalah. I was struck by the poverty of what we like to call the philosophy of Judaism. I was exasperated that the only three authors I knew, Saadya, Maimonides, and Hermann Cohen, saw their primary purpose in providing counter-theories to Myth and Pantheism, in refuting them—while what they should have been doing was to 'elevate' them to a higher order." From Scholem's letter to Schocken, published in Gershom Scholem, *Briefe I:1914–1947*, ed. Itta Shedletzky (Munich: Beck, 1994), 471.

[16] "Walter Benjamin," *Neue Rundschau*, 76 (1965): 1–21; now also in Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin und sein Engel* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), 9–34.

[17] Ibid., p. 17.

he was quite conscious as being both the origin and end of his thinking, is perceptible almost exclusively in the overtones of his works." Scholem's meaning is clear: contrary to all appearances, Benjamin's philosophical works are, both in origin and intent, Jewish (taken in the sense of "esoteric"). In his efforts to reinterpret Benjamin's philosophical about-face, Scholem described his later works as having been written only "seemingly" in the spirit of Marxist dialectic, while being, in fact, replete with fundamentally Jewish concepts. Conspicuous in this context is the fact that Scholem does not use the term "philosophy" when referring to Benjamin's Jewish background, but rather "theology." Even the latter's turn to Marxism is explained as a consequence of the "insights . . . of a theologian straying into the profane." Theology is, for Scholem, the term that best defines the intellectual occupation with things Jewish.[18] He refers to Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* as "the most original work of Jewish theology of our generation."[19] Writing to Edith Rosenzweig in 1930, he calls the book "the greatest philosophical achievement in recent times"[20] and, in the same breath, a "work of mystical theology"—entirely in keeping with the author's intent. In Scholem's usage, "philosophy" and "theology" appear to have been synonyms.[21]

In Scholem's conception, the *philosophia ancilla theologiae* of medieval Christian (and Jewish) scholasticism becomes *philosophia sive theologia* or, more precisely, *mystica theologia*. This definition of the philosophical can already be found in humanists such as Marsilio Ficino, for example.[22]

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[18] Because of this, it is not surprising that he was unwilling to accept Benjamin's rejection of theology. See Irving Wohlfarth, "Haarscharf an der Grenze zwischen Religion und Nihilismus. Zum Motiv des Zimzum bei Gershom Scholem," in *Gershom Scholem. Zwischen den Disziplinen*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Gary Smith (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 176ff.

[19] Scholem, *Walter Benjamin*, 28.

[20] Scholem, *Briefe I*, 242.

[21] The ambiguity in Scholem's usage can be seen, *inter alia*, in the fact that at one point he describes Judah ha-Levi as "the most Jewish of all Jewish philosophers" (*Die jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen* [Zürich: Rhein Verlag, 1957; repr., Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980], 26), while at another he refers to Saadya Gaon, Maimonides, and Hermann Cohen as medieval and modern representatives of classical Jewish theology (ibid., p. 41).

[22] On the intrinsic connection between *religio* und *philosophia* Ficino writes: "Si philosophia veritatis sapientiaeque amor ac studium ab omnibus definitur, veritas autem et sapientia ipsa solus est Deus, sequitur ut neque legitima philosophia quicquam aliud sit quam vera religio neque aliud legitima religio quam vera philosophia." (If philosophy is unanimously defined as the love and desire for truth and wisdom, and God alone is truth and wisdom, then it follows that legitimate philosophy can be nothing other than

It is worth noting, incidentally, that the humanist equation of philosophy with theology can, in turn, be traced back to the Neoplatonists, as can the high importance attached to language as a theurgic medium in mysticism and magic. In this respect, as well, there is a twentieth-century return, by way of the Renaissance, to the premises of Neoplatonism and Hermeticism.

By undertaking to re-Judaize, or to de-Christianize, certain terms (Torah, Law, Word, revelation, apocalypse, messianism, etc.)[23] Scholem implicitly confirms that he sees them as fundamental philosophical concepts. Here again, however, there is an underlying definition of philosophy from which the decisive elements of the universal and the systematic are entirely absent. Moreover, it thoroughly ignores the ways in which what had become European culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had been transmitted. To put it more bluntly: one cannot speak of Walter Benjamin's use of fundamental Jewish concepts on the one hand and, simultaneously, of his complete ignorance of Jewish tradition on the other, as Scholem does. The terms that Benjamin is said to have "unconsciously" absorbed from Judaism could just as easily have their roots in Christian tradition, or in a Christian reading of Judaism. The fundamental Jewish concepts transmitted in Christian tradition are, even if occasionally distorted through misinterpretation, quite often indistinguishable from their "true" Jewish counterparts. This is particularly so with regard to the understanding of such terms as mysticism,[24] messianism, Torah, and the like, which had over time taken on a "Christian taint" and in that guise informed the idealist-Romantic vision that so profoundly influenced Benjamin.[25]

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true religion and that legitimate religion can be nothing other than true philosophy.) *Opera* (Basel: Henricus Petri, 1561), 668, cited in its Latin version from Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino* (Florence: Sansoni, 1953), 348–349. The philosophy he is referring to is ancient (*prisca*) and originates with the teachings transmitted by Hermes Trismegistos: "inter philosophos primus a physicis ac mathematicis ad divinorum contemplationem se contulit…primus igitur Theologiae appelatus est auctor." (He first among philosophers turned from physics and mathematics to the contemplation of the divine.… Thus is he first called the author of Theology.) Cf. Kristeller, *Pensiero*, 16.

[23] See, e.g., his collection of articles, *Über einige Grundbegriffe des Judentums* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970).

[24] See also Andreas B. Kilcher, *Die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala als ästhetisches Paradigma. Die Konstruktion einer ästhetischen Kabbala seit der Frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998).

[25] Scholem himself recounts (*Benjamin*, p. 28) that the first work on Judaism that Benjamin had acquired for his own use was Franz Joseph Molitor's four-volume *Philosophie der Geschichte oder über die Tradition* (Münster: Thiessing, 1824–1855). Molitor was a Christian.

Scholem's view of Judaism led him to radically dissociate himself from the intellectualism and rationalism of Maimonides' admirers. For him, the spiritual basis of Jewish culture lay not in Maimonidean reason, but in (Jewish) theological concepts of a completely different nature. Moreover, he saw his own interpretation of Judaism as definitive, in an absolute sense. For the time being, Scholem admitted, the theological foundation of Jewish identity was obscured. It would, however, one day re-emerge, he believed.[26] In complete contrast to Scholem's use of the term theology, which, for him, had positive connotations, there is, in contemporary treatments of Judaism, an astonishing reluctance to employ the terms "theology" and "religion."[27] Rather, there is still a marked tendency to subsume anything and everything under the rubric of philosophy.[28]

1.2 *History of a Concept*

The emergence and use of the term "Jewish philosophy" raises two issues. First, there is the search for a Jewish identity that, having originated in a specific (temporally conditioned?) self-image, has been subject to constant revision, or at least discussion, ever since. Secondly, there is the issue of the relevance of the general philosophical discourse

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There can be no doubt that he had understood certain specialized terms better than others (cf. Scholem, *Grundbegriffe*, p. 93). The interesting thing here is the manner in which Scholem deduces Benjamin's identity as a Jewish philosopher/theologian. In this case, the reference to the known sources of Benjamin's cultural education seems to me of greater import than the appeal to his subconscious, a factor not subject to historical confirmation and which, in Scholem's usage, takes on a clearly idealistic-apocalyptic character. Concerning the extent of Benjamin's knowledge of Judaism, Scholem writes (*Benjamin*, 29): "In his correspondence and in conversation he constantly returned to Jewish matters. It is true that he always made a point of emphasizing his own ignorance on the subject. And yet he often persisted, with an intensity all his own, probing ever deeper into Jewish issues as into matters that touched him to the core."

[26] Cf. Wohlfarth, *Zimzum*, 231, n. 7.

[27] See, however, Johann Maier, *Geschichte der jüdischen Religion. Von der Zeit Alexanders des Großen bis zur Aufklärung mit einem Ausblick auf das 19./20. Jahrhundert*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1992), 19: "As late as 1972 there were still relatively few treatments [of Judaism]. Most of them were centered around the 'philosophy' of Judaism, which had proved itself so useful for apologetic purposes, whereby the long-term influence of 19th-century rationalist tendencies was still palpable."

[28] A notable exception is Peter Schäfer, *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie des rabbinischen Judentums* (Leiden: Brill, 1978); see also Karl Erich Grözinger, *Jüdisches Denken. Theologie, Philosophie, Mystik*, vol. 1, *Vom Gott Abrahams zum Gott des Aristoteles*; vol. 2, *Von der mittelalterlichen Kabbala zum Hasidismus* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2004–2005).

to a peculiarly Jewish outlook on the world. The concept of "Jewish philosophy" emerges at a specific moment in time in German-Jewish history, that of the nineteenth-century emancipation of the Jews. It is on this foundation that the assumptions underlying the contemporary debate still rest.

Ever since antiquity, and until the end of the eighteenth century, Judaism had defined itself first and foremost through its own written and oral tradition, the Torah, both as a book and as a mnemonically transmitted heritage complete with its own hermeneutic tradition. In the nineteenth century, this self-image went through a serious crisis. The gradual process of political emancipation made it possible for Jews to reflect upon their own identity in ways that had been unimaginable within the confines of the ghetto. This gave rise to a new Jewish self-image, constantly struggling to overcome its own past. On the one hand, Jewish scholars, from Leopold Zunz onward, felt it their duty to try to lend distinction to their own intellectual tradition, by treating it as the object of serious philological, historical, and cultural analysis. On the other hand, they simultaneously propagated the theory that there had been periods of darkness in the history of Judaism that were somehow responsible for the state of "poverty" that characterized contemporary Jewish culture. Magic and mysticism (and, above all, the Kabbalah) were barred from this renaissance of Jewish culture, while Maimonides rose once again to pre-eminence—a status that had not gone unquestioned, even in his own lifetime.

Israel Scheftelowitz, as indeed all other representatives of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* from Leopold Löw onward, saw in Maimonides the beginnings of the process of enlightenment that would, in the nineteenth century, finally put an end to spirit belief.[29] Maimonides, he wrote, "had striven to liberate the core of the religion from the shroud that had enveloped it through centuries of folk belief run rampant, and thus to present in all clarity the true essence of the religion."[30] This reverence for Maimonides as the personification of enlightenment, together with the desire for a scientific, that is, a critical-historical analysis of their own tradition, led the first proponents of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*

[29] On the influence of Maimonides on the Berlin *haskalah* see Isaac E. Barzilay, "The Ideology of the Berlin Haskalah," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 25 (1956): 4–7.

[30] Isidor Scheftelowitz, *Alt-palästinensischer Bauernglaube in religionsvergleichender Beleuchtung* (Hannover: Lafaire, 1925; repr., Osnabrück: Biblio, 1975), 171.

to constitute "Jewish philosophy" as an academic discipline. It is worth remembering, however, that from Isaac Israeli to Maimonides, from Leone Ebreo to Spinoza and Mendelssohn, no Jewish scholar had ever referred to himself as a Jewish philosopher or even considered himself as such. It seems that in reality, the philosophy of Judaism first evolved as a by-product of the history of Jewish philosophy.[31]

The idea of composing a history of Jewish philosophy was already included by Zunz in his pamphlet *Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur*. It would seem that it was in this "manifesto" of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* that the term "Jewish philosophy" first made its appearance.[32] Zunz writes:

> Above the halls of science, above the entire playground of human endeavor, rules Philosophy in unrivaled majesty, ever invisible, devoting herself with invulnerable self-reliance to all that is humanly knowable. And that is why we have not wished to see her as a separate science, as the epitome of Jewish wisdom alone; for she is also the higher, historical awareness of how this wisdom spread over centuries, put down in writing to be treated and mistreated by Jews and non-Jews; she is the loftiest guide when we ourselves undertake to know the intellectual greatness of our people and to transmit that knowledge. In this manner, each historical date discovered through industry, deciphered with acumen, employed by philosophy, and arranged with discernment, becomes a contribution to human knowledge, the sole most worthy end of all inquiry. But it is also only this higher notion that behooves Science, who survives states and nations, exalted over all earthly pettiness; she alone can lead us one day to [28] a true history of Jewish philosophy,[33] in which the lines of thought pursued by great minds need be discerned and comprehended,[34]

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[31] Cf. Frank, *Jewish Philosophy*, p. 5.

[32] According to Friedrich Niewöhner, the history of the term begins with Salomon Munk, who was the first to use the term as the subject of a monograph. Cf. Salomon Munk, *Esquisse historique de la philosophie chez les Juifs*, first published 1849; repr., *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe* (Paris: Franck, 1859; 3rd ed. 1955), 461–511; and Friedrich Niewöhner, "Vorüberlegungen zu einem Stichwort: 'Philosophie, Jüdische,'" *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 24 (1980): 195–220. The Zunz passage shows that the term was in use before the publication of Munk's study. I would not exclude the possibility that it had been used even before Zunz. As far as I am aware, however, Zunz was the first to consider the history of Jewish philosophy as a manifestation of philosophy in the general sense.

[33] Footnote by Zunz: "Authors were immediately treated as representatives of the entire people, and that, too, without distinction as to periods or countries. Buddeus provides only an introduction, and a sparse one at that."

[34] Footnote by Zunz: "…The *Yeṣirah* is a little book that is neither as clever nor as silly as partisans of either view would have it. This is what has confused the majority of those who have attacked the Kabbalah; honest Reuchlin is still the one who

> and retraced in parallel with the comprehensive teachings of the earth,[35] according to the strict prescripts of History.[36]

The message here is clear: Zunz will not allow himself to be satisfied with the term "Jewish wisdom," because philosophy also includes "the higher, historical awareness of how this wisdom spread over centuries, put down in writing to be treated and mistreated by Jews and non-Jews." With this statement, Zunz is attempting to unite two concepts, of which one refers to Jewish wisdom, while the other strives for, or presupposes, a "higher, historical awareness" of this Jewish wisdom. Or is he, in fact, trying to say that the latter (historical awareness) should completely replace the former (Jewish wisdom)? One thing, in any case, seems to me beyond doubt: he refuses to accept Jewish philosophy being reduced to Jewish wisdom. He has no wish to deny the latter its identity as being characteristically Jewish, but at the same time, he proposes a new concept, that of Jewish philosophy, in which it is precisely the historical dimension that plays a decisive, unifying role in cognition.

Although Zunz had not attended Hegel's lectures at the University of Berlin,[37] there can be no doubt that he is referring to the Prussian professor when he defines the element of intellectual development in the history of philosophy as a product of higher historical awareness. The only surprising thing is that he also takes the Kabbalah into consideration and says neither good nor bad about the pre-Kabbalistic "Book of Creation," the *Sefer Yeṣirah*, sufficing himself with the laconic remark:

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manages best with it. Very much to the point is Andreas Sennert: 'In our view there is one Kabbalah that is true, unquestioned, and divine; after that there is a second, intermediate and human, that is commonly refered to as the Jewish Kabbalah; finally, there is a third, which is false, superstition, indeed demonic.' The Messiah one finds in more recent Jewish religious books, and who is supposed to bring the world salvation and happiness, is the personified dogma that decrees what every reasonable human being should desire. It has replaced the former Jewish Messiah that now subsists only in form."

[35] Note by Zunz: "E.g., with the influence of Arab philosophy, of the study of grammar and astronomy, of scholasticism and of ideas of tolerance, etc."

[36] Leopold Zunz, *Etwas über die rabbinische Litteratur*, in idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Curatorium der 'Zunzstiftung,' published by the Louis Gerschel Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1875), vol. 1, 30–31.

[37] This can be clearly seen from his study records. On this see my article, "Altertumswissenschaft und Wissenschaft des Judentums: Leopold Zunz und seine Lehrer F. A. Wolf und A. Boeckh," in *Friedrich August Wolf. Studien, Texte, Bibliographie*, ed. Reinhart Markner and Giuseppe Veltri (Göttingen: Steiner, 1999), 32–47.

> The *Yeṣirah* is a little book that is neither as clever nor as silly as partisans of either view would have it. This is what has confused the majority of those who have attacked the Kabbalah; honest Reuchlin is still the one who manages best with it. Very much to the point is Andreas Sennert (*exercitt. phill. hept. alt.* p. 139): *Kabbalah nobis alia est verior, indubitata atque divina; alia sequior hac, media et humana, quae et Judaica dicitur vulgo; alia denique falsa, superstitiosa, immo daemoniaca.*

Although Zunz praises the scholarly honesty of Johannes Reuchlin, it is the opinion of Andreas Sennert (1609–1689) that he quotes. Sennert was a Hebraist from Wittenberg, who devoted several chapters of his *Exercitationes philologicarum*[38] to Jewish mysticism. The treatise appeared in 1678 and is largely ignored today. In it, Sennert deals with the names of God, the Masorah, the Kabbalah, the *musica hebraeorum*, Jewish schools and studies, and the like, up to and including hieroglyphics. His vision of the Kabbalah is clear: there is one version that is divine and indisputable; a second that is human, the so-called Jewish Kabbalah; and a third that is unquestionably false, a superstitious and devilish invention. Judaism is no longer considered the bearer of the *Philosophia kabbalistica divina*. This has now become a universal doctrine and, in the process, de-Judaized—a phenomenon to which we will return.

Sennert's book appeared nearly synchronously with the first volume of Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbalah denudata*, and in the same year as the second volume of that work (Sulzbach, 1678). The Wittenberg Hebraist had no personal interest in Kabbalistic practices. He treats it as a subject of inquiry, judging the extent of its relevance by the fact that it was considered to be of importance to Christianity by the illustrious likes of Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin, as well as by Petrus Colonna Galatinus.[39] He deals extensively with the ways in which the Kabbalah is designated and the synonyms applied to it, compares it with the *allegoria patrum*, examines in detail the practical Kabbalah as *technē* (of Pythagorean origin), and thus shows some appreciation for it as a useful "scientific" instrument. He closes his treatise

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[38] *Exercitationes philologicarum Heptas altera: quarum I. De Div. Nom. Elohim. add: Mantissa de Jehovah; II. De Masorah; III. De Cabbalah; IV. De Musica Ebræor.; V. De Scholis, studiis, &c. &c. eorundem.; VI. De Mendis Codicum Apographorum V. Intr. Ebr. hodiernor.; VII. De Sceptro Judah, &c. ex Genes. c. XLIX. comm. 10, Cui additur Hierographicum Sinaicum Kircher &c. &c.* (Wittenberg: Joh. Sigismundi Ziegenbeins, 1678). Online at www.bibliothek.uni-halle.de.

[39] On whom see Giuseppe Veltri, "Der Lector Prudens und die Bibliothek des (uralten) Wissens: Pietro Galatino, Amatus Lusitanus and Azaria de' Rossi," in *Christliche Kabbala*, ed. Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2003), 133–142.

with the remark that the study of the *Kabbalah artificialis sive technica* is a worthwhile occupation, to be engaged in, however, with caution (*caute*) and moderation (*moderate*). This is worthwhile, and even a duty, so as to avoid bringing guilt upon oneself, either through excess (*per excessum*) or deficiency (*per defectum*). For there are, he adds, two groups that failed to follow this golden rule (*ne vel in excessu, aut defectu quoque peccetur*): the Valentinians, that is, the Gnostics, who misused Holy Scripture for heretical purposes; and the Karaites, who abhorred the Kabbalah and considered only the literal sense of the Bible.[40] Drawing a direct comparison between these two groups was new, but, as I would like to show below, not truly original.

There is, however, also a second author whom Leopold Zunz quotes, someone who had dealt with the subject of Jewish philosophy before him. It is worth considering this quotation more closely, and in context. Part of Zunz's objective in his quest for "a true history of Jewish philosophy" is that "the line of thought pursued by great minds need be discerned and comprehended, and retraced in parallel with the comprehensive teachings of the earth, according to the strict prescripts of History." He criticizes the fact that Jewish authors had thus far all been treated as representatives of the Jewish people, without distinction as to time or place of origin, and without taking into account the intellectual influence of their surroundings. On this subject he remarks,

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[40] Op. cit., *De Cabbalah. IV*, p. 177: "Ita vicissim tamen, ut moderate eadem atque caute item adhibeatur, ne vel in excessu, aut defectu quoque peccetur. In excessu, cum Valentinianis atque Gnosticis jam olim, quorum Haeresi, teste Irenaeo & Epiphanio, originem dedisse creditur non absimilis prorsus modus, & ipsis jam tum Quoque usitatus, interpretandi Scripturam S., dum discussis inter sese varie elementis lacerabant verius eam, quam examinabant aut exponebant, in lucem expositis ab ipsis miris inauditisque haereseon portentis. In defectu vicissim tamen, & ipso quoque cum Judaeis hodie nonnullis, quae apud ipsos factio ideo קראים sive Caraitae vocantur, et in Polonia, Russia atque Turcia praesertim satis frequens est, quibus (maxime propter Cabbalae abusum) nihil sapit nisi unice litera textus, quam mordicus ideoque tenent, nec ab ac vel latum unguem discedunt." (Again, however, in such a way that it be approached with both moderation and with caution, lest one sin either through excess or deficiency. Through excess, along with the Valentinians and the Gnostics of long ago, whose heresy, according to Irenaeus and Epiphanius, is, in short, believed to have had its origin in a not dissimilar method of interpreting the Holy Scriptures, which they too, even then, made use of. When discussing various elements [of Scripture], they tended to mangle it rather than investigate or interpret it, professing miracles and unheard of heretical portents. Or through deficiency, on the other hand, and this along with not a few contemporary Jews, among whom there is a faction called the קראים, or Karaites, which is quite popular in Poland, Russia, and especially Turkey, who—largely because of the misuse of the Kabbalah—acknowledge nothing but the letter of the text, to which they cling tenaciously, not departing from it by a finger's breadth.)

again, laconically, "Buddeus provides only an introduction, and a sparse one at that." This remark, and its implications, has not received much attention from modern scholars. Who, however, was Buddeus?

Among the accomplishments of Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann is his ability to clearly formulate philosophical theories and to clarify the historical context of intellectual developments. Moreover, he did this while venturing into fields where representatives of modern philosophical discourse famously fear to tread. One such case was his recognition of the *philosophia perennis* as a spiritual and intellectual dimension of Western philosophy.[41] Another was his interest in the origins of the *Philosophia Hebraeorum* as a historical concept that doubtless played a role in the formation of the tradition of archaic/eternal Philosophy. According to Schmidt-Biggemann, the eclectic Johann Franz Budde (1667–1729) was the first to "denounce" the theology of "archaic man" (*Adam ha-qadmon*) and of Christian philosophical Kabbalah through historicization, in his *Introductio ad Historiam Philosophiae Ebraeorum.*[42] This process takes place in specific stages and in accordance with certain assumptions, of which Schmidt-Biggemann provides us with a very precise list. In the history of Judaism's inclusion in, or exclusion from, the general philosophical discourse, he distinguishes three periods. The first is represented by Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin, and is characterized primarily by speculation about numbers and Pythagorean theory. The second is represented by Knorr von Rosenroth, and the third by Johann Buddeus under the influence of Wachter's criticism of Spinozan pantheism. It is not my intention here to treat, or to question, each of these points. I would like merely to present his opinion concerning Buddeus and to refute it, in part, as a means of drawing attention to a new element in the investigation of Jewish influence, or the deconstruction thereof, through theological speculation.

According to Schmidt-Biggemann, the premises underlying the *Introductio* can be condensed into three main points: (1) the philosophical-historical bases of the Kabbalah are disputable; (2) the high esteem in which Pythagorean philosophy is held (particularly by Henry More) is

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[41] Wilhelm Schmiddt-Biggemann, *Philosophia perennis. Historische Umrissse abendländischer Spiritualität in Antike, Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998).

[42] Johann Franz Buddeus, *Io. Francisci Buddei… Introductio ad Historiam Philosophiae Ebraeorum: Accedit Dissertatio de Haeresi Valentiniana. Editio Nova eaque Multis Accessionibus Auctior* (Halle: Orphanotropheum, 1720).

closer to the *philosophia perennis* than the form propounded by Knorr; (3) the Kabbalah, when linked to Spinozan philosophy as interpreted by Wachter, is a prelude to pantheism and atheism. Buddeus's "contribution" is, according to Schmidt-Biggemann, more of a destructive nature, or, to let the author speak for himself:

> His particular, and lasting, contribution to the discussion consists in his having been the first to connect the Pythagorean interpretation of the Kabbalah with Late Antique, anti-Christian Gnosis. In this, Budde's intent, with respect to the Kabbalah, is destructive. Christian apologetics has long since refuted Gnosis. The anti-Gnostic arguments are thus equally applicable to the Kabbalah.

And thus, logically: "The Kabbalah, as a serious object of Christian speculation, has been expelled from the realm of academic Protestant theology."[43]

While the approach taken by Schmidt-Biggemann is admirable, there is some question as to whether the process of estrangement directed at Jewish tradition did, in fact, first emerge as a consequence of Buddeus's *Introductio.* As for the turning point in the level of esteem attached to the Christian Kabbalah, there can be no doubt that Knorr von Rosenroth was still an adept. He was perhaps the last of those who still adhered to the tried and true Christian theory of the Kabbalah as an aspect of divine, archaic wisdom, and who tried to support that theory with new arguments.

Knorr's conception of the *philosophia iudaica sive hebraica sive Hebraeorum* clearly revolves around the Zohar.[44] Beginning with the title of his monumental work, he provides a clear indication as to what the reader is, or at least should be, avidly seeking: *doctrina Hebraeorum transcendentalis et metaphysica atque theologica opus antiquissimae philosophiae barbaricae.* In the *loci communes* that constitute a kind of philological-philosophical-theological *apparatus* to the Zohar, the word "philosophy" does not, of course, appear. In its stead, there is an entire arsenal of conceptual terminology that the reader is free to use for his own purposes.

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[43] Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, "Die Historisierung der 'Philosophie Hebraeorum' im frühen 18. Jahrhundert. Eine philosophisch-philologische Demontage," in *Historicization—Historisierung*, ed. Glenn Most (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 103–128.

[44] On Knorr, I have followed the highly detailed analysis of his work by Andreas Kilcher, "Synopse zu Knorr von Rosenroths *Kabbala denudata*," *Morgen-Glantz* 10 (2000): 201–220.

Knorr clearly proceeds from the assumption that the Kabbalistic tradition of the Zohar is meant to be understood as being Adamitic and, thus, universal knowledge. He does so in spite of, or perhaps because of, the fact that he had included in the first volume of his *Prefatio ad lectorem philebraeum* a translation of the story of the cave of R. Shimʿon ben Yoḥay. There he also mentions doubts as to the truth of the Kabbalah, insofar as there is no reference to it in the Talmud.[45] By bringing up the cave of Shimʿon, Knorr alludes implicitly to Plato's allegory of the cave and its implications for the philosophy of being, the theory of revealed knowledge, and the epistemology of appearance. In treating the Hebrew term "wisdom," he characterizes it not as something specifically Jewish, but equates it rather with philosophy, or, more specifically, with ontology:[46]

> חכמה: *Wisdom*, is the second *Sephirah*, which is thus called because it is the wisdom of being. That is why Job 28:12 says: *There is wisdom that will be found from* אין [nothingness]. For חכמה [wisdom] is equivalent to מה כח [what is strength] that is strength מה, which is the numerical equivalent of אדם [man].[47]

The divine wisdom of Scripture is the equivalent of the central question of the pre-Socratics: *ti esti*, which in turn is the equivalent of Adam, according to the Gematria: מה = 45, אדם = 45. In treating archaic knowledge, Knorr defines it as being of Oriental origin; divine knowledge is clearly equated with theology, in keeping with the definition offered by Maimonides:[48]

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[45] Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala denudata*, 2 vols. (Sulzbach and Frankfurt a.M.: Abraham Lichtenthaler, 1677–1684; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1974), 1:3: "Dubium tamen quibusdam exortum est, an etiam vera sint ista, quae in Sohar traduntur, de sapientia ipsius Cabbalistica; ex eo, quod in Talmudis Codice, ubi saepe eius est mentio, nihil unquam de Cabbala eius commemoretur." (Some have had doubts as to whether the things transmitted in the Zohar are even true, as to its its Kabbalistic wisdom; this because in the codex of the Talmud, to which it often refers, there is no mention at all of the Kabbalah.)

[46] Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala Denudata. Tomus primus, pars prima: loci communes*, p. 343: "חכמה*:* Sapientia, Est sephirah secunda, quae sic vocatur, quia est sapientia entis. Deque ea dicitur Ijobh 28,12: *Est sapientia ab* אין invenietur. Est autem חכמה quasi מה כח ist est vis מה qui est numerus אדם."

[47] Translated by Hal Wyner.

[48] Ibid.: "חכמה קדומה*: Sapientia Orientalis*, ut indicetur anterioritas notionis eius, quae vicina est coronae, quae vocatur קדמון anterior. Dicitur etiam porro חכמת אלהים *Sapientia Dei. I. Reg 3,28.* id est, ut vult R. Moscheh, illa, quae datur mensuris illi, quae vocantur אלהים."

> חכמה קדומה: *Oriental Wisdom* as an indication of the antiquity of this notion, which is in proximity to the Crown, which is called קדמון, or anterior. One speaks moreover of חכמת אלהים *the Wisdom of God* (*I Kings* 3:28), that is, as Rabbi Moses would have it, that [wisdom] that is given to those who can be measured, those who are called אלהים [i.e., interpreting the common word for "God" as a plural noun].[49]

Knorr's interest in the Zohar derives from his view of it as an archaic source of philosophic discourse (*ti esti*). He maintains this view in spite of the criticism aimed at him by his contemporaries with respect to both the age and the veracity of the Zohar. Reading his *Excerpta ex Epistola quadam Compilatoris de utilitate Versionis Libri Cabalistici Sohar*,[50] one has the impression that he considers the Kabbalistic text less as an object of philological or philosophical debate than as the defense of an article of faith. The important thing for him is the *vetustas* and, especially, the great wisdom that Judaism, like a river, bears along with it in its flow. Certainly, Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy have also left behind traces of archaic philosophy (*amica responsio:… multa occurrere philosophiae huius barbaricae vestigia*).[51] These, however, are mere brooks as compared with the fountain (*fons*) of Jewish philosophy. In this, Knorr's intent was to refute Henry More's thesis, according to which the *philosophia perennis* had been best preserved in Pythagorean philosophy and of which the Jewish Kabbalah was, by comparison, a mere distortion. Knorr treats the Kabbalah with the conviction of a believer. He was, perhaps, the last to argue for the recognition of Kabbalistic theology as the archaic precursor of Greek philosophy. That he had few, if any, followers was due to the fact that Protestant theology was by that time well on its way toward de-Judaizing the theological canon.

As Schmidt-Biggemann would have it, Jarig Jelles's reading of Spinoza[52] and, more particularly, Georg Wachter's subsequent work *Spinozismus in Judenthumb* (1699)— Spinozan philosophy as pantheism, equated with atheism—played a role in the de-Judaization of the *philosophia perennis*. There is not, for the moment, sufficient evidence to permit a decision as to whether this was in fact the case. It is clear, however,

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[49] Translated by Hal Wyner.
[50] Ibid., *pars secunda*, pp. 3–5.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Jelles was the author of a foreword to the *Opera Posthuma* of Spinoza, published by Rieuwertsz (Amsterdam, 1677). Neither the place of publication nor the author's name is noted in the edition.

that the process of de-Judaizing philosophy and theology was already under way at this time, as other scholars have shown. The work of Valerio Marchetti is particularly instructive in this regard.[53] As his studies on the *dissertationes* in Protestant universities of the period confirm, the question of the Jewish or Christian origins of Pythagoras and Aristotle (and Plato) was actively debated in the academic world of the period. It is thus not surprising that there, once again, we encounter the name of Buddeus, and this even before he had written his *Introductio*. As early as 1702, a certain Johann Jacob Borsch wrote a *Dissertatio historica de peregrinationibus Pythagora* (Historical dissertation on the peregrinations of Pythagoras) under the direction of Buddeus, who also led the discussion thereof. Both student and master attacked mainly the position of French scholar Pierre-Daniel Huet,[54] who, in his *Demonstratio evangelica* (1679) had with deep conviction defended the idea of the Mosaic origins of philosophy. Borsch and Buddeus reject the idea of Pythagoras having been a student of the prophets Daniel or Ezekiel. The very real travels of Pythagoras, they argue, had taken him to both Egypt and Babylonia, and thus expanded his philosophical horizon. They had, however, in no way contributed to a mastery of Jewish philosophy on his part. A similar point of view had already been taken two years earlier by Daniel Bandeco, a student from Berlin, who in 1700 defended his thesis, *Pythagoras utrum fuerit Judaeus, Monachusve Carmelita*[55] (Whether Pythagoras was a Jew and a Carmelite monk) under the direction of Johann Friedrich Mayer, in Hamburg. Mayer and Bandeco subjected to a thorough analysis the ancient belief that Pythagoras had been a student of Daniel or Ezekiel, concluding that although there might be

[53] See Valerio Marchetti, "Sulla degiudaizzazione della politica. In margine alla relazione di Horst Dreitzel," in *Aristotelismo e ragion di stato*, ed. Enzo A. Baldini (Florence: Olschki, 1995), 349–358; idem, "An Pythagoras proselytus factus sit," in *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* 2 (1996): 111–131; idem, "'Aristoteles utrum fuerit Iudaeus'. Sulla degiudaizzazione della filosofia europea in età moderna," in *Anima e paura. Studi in onore di Michele Ranchetti*, ed. Bruna Bocchini Camaiani (Macerata: Quodlibet, 1998), 249–266; idem, "Il teologo luterano Johann Franz Budde (1667–1729) e la filosofia ebraica," in *Interculturalità dell'ebraismo*, ed. Mauro Perani (Ravenna: Longo, 2004), 299–314.

[54] On Huet see now Suzanne Guellouz, ed., *Daniel Huet (1630–1721): Actes du colloque de Caen (12–13 novembre, 1993)* (Paris: Romanisches Seminar, 1994).

[55] Hamburg: Reumann, 1700.

some concordance between Hebrew and Pythagorean thought, there is no evidence of a direct relationship.[56]

Now, if Buddeus was not, as we have seen, the first to doubt Pythagorean conformity with the Kabbalah, was he at least original in his condemnation of the Kabbalah as being Gnostic? This, too, I would like to call into question. Andreas Sennert provides the earliest testimony that Buddeus was here not the first. However, even Sennert was clearly not the father of this "scientific" opinion.

Some forty years before the publication of the first volume of the *Kabbalah Denudata*, the Venetian rabbi Simone Luzzatto[57] had proposed a division of Jewish intellectuals into three groups. The first was made up of rabbis and Talmudists; the second of philosophizing theologians; the third of Kabbalists and mystery teachers.[58] What the three groups, or classes, have in common is that they all see themselves as biblical exegetes. What distinguishes them are the aspects they choose to emphasize.

The first group is composed of the guardians of tradition, of the true halakhah. It is they who have the authority to fix the calendar,[59] and to decide matters of ritual, custom, and ceremony. For this reason they receive the respectful obedience of the Jewish people. The Venetian rabbi explains at length the responsibilities of these representatives of Judaism, a class to which he himself belonged. The divisions he proposes reflect a belief that Judaism is a religion that, like Christianity, can be broken down into various denominations, each of which with its own rituals and customs. Precisely these distinctions are the subject of his treatise.

The second group, that of the "philosophizing theologians," is of more interest to us here. In describing them, Luzzatto is the first, to my knowledge, to provide us with a history of philosophy among the Jews.

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[56] My interest here is not to determine who was the first to question the presumed derivation of Pythagoras's *philosophia antiqua* from archaic Jewish philosophy, but rather to establish the fact that this question had already been raised before the publication of Buddeus's *Introductio.*

[57] Simone Luzzatto, *Discorso circa il stato de gl'Hebrei et in particular dimoranti nell'inclita città di Venetia* (Venice: Giovanni Calleoni, 1638). For more details on Luzzatto see chapter 9 below. I am using here my edition of his *Discorso*, in modern standardized Italian.

[58] *Discorso*, 75v: "Prima di Rabbini e Talmudisti, seconda, Teologi Filosofanti; terza, Cabalisti, e professori d'Arcani."

[59] On this text, see also Robert Bonfil, "A Cultural Profile," in *The Jews of Early Modern Venice*, ed. Robert C. Davis and Benjamin Ravid (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 169–190.

Philosophizing theologians are those who were capable of accompanying "human reason with the authority of God's word," and providing "commentary on Scripture in harmonious concert."[60] Luzzatto begins his history of Jewish philosophy with Philo of Alexandria, who, in his opinion, would have done better "to teach the Jews rather than convert the Greeks," and with Flavius Josephus, whose influence on Jewish history he particularly appreciates. He continues with Maimonides, followed by Gersonides, Crescas, Albo, and, finally, Ibn Ezra, as exegete. The responsibility of the philosophizing theologians consists in making the past relevant to the present. The Jewish nation looks to them in matters of dogma and belief.

Here, one cannot avoid the impression that Luzzatto is employing the term "philosophizing theology" as a kind of catchall, convenient for presenting certain personages already known to Christendom. Most conspicuous in this regard is Josephus, who is called a philosopher without any detailed explanation as to how he came to merit this honorific. It is worthwhile, however, to examine the terminology more closely. The use of the term "filosofanti" (Lat. *philosophantes*) recalls the distinction drawn by Duns Scotus between philosophers who are able to make do without revelation (Aristotle, the Averroists) and the *philosophantes*—theologians with philosophical tendencies, it would seem.[61] In the Renaissance, the term begins to take on slightly negative connotations[62] that were certainly not inherent in it originally.[63] Dante, for example, only a few centuries earlier, refers to himself in the *Quaestio de aqua et terra* as "inter vere philosophantes minimus."[64] Dante's choice of

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[60] *Discorso*, 77v.

[61] *De primo principio* III; see Etienne Gilson, "Les 'Philosophantes,'" *Archives d'Histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 19 (1952): 139–140.

[62] See the Papal Bull *Apostolici Regiminis* of 1513 in *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. Heinrich Denzinger and Peter Hünermann (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), no. 1440: "…de natura praesertim animae rationalis, quod videlicet mortalis sit, aut unica in cunctis hominibus, et nonnulli temere philosophantes, secundum saltem philosophiam verum id esse asseverent." ("…on the nature especially of the rational soul, that it is namely mortal, or one in the same in all human beings; and there are not a few philosophizers who rashly claim that this is true, at least according to philosophy").

[63] In general, the term is used as a synonym for *philosophi*, as a verbal construction, for example. This does not, however, imply that the *philosophi* could not also be objects of censure. In the *Historia Augusta* (*Vita Avidii Cassii* 1.8), the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius, for example, is chided as a "*philosopham aniculam*"—a "little old lady philosopher." (I would like to thank Professor Sigrid Mratschek for the reference.)

[64] At the very beginning of the tractate; see Dante, *Le opere latine di Dante Allighieri, reintegrate nel testo con nuovi commenti*, vol. 2, ed. Giambattista Giuliani (Florence:

words was presumably intended to draw attention to the philosophical origins of poetry, which had been disdained as unworthy of philosophy by Thomas Aquinas.[65] Nevertheless, there was, in spite of the great Aristotelian's contempt, a growing conviction that philosophy and mysticism had much in common. The proximity of the "philosophantes" to mystical theology is clearly expressed by Pico della Mirandola in his *De Dignitate* (15 §87):[66]

> When we shall have attained this, by the art of discourse or of reason, then, animated by the spirit of the Cherubim, mounting the rungs of the ladder—that is, of nature—through philosophy, we shall penetrate all things from the center to the center; by turns we shall descend, rending with titanic force a whole, like Osiris, into a multitude of parts, only to ascend again, joining together, with the power of Phoebus, a multitude of parts, like the members of Osiris, into a whole. Then at length, in the bosom of the Father, who is on high, above the ladder, we shall find repose and be consumed by the joy of theology.[67]

Some time later, Francis Bacon vehemently rejects this idea ("scientific falsehoods") as depraved and dangerous to the whole of philosophy. Baron Verulam blames Pythagoras and Plato for having created a link between philosophy and superstition.[68] Obviously included in his attack

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Le Monnier, 1882), also available online from the *Bibliotheca Augustana*, http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost14/Dante/dan_aqte.html.

[65] *Summa theologica* 1.1.9: "infima inter omnes doctrinas"; see Claire Cabaillot, "Discours poétique et discours scientifiques dans la *Vita Nuova* de Dante," http: //www.lire.univ-avignon.fr/cabaillot.htm/ (accessed March 27, 2002).

[66] "Quod cum per artem sermocinalem sive rationariam erimus consequuti, iam Cherubico spiritu animati, per scalarum, idest naturae gradus philosophantes, a centro ad centrum omnia pervadentes, nunc unum quasi Osyrim in multitudinem vi titanica dis[c]erpentes descendemus, nunc multitudinem quasi Osyridis membra in unum vi Phebea colligentes ascendemus, donec in sinu Patris qui super scalas est tandem quiescentes, theologica foelicitate consum[m]abimur." I would like to mention here the very good and very practical annotated edition of the Department of Italian Studies at Brown University and the Università di Bologna; it is available online at http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/pico/text/ov.html.

[67] Translated by Hal Wyner.

[68] *Novum Organum. Partis secundae summa, digesta in aphorismos. Aphorismi de interpretatione naturae et regno hominis*, LXV: "At corruptio philosophiae ex superstitione, et theologia admista, latius omnino patet, et plurimum mali infert, aut in philosophias integras, aut in earum partes.… Hujus autem generis exemplum inter Graecos illucescit, praecipue in Pythagora, sed cum superstitione magis crassa et onerosa conjunctum; at periculosius et subtilius in Platone atque ejus schola. Invenitur etiam hoc genus mali in partibus philosophiarum reliquarum, introducendo formas abstractas, et causas finales, et causas primas; omittendo saepissime medias, et hujusmodi. Huic autem rei summa adhibenda est cautio." (But the corruption of philosophy by superstition with an admixture of theology is far more widespread, and does the greatest harm, be it to philosophy as a

are attempts to make the books of Genesis and Job the foundation of a natural philosophy. Pythagoras and Plato are also treated by Luzzatto as a source of "superstitious" philosophy, but only insofar as the Kabbalists are concerned.[69]

Luzzatto's third group requires no general acceptance by the Jewish people, since, in his opinion, it is of consequence in neither practical nor theological life. It is, nevertheless, widely represented in the Orient and in Poland. Luzzatto defends his own, as it were, almost exaggerated interest in the Kabbalah with the remark:

> . . . and that is because the term Kabbalah has become a commonplace, used without any knowledge of its origin. This means that I am obliged to briefly discuss it here, all the more so since this doctrine was dealt with by the famous and outstanding Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in the Latin language in his *Conclusiones*. And in this, he had no lack of followers.[70]

It is noteworthy that one finds here the same reasoning that will later be used by Andreas Sennert. On the one hand, there is a certain embarrassment over the fact that one is even discussing, or being obliged to discuss, the Kabbalah. On the other hand, it is defensible as a legitimate subject of discussion, for the simple reason that there is a scholarly community that considers it a doctrine of importance (to Christianity). This leads to a kind of *acceptatio per auctoritatem maiorum*, a willingness to take up certain theses on the authority of earlier scholars.

The diffusion of the Kabbalah and, particularly, of Christian interest in it induce the Venetian rabbi to undertake an analysis of some highly interesting aspects of the Kabbalah.[71] Kabbalah, he explains, is

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whole or to its parts. . . . Among the Greeks, the most prominent example of this kind is Pythagoras, though he is associated with a grosser and more oppressive superstition; more dangerous and more subtle is the example of Plato and his school. This kind of fault is found even in aspects of other philosophies, through the introduction of abstract forms and final causes and first causes, most often with the omission of intermediate causes, and the like. In this matter, the greatest of caution is to be employed.)

[69] The subject is mentioned here only in passing. See the next chapter.

[70] *Discorso* 80v: ". . . e perché questo nome di Cabala ormai è divenuto volgare senza che si sapia la sua etimologia, e ciò che significa, intendo alquanto digredire in tal proposito, tanto più che questa dottrina fu dall'illustris. ed eccellentis. Gio. Pico Mirandolano nelle lettere latine introdotta come nelle sue Conclusioni si può vedere; e non vi mancarono altri di lui seguaci."

[71] On this passage see the instructive essay by François Secret, "Un texte mal connu de Simon Luzzato sur la cabbale," *Revue des Études Juives* 118 (1959–1960): 121–128. I will be referring to this essay in the following discussion. See also Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 5.

an acroamatic term meaning "reception."[72] Its exponents defend their sources, and thus their authority, using the same reasoning as the rabbis. The latter establish the divinity of their sources with respect to ritual, the former with respect to the esoteric interpretation of Scripture. There exists, he continues, a practical, more ostentatious version of the Kabbalah that concerns itself with numbers, numerical combinations, letters, and the names of certain formations. And there is also a more theoretical, scientific version that concerns itself predominantly with the relationship between the physical and the spiritual world, and which speaks, moreover, of an intermediary process that transports and diffuses divine energy and power in the manner of an aqueduct (see Knorr!). This process traverses ten fundamental principles that can be compared with the ideas of Plato. While ten is a Pythagorean number, as Luzzatto notes, here it must be doubled in order to account for the dual nature of the principles as both good and evil. This is an implicit criticism of Christian Kabbalists such as Reuchlin, for whom precisely this Pythagorean approach to the Kabbalah is the essential element of Kabbalistic research. According to Luzzatto, however, the number relates to purely Platonic theory: the theory of motion.

The concept of motion, for which sensory perception is a prerequisite, derives from Heraclitus, just as he is also the source of the idea that fire is the origin of all things. Fire is to be interpreted as destruction and regeneration, and is comparable, in this sense, to the Kabbalistic ideas of *shevirat kelim* and *tiqqun 'olam*. At this point Luzzatto continues with a short but detailed exposition of motion, the word and the names derived from Greek philosophy (from Plato to Aristotle, to the Stoics and Sextus Empiricus, to Philo of Alexandria). One cannot help but ask whether the reader would have seen any connection with Kabbalists here, had not Luzzatto indirectly pointed out that the whole construction depends on Plato's theory of ideas, for which the Kabbalists seek support in Jewish tradition. Moreover, according to the Kabbalists,

> These ideas are divided into four categories, of which the most worthy are those inspired by the spirit; the second are those created; the third those formed; the fourth and final those realized and perfected. These doctrines

[72] *Discorso* 80v: "Cabala significa propriamente receuimento, & ha relatione a colui ch'apprende dal maestro, come la parola di traditione a quello ch'insegna e infonde la Dottrina." (Kabbalah means, in the proper sense, received, and relates to one who learns from the master, just as the word tradition relates to one who teaches and instills the Doctrine.)

> require extensive investigation, since many of the verses from Scripture have been modified to fit the interpretation of the Kabbalists, just as the Valentinians, the Gnostics and other ancient heretics falsely derived [their own spurious doctrine] from that [of Plato] mentioned above, as can be seen in Epiphanius, the learned Greek, and in the Latin Irenaeus. Only Avicenna [Ibn Sina], the famed Arab author, seems comparable to the Kabbalists in that he postulates a certain concatenation of spiritual causes in order to avoid having several effects resulting from a single cause, as can be understood from his *Metaphysics*.[73]

The Kabbalists also believe that between the (intellective) soul and the body, there exists an additional soul, capable of suffering. This is a reference to the doctrine of purgatory, where the passive soul is capable of perceiving the pain of punishment,[74] as can be deduced from Dante's *Divina Commedia* (*Purgatorio* 25.79–84). The Pythagorean doctrine of reincarnation, says Luzzatto, is also Kabbalistic—and not Talmudic, as even Lipsius wrongly holds. Jewish "philosophizing theologians" vehemently opposed Kabbalistic doctrine, he adds laconically. Finally, Luzzatto mentions the books of the Kabbalists, the *Sefer Yeṣirah* and the Zohar, "un'altro volume grandissimo sopra cinque libri de Moise nominato il Splendore, attribuito ad uno d'antichi Rabbini." The only Kabbalist he mentions by name is Nachmanides ("Rabi Moise Gerundense," "che fu di acutissimo ingegno"). Immediately following the Kabbalists he deals with a fourth group of Jewish thinkers, the Karaites.[75] Of these, he says, there were only a small number. They were merely grammarians and taught the tradition of the Sadducees. The Karaites, according to Luzzatto, have no connection with the Kabbalah.

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[73] Luzzatto, *Discorso* 83r: "Di più tengono che queste idee si trovano in quadruplicata distinzione, alcune le più degne sono difuse overo inspirati; le seconde create, le terze, formate, le quarte ed ultime operate, e perfezzionate; essendo l'une subordinate all'altre con regolata ierarchia; le qual dottrine averebbono bisogno di lunga discussione, addattandosi molti lochi della Scrittura in conformità del parere di detti Cabalistici come spuri tralignarono dalla dottrina sopra detta, li Valentiniani, e Gnostici, ed altri eretici antichi, come si può vedere in Epifanio dottor greco, ed Ireneo latino, solo Avicena famoso autor arabo pare che s'accostasse alli cabalistici, ponendo certa concatenazione de cause spirituali, per evitare l'incomodo che da una semplice causa derrivasse la moltiplicità d'effetti, come nella sua metafisica si può vedere."

[74] See Giuseppe Veltri, "Platonische Mythen und rabbinische exegetische Entwicklungen," in idem, *Gegenwart der Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 195–212.

[75] On the Karaites in seventeenth-century—particularly Protestant—literature, see Valerio Marchetti, "The Lutheran Discovery of Karaite Hermeneutics," in *Una manna buona per Mantova. Man tov le-Man Tovah. Studi in onore di Vittore Colorni per il suo 92° compleanno*, ed. Mauro Perani (Florence: Olshki, 2004), 433–459.

The overall impression one receives on reading Luzzatto's description of the Kabbalists is that he has allotted them far too much space. He accords them an exceptionally detailed explanation of their basic principles, while hardly saying anything about the philosophizing theologians, for example. François Secret has already noted that some of what Luzzatto says is not his own and relies, at least in part, on Agrippa von Nettesheim's criticism of the Kabbalah as a product of Gnosticism. Nevertheless, one cannot help wondering why the Neoplatonic origins are given such prominence, and why, in support of certain theories, Dante Alighieri is adduced, when it was well known that he was neither a Kabbalist nor a Christian Hebraist.[76] One possible explanation is that Luzzatto is tempted to present the Kabbalah as a common, Judeo-Christian, philosophical heritage at a time when this idea was (still) generally acknowledged. A second and, in my opinion, more plausible explanation would be to see both the discussion of the Kabbalah and that of the "philosophizers" as part of a single overall treatment of the value of mysticism, poetry, and rhetoric in the philosophical discourse. According to Luzzatto, both the philosophizers and the Kabbalists base their doctrine on scriptural revelation. Can revelation be understood both in a poetic and in a philosophical sense? The answer, which Luzzatto will clearly provide only in his later work *Socrate*, is a resounding "no."

1.3 *Back to the* Wissenschaft des Judentums

The earliest criticism of Jewish philosophy as being simply the equivalent of the wisdom of the Israelite nation, as Leopold Zunz defines it, dates back much further than Protestant pietism. It belongs to the period when the historicization of Jewish tradition was in full swing. Zunz adopts both this criticism and the intellectual tradition to which it belongs, explicitly citing Knorr von Rosenroth's contemporary Andreas Sennert, for whom Jewish philosophy as Wisdom had become a hermeneutic method to be taken only *cum grano salis*. The limit to its usefulness lies in the constant danger that it will lead to an instrumentalization of biblical verses, as with the Gnostics and the Valentinians, or to a ques-

[76] See, however, Sandra De Benedetti-Stow, *Dante e la mistica ebraica* (Florence: Giuntina, 2004).

tioning of the entire exegetic tradition, as with the Karaites. This is a far cry from the enthusiastic views of Knorr, who still saw the origins of archaic philosophy in Jewish tradition. The Venetian Simone Luzzatto, a skeptic in his philosophic soul,[77] but a pragmatist in his calling as a rabbi, was aware that as a common basis for discussion between Jews and Christians only the Kabbalah remained. Clearly opposed to Judaism's esoteric doctrine, he nevertheless hesitates to characterize it as pure invention.

If one now follows this trail of hesitation backward from Leopold Zunz through Buddeus and, in part, Sennert to Luzzatto, there is only one possible conclusion: the Kabbalah and the *philosophia perennis* are Jewish identities that have been imposed on Judaism from the outside. It is they, however, that form the essence of what is called "Jewish philosophy." The Jews were considered the People of the Book (and, to a certain extent, they are still seen that way today). In the Christian view, this was the justification for their continued existence. The preservation of their tradition was therefore considered worthwhile only insofar as it could be seen as the fundament of Christianity. This I would call a borrowed and imposed identity.[78]

Zunz, of course, understood intuitively that a history of philosophy also has to take Jewish philosophy into account. It was necessary, however, to "cleanse" it of those aspects that had been inspired through contact with Christianity. Luzzatto, by contrast, saw the philosophy of Judaism as an attempt to combine philosophy and theology, while the Kabbalah was mainly just a common amusement, popular, but with hardly anything to recommend it. In his view, it was noteworthy only for having, in fact, been recommended by scholars of great distinction. It thus formed the basis for a dialogue between cultures that, even if limited, did promote an exchange of knowledge. The status attached to Jewish mysticism is not welcomed by Luzzatto, it is merely

[77] Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah*, 5, is of a differing opinion: "Judging from the manner in which Luzzatto formulated his view on Kabbalah, it appears that he believed in its antiquity, although he himself is not to be considered either as Kabbalist or as an opponent of this lore." I do not think it can be said that he was not opposed to the Kabbalah: were that the case he would not have written, "principale in tal proposito, parimente un'altro volume grandissimo sopra li cinque libri de Moise nominato il Splendore, attribuito ad uno d'antichi Rabbini" (*Discorso*, 84v). "Attributed to" does not imply that he himself was convinced.

[78] See Giuseppe Veltri, "Geborgte Identität im Zerrspiegel: 'Jüdische Riten' aus philosophisch-politischer Perspektive," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 33 (2006): 111–130.

acknowledged. He is aware that Christian interest will last only for a limited amount of time. The ensuing tendency to de-Judaize universal philosophy will prove him right.

If we return now to the beginning of this introduction, we can clearly discern the lines of discourse that determine our current interest in "Jewish philosophy": the genealogy of knowledge, introduced through the doctrine of *philosophia/theologia perennis*, on the one hand, and the revival of interest in the Jewish mystical tradition through the work and influence of Gershom Scholem, on the other. Within this context, Jewish philosophy becomes the central element of a Jewish identity that has been lastingly marked by Christianity. In this same context, it is certainly also no coincidence that the term itself was first coined in the nineteenth century. It was at this time that Jewish philosophers, far from the universities, began to refer increasingly to a specifically Jewish theology, in contrast to a Christian/universal outlook, as a means of grounding and defending their own importance within the history of the world. In the Middle Ages and the early modern period, the Jews were still a part of the general philosophical discourse. By the nineteenth century, that was no longer the case.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROPHETIC-POETIC DIMENSION OF PHILOSOPHY: THE *ARS POETICA* AND IMMANUEL OF ROME

To the extent that it may be permitted to speak of the character of an entire epoch, I would describe the period between the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century as a time of both inclusion and exclusion. It appears to me that the primary characteristic of the humanist and Renaissance periods was not the emphasis on the individual, as Herman Cohen and Jacob Burckhardt would have it,[1] but rather the need to localize new discoveries, people(s), and experiences within a universal system of reference that allowed for no exclusions, and required that even the slightest detail be categorized and fit into the whole. It is a period of *inclusion*, both intellectually and practically, in the sense that nearly everything was given a place within the new, holistic concept of humanity. Paradoxically, however, it was also a period of *exclusion*, in the sense that the political individualization of states, the rise of autonomous cities,[2] and the increasing confessional rivalries, based on claims of exclusive religious truth, excluded all possibility of unity.

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[1] Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* (Leipzig: Seemann, 1869); there are many English versions, for example recently *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, introduction by Peter Gay; afterword by Hajo Holborn; trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (New York: Modern Library, 2002); Ernst Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*, 6th ed. reprint of the 1st edition of 1927 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1987). The main idea was already formulated in his book *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, 3rd ed. (1906; repr., Darmstadt: Buchgeselschaft 1994), 1:23. The source of the "philosophy of man" is of course Petrarch and his conviction that the time has come "to reveal man to himself once more"; see Cesare Vasoli, "The Renaissance Concept of Philosophy," in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 62ff.

[2] For the nearly modern idea of the impossibility of a unique, truthful religion, see Joshua Lorki in his letter to Solomon alias Paul de Burgos after his conversion to Christianity in *Ketav Divre Ḥakhamim*, published in *Sefer divre ḥakhamim*, ed. Eliʿezer Ashkenazi (Metz: Mayer Samuel, 1849), 41–46; on Lorki's text, see Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 347–352; Sina Rauschenbach, *Josef Albo (um 1380–1444). Jüdische Philosophie und christliche Kontroverstheologie in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Brill: Leiden, 2002), 12–23.

In the following, I would like to focus on Jewish philosophy in Rome and its relationship to the contemporary philosophical movements there and, specifically, on the inclusion of poetry among the sources of inspired truth, similar or equal in value to acts of the prophetic mind. We will look first at the reception of Dante in Jewish scholarship, then turn to the nature of prophetic/poetic consciousness as conceived by Immanuel of Rome.

2.1 *Reception of Dante*

In describing Jewish philosophy and philosophers, the Venetian rabbi Simone (Simḥa) Luzzatto[3] places in the category of "philosophizing theologians" those who are capable of accompanying "human reason with the authority of God's word," and providing "commentary on Scripture in harmonious concert."[4] As I have noted elsewhere,[5] the use of the term "filosofanti" (Lat. *philosophantes*) recalls the distinction drawn by Duns Scotus between philosophers who are able to make do without revelation (Aristotle, the Averroists) and the *philosophantes*—theologians with philosophical tendencies, it would seem.[6] Dante refers to himself in the *Quaestio de aqua et terra* as "inter vere philosophantes minimus."[7] The choice of words was presumably intended to draw attention to the philosophical origins of poetry, which had been disdained as unworthy of philosophy by Thomas Aquinas,[8] who saw even metaphorical speech

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[3] Simone Luzzatto, *Discorso circa il stato de gl'Hebrei et in particular dimoranti nell'inclita città di Venetia* (Venice: Giovanni Calleoni, 1638; repr., Bologna, 1976), 75v.

[4] *Discorso*, 77v.

[5] See Giuseppe Veltri, "Von der 'philosophia iudaica seu hebraeorum' zur 'jüdischen Philosophie': (Ver-)Wandlungen eines Begriffes im Kontext der *Kabbala Denudata*," *Morgen-Glantz Zeitschrift der Christian Knorr von Rosenroth-Gesellschaft* 16 (2006): 323–341; for an English translation see above, chapter 1, pp. 11–38 and esp. pp. 31 ff.

[6] *De primo principio* III; see Etienne Gilson, "Les 'Philosophantes,'" in *Archives d'Histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 19 (1952): 139–140. The term θεολογήσαντες is employed by Aristotle (M*etaphysics* 983b.29) of those poets who dealt with the origins of the cosmos.

[7] At the very beginning of the tractate; see *Le opere latine di Dante Allighieri, reintegrate nel testo con nuovi commenti*, vol. 2, ed. Giambattista Giuliani (Florence: Le Monnier, 1882); also available online from the *Bibliotheca Augustana*, http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost14/Dante/dan_aqte.html.

[8] *Summa theologica* 1.1.9: "infima inter omnes doctrinas"; see Claire Cabaillot, "Discours poétique et discours scientifiques dans la *Vita Nuova* de Dante," http://www.lire.univ-avignon.fr/cabaillot.htm/ (accessed March 27, 2002). See also Benedikt K. Vollmann, "Dichter und Philosophen–zwei zankende Geschwister," in *Poetry and Philosophy*

as having meaning also in the literal sense, that is, at the lowest level of scriptural interpretation.

Through his interpretation of Jewish philosophy as being Jewish commentary on biblical texts *sub specie philosophiae*, or better, as the composition of "commentary on Scripture in harmonious concert," Luzzatto offers us a key to understanding the historical development of Jewish philosophy: the *philosophantes* are those who try to harmonize Scripture with philosophy and with the metaphorical interpretation of Scripture—and, I would add, just as Jewish and Christian mysticism did. It is not by chance that in his political tractate *Discorso*, and even in his philosophical work *Socrate*,[9] Luzzatto quotes Dante, at length, as being authoritative also with respect to the *Jewish* mystical tradition. For it was Dante who, for his Christian audience, had set the parameters of philosophical-theological thought clothed in the garment of poetic spirit. My argument here is that the reception of Dante in early-fourteenth-century Jewish literature and philosophy is not only a product of the enthusiasm for the *dolce stil novo*, the "new sweet style" of Italian poetry, but also an expression of the philosophical conviction that union with the active intellect (*intellectus agens*) is also possible through poetry.

Poetry transcends all other forms and genres of literary composition because it expresses itself through the use of figurative language, often going beyond set barriers or limits. In addition to its recognized role as a driving force in cultural life, poetry also has a "political" function, offering a kind of flag to rally around for all those who wish to profess their desired or effective belonging to a particular culture and society. The prime example is, of course, Homer, the representative epic poet of classical Greek culture. In the Hellenistic Age, not only were his poems considered canonical in Greco-Roman schools, they also found an audience among Hellenized Jews. Jewish scholars of the Imperial period and in Late Antiquity persisted in reading Homer's verses, even

in the Middle Ages: A Festschrift for Peter Dronke, ed. John Marenbon (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 260. Vollmann does not focus on the integration of poetry into philosophy.

[9] *Socrate overo dell'humano sapere. Esercitio seriogiocoso di Simone Luzzatto Hebreo Venetiano. Opera nella quale si dimostra quanto sia imbecile l'humano intendimento, mentre non è diretto dalla divina rivelatione* (Venice: Tomasini, 1651). On this work see David B. Ruderman, "Science and Scepticism. Simone Luzzatto on Perceiving the Natural World," in idem, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 161–184; Ariel Viterbo, "La mitzwàh di studiare le scienze nell'opera di Rav Simchah (Simone) Luzzatto," *Segulat Israel* 4 (1997): 54–67; idem, "Socrate nel ghetto: lo scetticismo mascherato di Simone Luzzatto," *Studi Veneziani* 38 (1999): 79–128.

going so far as to memorize them and, finally, to interpret them. A reflection of this tendency can be seen in the fact that rabbinic Judaism mentions no Greek philosopher, intellectual, playwright, or poet other than Homer. He alone is considered worth reading, possibly because nobody could afford to ignore him, given his ubiquitous presence in every school and academy. A very similar destiny was allotted to Goethe by enlightened German Jewry in the nineteenth century, among whom the great poet of Weimar was seen as the very quintessence of *Deutschtum*, or Germanness, making familiarity with his works a *conditio sine qua non* for entry into modern German society, politics, literature, and intellectual life.[10]

But what about Dante Alighieri and the use of vulgar Italian in Italy, where the political and cultural fragmentation of states and cities was never entirely overcome and has baffled all efforts at unification, even down to our own time? Why did Jewish scholars choose the *volgare*, vernacular Italian (written in Hebrew characters), as the language in which to compose their philosophical works, rather than Latin, the *lingua franca* of the academy, the universities, and the *studia* of monasteries, abbeys, and convents throughout Europe? This question is all the more intriguing if we consider that, at the same time, there were Jewish scholars who also produced texts in Latin, the language of academics, well aware that not all of their potential readers had mastered it. It was for this reason that the brothers Provençale, in the fifteenth century, proposed a change in the educational curriculum of *talmidim*, suggesting that Latin be made obligatory.[11] For teaching and learning, the *volgare* was not contemplated at all.

Why write in Italian, then? If we think of Jewish culture as the culture of an elite, of a small select group with access to the surrounding

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[10] On Goethe and German Judaism see Giuseppe Veltri, "Jews and Judaism in Goethe's Esthetical and Reactionary World: A Typological Study," *Revue des Études Juives* 162 (2003): 123–144.

[11] On this aspect see Gianfranco Miletto, "The Teaching Program of David ben Abraham and His Son Abraham Provenzali in Its Historical-Cultural Context," in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, ed. David Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 127–148. The process of introducing the Latin language started of course not in the sixteenth century, but already in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries with Judah Romano (see below); on the question see Giuseppe Sermoneta, "L'ebraico tra l'arabo e il latino nella trattatistica filosofica medievale: un ponte segnato dal passaggio di due tradizioni terminologiche e culturali," in *Actas del V Congreso Internacional de filosofía Medieval* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1979): 145–154; see also Caterina Rigo, quoted in fn. 23, p. 46, below.

culture, able to open doors and gain access to the cathedrals of science, it is difficult to explain the phenomenon of translating texts into the Italian vernacular for an audience that reads it in Hebrew script. The Italian language was probably never considered by Italian Jews as a gateway to emancipation, least of all between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Rather, it was a means of communication, of privileged communication in the idiom of poetry, the *dolce stil novo* (the new sweet/gracious style). I assume that the origin of Jewish intellectual interest in the vernacular lay primarily in the awareness of its being used for the composition of a poetic genre that encompassed both philosophy and theology. Emblematic of what spurred that interest was the fountain of knowledge and inspiration set into the world by a Florentine poet called Dante.

"Enthusiastic" describes the reaction of Jewish scholars in approaching Jewish culture and philosophy in Italy from the thirteenth century until the fervid and lively atmosphere of Venice in the seventeenth century.[12] According to Moritz Steinschneider, Italian Jews thought of the *dolce stil novo*[13] as their own language, and not as a foreign idiom: "They had seen it in its beginnings, and began very quickly to share in its development; and never did they adulterate it or distort it with their own words."[14] As evidence of this assertion, Steinschneider points out that we have only some few examples of Italian Jewish texts written in Hebrew characters. For the most part, he adds, it was first, and only, by examining the contents of most Italian Jewish texts that the intellectual audience would have been able to recognize their Jewish origin.

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[12] On the influence of Dante on Jewish literature see Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959), 86–110 ("In the Steps of Dante"); Alan Freedman, "Passages from the Divine Comedy in a Fourteenth-Century Hebrew Manuscript," in *Collected Essays on Italian Language & Literature Presented to Kathleen Speight*, ed. Giovanni Aquilecchia (Manchester: Manchester University Press; New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1971), 9–21; Giorgio Petrocchi, "Gli ebrei, Dante e Boccaccio," in *Aspetti e problemi della presenza ebraica nell'Italia centro-settentrionale* (*secoli XIV e XV*), ed. Sofia Boesch Gajano (Rome: Ripoli, 1983), 343–359; Giorgio Battistoni, "Il contesto veronese e il paradigma dei 'tre anelli': Convergenze ebraiche, cristiane ed islamiche alla corte del 'gran Lombardo,'" http://www.geocities.com/dantestudies/gb1.html (accessed December 2006); Bruno Chiesa, "Dante e la cultura ebraica del Trecento," *Henoch* 23 (2001): 325–342.

[13] The expression first appears in Dante's *Purgatorio* (24.55–57): "'O frate, issa vegg' io,' diss' elli, 'il nodo/che 'l Notaro e Guittone e me ritenne/di qua dal dolce stil novo ch'i' odo.'"

[14] Moritz Steinscheinder, "Die italienische Litteratur der Juden," *Monatschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums* 42 (1898): 116 (the English translation is mine).

It should be mentioned, first, that Steinschneider was himself an enthusiastic admirer of Italian Judaism and a notoriously severe critic and detractor of Ashkenazi life—whose major achievements, he cynically held, consisted in "schnapps and hasidim."[15] His tendency to overestimate Italian Jewish culture should, therefore, be seen in this light and the significance of the Italian language for the Jews of Italy in the context of their actual use of it, from Naples to Venice. Steinschneider's assertion of the adoption, co-creation, and predominance of the Italian language among the Jews cannot be accepted uncritically, particularly if we consider, for example, the fact that we have transcriptions of Dante's poems into Hebrew characters or that the first philosophical composition in Italian by a Jew, Moses da Rieti's *Filosofia di Dio*,[16] was also written in Hebrew characters.

The reception of Dante in Jewish literature is a well-known phenomenon, mentioned regularly in the scholarship on medieval and Renaissance Judaism.[17] Dante inspired Jewish poets and scholars as early as the thirteenth and as late as the eighteenth century. The most famous example is that of Manoello Romano, or Immanuel of Rome (1261–1332), whose *Ha-Ṭofet we-ha-ʿEden* (Hell and Heaven)[18] was most

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[15] Ibid.

[16] In dealing with the importance of the Italian language for the Jewish tradition we can distinguish the following, also overlapping phases: (1) isolated explanations in the *volgare*, a tradition which goes back at least to Rashi's commentary on the Talmud in French; an example is Shabtay Donnolo's explanation of some difficult words in *Sefer Ḥakhmoni*, a commentary on the *Sefer Yeṣirah*; (2) glossaries of philosophical works in Judeo-Italian like the works of Moses ben Shlomo of Salerno, based on the glossary of Ibn Tibbon (Giuseppe Sermoneta, *Un glossario filosofico ebraico italiano del XIII secolo* [Rome: Athenaum, 1969]) and on Maimonides' Latin translation (Steinschneider, "Litteratur," 122), and finally the glossary by Moses da Rieti for his *Miqdash Meʿat;* (3) quotations of Dante's philosophical poetry in Hebrew letters, such as that included by Judah Romano in his anthology of philosophical texts; (4) philosophical texts written in Italian but in Hebrew letters, such as Moses da Rieti "Filosofia di Dio"; and finally (5) philosophical compositions in Italian like the *Dialoghi* of Leone Ebreo.

[17] See, for example, Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance*, 86–110.

[18] *Sefer ha-Maḥbarot* (Brescia: Gershom Soncino, 1491); modern edition *Immanuel ben Solomon (Romano). Maḥbarot Immanuel Ha-Romi*, 2 vols., ed. David Yarden (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1957); Immanuello Romano, *L'Inferno e il Paradiso*, ed. Giorgio Battistoni (Florence: Giuntina, 2000); see Harry S. Lewis, "Immanuel of Rome," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 6 (1934–1935): 277–308; Joseph Chotzner, "Immanuel di Roma, a Thirteenth Century Hebrew Poet and Novelist," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 4 (1891): 64–89; Jacques Genot, "Philosophie et Poétique dans l'oeuvre d'Immanuel de Rom" (PhD dissertation, Paris, 1977); Fabian Alfie, "Immanuel of Rome, alias Manoello Giudeo: The Poetics of Jewish Identity in Fourteenth-Century Italy," *Italica* 75 (1998): 307–329; David S. Segal, "Veiled Cohesion: Gate Twenty-Three of the Mahbarot of Immanuel of Rome" (in Hebrew) *Peʿamim* 81 (1999): 43–55.

probably written in 1321, possibly in reaction to Dante's death. Manoello's guide on his visit to the underworld is not Virgil, but a certain "Daniel," whom some scholars would identify as Dante himself.[19] Dante, however, was more than just a model to be imitated. His life had been a gift to all mankind, so that at his death mourning was universal, as Manoello writes in a sonnet to Bosone da Gubbio:

> I, who drew the tears from the bottom
> Of the abyss of the heart which was sending them up,
> Weep: and the fire of grief would have burned me
> If it were not for the tears in which I abound.
>
> Inasmuch as their downpouring deadens the deep
> Burning, which was drawing me out of my deep ills;
> In order not to die, to have another way,
> I stand strong against their striking and do not drown.
>
> And both Christian and Jew may well weep,
> And each of them sit in sad mourning:
> Perpetual weeping has made me a prisoner.
>
> Because I have realised that that was the bad year;
> I am much dejected, because I see that God
> Did that harm from enviousness of the good.[20]

The subject of Manoello's imitation of Dante and his own poetic originality has interested scholars at least since the beginning of the

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[19] Another possible identity would be that of Arnaldo Daniello (Arnaut Daniel), considered a great poet by the initiator of the *dolce stil novo*, Guido Guinizelli; see *Purgatorio* 26.107ff.

[20] Text and translation by Ed Emery; see http://www.geocities.com/ImmanuelloRomano/ (accessed June 12, 2007). The original text, as published in *Poeti giocosi del tempo di Dante*, ed. Mario Marti (Milano: Rizzoli, 1956), reads as follows:

> Io, che trassi le lagrime del fondo
> de l'abisso del cor che 'n su le 'nvea,
> piango: ché 'l foco del dolor m'ardea,
> se non fosser le lagrime in che abbondo.
>
> Ché la lor piova ammorta lo profondo
> ardor, che del mio mal fuor mi traea;
> per non morir, per tener altra vea,
> al percoter sto forte e non affondo.
>
> E ben può pianger cristiano e giudeo,
> e ciaschedun sedere 'n tristo scanno:
> pianto perpetual m' è fatto reo.
>
> Per ch' io m'accorgo che quel fu il mal'anno;
> sconfortomi ben, ch' i' veggio che Deo
> per invidia del ben fece quel danno.

twentieth century. Saul Tchernichowsky and Moses David Cassuto, for example, both maintained that Manoello was not original at all and that he cannot be compared to Dante.[21] This, however, would seem merely to reflect an "anti-apologetic" attitude toward Jewish culture. It was not Dante's poetic imagination that the Jewish poet was trying to imitate; his primary aim was to compose in the new style. Despite the admiration and, surely, the love he felt for Dante, Manoello cannot be seen as simply an imitator of the Florentine poet. *Ha-Ṭofet we-ha-ʿEden* is structured on the lines of Alḥarizi's *Taḥkemoni*, a Hebrew adaptation of the Arabic Divan,[22] and also shows Sephardic influences —poetry celebrating love and wine was, of course, also known in Spain from the eleventh century onwards. More important, a central factor in distinguishing Manoello from his model is the role that each poet assigned to theology in their respective works. Manoello is quite simply not very interested in the theological construction of the *Divina commedia*, even if his own poem does contain certain elements of philosophical and theological significance, as I will try to show further below.

By contrast, theology and philosophy were clearly the main interest of Manoello's cousin, Judah Romano, as seen, for example, in texts from MS 4o. 616 of the library of the Talmud Torah of Livorno, now in the University and National Library of Jerusalem. A description of the manuscript was published by Giuseppe Sermoneta as early as 1962.[23] For our purposes, the most important part of the manuscript is that containing the Hebrew transcriptions of some of Dante's *terza rima*, first examined by Giuseppe Sermoneta. Judah transcribed four

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[21] Saul Tchernichowsky, *Immanuel haRomi: Monography* (Berlin: Eshkhol, 1925); Moses David Cassuto, *Dante e Manoello* (Florence: Soc. Tip. Ed. Israel, 1922). Hebrew translation: *Dante we-ʿimmanuʾel ha-romi* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1965).

[22] See Israel Abrahams, *Chapters on Jewish Literature* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1899), http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/13678.

[23] Joseph Sermoneta, "Una trascrizione in caratteri ebraici di alcuni brani filosofici della *Commedia*," in *Romanica et occidentalia. Études dédiées à la mémoire de Hiram Peri* (Pflaum), ed. Moshé Lazar (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1963), 23–42. Caterina Rigo illuminated the whole complex of Judah's anthology, manuscripts, and translations in 1994, identifying all the texts translated by Judah from Latin into Hebrew. See Caterina Rigo, "Un'antologia filosofica di Yehuda b. Mosheh Romano," *Italia* 10 (1993): 73–104; see also her "L'antologia filosofica miscellanea tradotta da Judah Romano: tradizione manoscritta ed edizione critica del testo" (manuscript). I thank the author for putting her typescript at my disposal.

texts, which deal with the following topics: the limits and conditions for the fulfillment of the vows (*Paradise* 5.73–85); direct or indirect emanation of all things from God (*Paradise* 13.52–54), prayer and possibility of changing God's will through prayer (*Paradise* 20.49–54) and, finally, free will (*Purgatory* 16.73–76).

As Sermoneta reports, the central theme, on which Dante is cited as an authority, is the doctrine of free will, or predestination/providence, and the effectiveness of prayer and vows as a means or as prerequisites to affecting the divine plan for humanity. On these *quaestiones*, Judah cites not only Dante,[24] but also Egidio da Viterbo, Thomas Aquinas, Alessandro Bonini, and Angelo da Camerino, all of them, with the exception of Dante, in Hebrew translation. Only Dante is quoted in the original, transcribed into Hebrew characters, and occasionally showing textual variants not found in other manuscripts.

Unlike Maimonides, who speaks of wisdom as having been "stolen" by the Gentiles, Judah Romano is convinced that wisdom can be found among the sages of all contemporary religions. His anthology, as he writes in the introduction, is a response to Jews who, convinced that they alone possess all wisdom, deny that non-Jews can have direct access to science and wisdom. The texts he translates are intended as proof of that thesis, with the aim of disseminating among Jews the wisdom and the science of the thinkers of other nations.[25]

It seems to me that Dante's poem, combined with scholastic philosophy, inspired Jewish scholars to offer their own contributions to the sciences and the general body of knowledge. In other words, there was, between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a prevailing atmosphere of intellectual tolerance and exchange in Italy. More cautiously expressed, Maonello Romano spoke for many Jews of the period when he wrote:

> I am a bad Jew,[26] not a Saracen:
> To the Christian, I do not wish to show the way,

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[24] On the text-critical evaluation of Dante's verses see Alan Freedman, "Passages," 9–21. According to him, Dante's quotations in the manuscript of Romano's Hebrew philosophical treatise do not accurately represent the original text, but reflect corruptions by uncomprehending scribes.

[25] For the references, see Rigo, "L'antologia," 4.

[26] On this expression, see Fabian Alfie, "Immanuel of Rome," 319–320.

> But of every religion I am desirous,
> Wishing to observe some part of it.[27]

The situation changed in the fifteenth century, when Jewish compositions in Italian can no longer be seen as a profession of tolerance. They are composed as alternatives to Christian literary production. This apologetic character can be seen in the works of Moses da Rieti (1388–after 1460), rabbi of the local community of Rome and private physician to Pope Pius II. Moses da Rieti or, as one finds him in the manuscripts of the *Filosofia naturale*, "Mosheh de Gajo de Riete," was known as a physician,[28] poet, and philosopher. He began the composition of his *Miqdash Me'at* (The Little Temple) in 1415/1416, although it was not published until 1851, by Jacob Goldenthal.[29] The poem is a sort of Hebrew response to Dante's *Divine Comedy*.[30] "The Little Temple" is encyclopedic in character and deals mainly with philosophy and the sciences, with no narrative continuity. Rather, it follows the structure of the Temple of Jerusalem, taking the reader from the external walls of the building to the innermost sanctum, from the *ulam*, through the *hekhal* to the *devir*. In some 4,800 verses, Moshe tries to develop a concept of science based on Jewish literature and culture. No contemporary Christian author is mentioned.

A similar observation can be made with regard to his major philosophical work, the *Filosofia naturale e fatti di Dio* (Natural philosophy and divine things),[31] written in Italian and transmitted in Hebrew script. In the introduction to the manuscript, the author describes the structure

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[27] English translation of Emery (see above) with corrections. The original text reads:

> …mal giudeo sono io, non saracino:
> ver' li cristiani non drizzo la proda.
> Ma d'ogni legge so' ben desiroso
> alcuna parte voler osservare.

[28] Yehoshua Leibowitz and Shlomo Marcus, "Liqquṭim mi-refu'ot le-rabbi moseh da-rieti," *Kirjath Sepher* 42 (1966–1967): 108–128.

[29] *Sefer Miqdash me'at le-R. Moshe ben R. Yiṣḥaq di Rieti. Il Dante Ebreo ossai il picciol Santuario. Poema didattico in terza rima, contenente la Filosofia antica e tutta la storia letteraria sino all'età sua*, ed. Jaakov Goldenthal (Vienna: J. P. Sollinger's Witwe, 1851).

[30] See *Prooftexts* 23 (2003), including contributions by Alessandro Guetta (4–17), Devora Bregman (18–24), and Raymond Scheindlin; further Alessandro Guetta, "Renaissance et culture juive: le case de Moshe ben Yitzhaq de Rieti," *Tsafon* 48 (2004): 43–58.

[31] *Mosè da Rieti. Filosofia naturale e fatti de Dio. Testo inedito del secolo XV*, ed. Irene Hijmans-Tromp (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

of the work, which is divided into three parts:[32] the first is devoted to the "natural philosophy, omitting speculative matters and choosing the more familiar";[33] the second deals with "things divine, and how our soul should always serve Him, and the way of life of the devoted soul";[34] the third, unfortunately not extant, was to deal with the "the stories of the Old Testament, i.e., the Bible, with other reasoning things of use, and the course of the peregrinations of our people until now."[35] The author draws here the same distinction commonly made in the medieval sciences, and followed also by Maimonides in his *Guide*—that is, the division between the natural sciences (dealt with in *Ma'ase Bereshit*) and divine knowledge or theology (the subject of the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*). Da Rieti's purpose is clear: to "translate" Jewish wisdom into the language of the common people, as Maimonides did.

Seen from the perspective of Italian letters, Judah's philosophy and Immanuel's poetry were written with a view to participating in the contemporary intellectual movement developing in educated Christian circles. Judah quotes directly from, translates, and summarizes Latin authors,[36] while Immanuel at least purports to do the same. Moses da Rieti, on the other hand, contests the ostensible wisdom of the gentiles and, as ʿOvadya Sforno does somewhat later in his *Lumen gentium* (Light for the Nations), lays claim to an inherently Jewish nature of philosophy and science. This same tendency can already be detected in Immanuel of Rome's vision of philosophy and poetry.

2.2 Intellectus agens *or* unio poetica

In her introduction to Judah Romano, Colette Sirat reaches the conclusion that, in Judah's view, "the prophet is a philosopher, a guide to intellectual knowledge, and not so much a lawgiver." From this

[32] *Filosofia* 5, ed. Hiymans-Tromp, 308: "tre libretti in un golume."

[33] *Filosofia* 5–6, ed. Hiymans-Tromp, 308: "filosofia naturale, cioè lassando le cose molto speculative e profonde e piglianno le più domestiche."

[34] Ibid.: "li fatti de Dio, e come l'anima nostra se de' desponere a servir Lo sempre, e l'ordine de la vita de l'anima devote."

[35] Ibid.: "storie del Testamento Vecchio, cioè la Bibia, con alcuna altra rascione ed utilità, e come sono state le traslatazioni del popolo nostro fin qui."

[36] See Caterina Rigo, "Egidio da Viterbo nella cultura ebraica: le versioni di Yehudah b. Mosheh Romano," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 5 (1994): 397–437.

perspective, it is logical, according to Sirat, to see Romano as being close to Aquinas and Christian scholasticism, given his "insistence on the ontological and cognitive aspect of prophecy." In this, Sirat bases herself on Sermoneta's analysis of Judah's texts. Nevertheless, although the consonance between Judah and certain aspects of Thomist philosophy and theology cannot be denied, I strongly doubt whether he did, in fact, accept the concept of an ontological and cognitive aspect to prophecy, as expressed by Thomas and, earlier, by Maimonides.

In his well-known article on the doctrine of the intellect and "philosophical faith" in Judah and Immanuel of Rome,[37] Sermoneta stresses the doctrinal changes that were discussed in the Roman circle that formed around Zeraḥya ben Shealtiel Ḥen (Gracian). The teachings of Maimonides, he adds, became an esoteric doctrine dressed in liturgical and mystical raiment, developed within the context of a philosophical faith. Sermoneta's principal argument is that while Judah Romano agrees with Maimonides' conception of an intellectual—that is, a philosophical—interpretation of biblical texts, there remains a radical difference between the two thinkers. Maimonides considered the study by Jews of philosophical texts that were transmitted by "gentiles" as justified, by virtue of the fact that all wisdom properly belonged to Judaism. It was only in consequence of the sins and the historical humiliation of the Jews that wisdom had been passed on to the Gentiles.[38] Conversely, for Judah, it was not only the Jews who had direct access to wisdom, but all peoples. This was the main reason for his translating so many Latin works into Hebrew: "My aim was to make known their science and their intellectual capability in every book and every doctrine."[39] And he adds: "Perhaps by virtue of this knowledge we will remove the prisoner from the jail of foolishness and the captive sitting in the darkness of the sensible. And following this path we can accede to the lowest of the heavens where the eternal abides." Philosophical knowledge is, thus, the prerequisite to, and not the purpose of, joining the king, a metaphor for the active intellect.

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[37] Joseph B. Sermoneta, "La dottrina dell'intelletto e la 'fede filosofica' di Jehudàh e Immanuel romano," *Studi medievali* 6 (1965): 3–78.

[38] *Moreh Nevukhim* 1.71. See also Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov Falaquera, *Iggeret ha-Wikuaḥ. Dialog zwischen einem Orthodoxem und einem Philosophen*, ed. Adolf Jellinek (Wien: Winter, 1875; repr. Jerusalem 1970), http://www.teachittome.com/seforim2/seforim/iggeres_havikuach.pdf, 14; and Moshe Idel, "The Journey to Paradise: the Jewish Transformation of a Greek Mythological Motiv," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 2 (1982): 7–16.

[39] Cod. Bodl. Ox. 1390, fol. 121a; Sermoneta, "Dottrina," 25.

For Immanuel, poetry is the highest form of prophecy, the unique means of achieving unity with the active intellect. In his description of hell and heaven, Manuello consigns all the ancient philosophers to hell: Aristotle for his doctrine of the pre-existence of the universe, al-Farabi for his doctrine of the union between the active intellect and the human rational intellect (*sekhel ha-enoshi we-sekhel ha-nifrad*) and for his doctrine of the transmigration of the soul (*gilgul nefashot*), Plato for his doctrine of ideas, and Ibn Sina for his doctrine of the eternity of the world. It is notable that only Judah Halewi and Mamonides are included in Immanuel's Paradise, although no mention is made of their "philosophy." Immanuel of Rome is of the opinion that poetry alone is the highest form of knowledge, that form which allows the perfect union with the active intellect.

A full understanding of the importance Immanuel attaches to poetry in the philosophical discourse requires a brief summary of the introduction to the *Maḥbarot*, the style of which is somewhat long-winded, with a tendency to become redundant. It begins with the recounting of a small symposium held in Fermo, in the March region of central Italy, following the holiday of Purim (Adar 14). The main theme is, of course, poetry and *meliṣot* (compositions in rhyme), and the participants are presented as being "pious, outstanding believers in science and wisdom,"[40] who begin to recite poetic compositions. Immanuel reports (or fictively claims) that some of the more convivial participants had the impertinence to recite poems composed by other authors, while boasting of having written them themselves. Naturally, Manoello is primarily concerned about the appropriation of his own poems and his verses, which had been widely disseminated and plagiarized. Clearly exaggerating, he claims that: "to collect [my] scattered [verses] is a task more difficult than the ingathering of the Diaspora."[41] At first he was saddened, because "part of my people is unfaithful"[42] and has plundered,[43] until, at last, the *sar* (prince) appears at the symposium, as a *deus ex machina*, to suggest that he publish an edition of the poems.

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[40] My reference edition of the Hebrew text is, for this short summary, Battistoni and Levi, eds., *L'Inferno e il Paradiso*, 129–168; Immanuel's introduction is on pp. 129–132.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Battistoni and Levi, eds., *L'Inferno e il Paradiso*, 120.

[43] However, he himself also plundered the works of Judah Romano, as he confesses to the *sar* in the twelfth *maḥberet*; on this point see Sermoneta, "La dottrina dell'intelletto," 58ff.

The declared purpose of this highly curious introduction to the *Maḥbarot* is to justify the publication of the collected poems, which had been scattered all over the world. The real aim of the *haqdamah*, however, is to assign his poetry a place within the category of revelation. The *sar*, a *figura poetica* available for use as a metaphor for the *intellectus agens* (active intellect),[44] is the actual poet, Manuello but his intermediary. God inspired the *sar* by giving him the faculty of discernment and putting in his heart science and intellect. With the help and mediation of the *sar*, Manuello attains to the highest degree of prophecy and (divine) wisdom. Prophecy and revelation are not the only sources of poetry; true poetry is, in itself, prophecy.

In addition to the allusions and quotations from Judah Romano, both direct and indirect,[45] and the critique of Maimonides, a further interesting aspect of Immanuel's concept of poetry is the indirect reference he makes to Horace's *Ars poetica* in the introduction to the *Maḥbarot*. I am not certain as to whether Immanuel actually read the *Ars poetica*. However, both that work and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, attributed to Cicero, were commonly known in intellectual circles of the period, at the very least in the version of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's celebrated and widely read treatise *Poetria nova*, of which some two hundred manuscripts are still extant.[46] There is also no doubt that changing attitudes concerning the esteem in which poetry was held were characteristic of the intellectual atmosphere of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Evidence thereof can be found in the proliferation of treatises on poetics, the so-called *poetriae novae*, such as Matthes of Vendôme's *Arte Versificatoria*.[47] Manuello Romano's model, Dante, both read the *Ars poetica* and quoted it in the original Latin.[48]

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[44] See Sermoneta, "La dottrina dell'intelletto," 60 n. 125.

[45] See Sermoneta's study and, further, Guy Shaked, *Immanuel the Roman's critique of Dante's Divine Comedy and Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed* (private publication by the author, 2007).

[46] See Karsten Friis-Jensen, "*The Ars Poetica* in Twelfth-Century France. The Horace of Matthew of Vendûme, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, and John of Garland," *Cahiers de l'Institute du Moyen-Age Grec et Latin* 60 (1990): 319–388; Martin Camargo, "Tria sunt: The Long and the Short of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi*," *Speculum* 74 (1999): 935–955.

[47] Modern English translation: Matthew of Vendome, *Ars Versificatoria: The Art of the Versemaker*, ed. Roger P. Parr (Marquette University Press, 1981).

[48] See Dante, *Epistula XIII Cani Grandi de la Scala*; idem, *De vulgari eloquentia* 2.4.4–5; idem, *Convivio* 2.13.10; idem, *Vita nova* 35.9. See Gaetano Maruca, "Metamorfosi di un motivo oraziano nel sonetto 'Sonar Bracchetti' di Dante," *Banca Dati* "*Nuovo Rinas-*

Some elements of the preface to the *Maḥbarot* are astonishing in their similarity to the *Ars poetica*. Immanuel tells us that all his poetic compositions have been stolen by other would-be poets. Regardless of whether Manuello is making up the story, or whether someone actually had copied his poems, he is using here a very well-known *topos*, or code, in a more or less esoteric allusion to the scattering of Jewish wisdom among the "nations." This is further emphasized by the comparison between the dispersed poetical verses and the exile of the Diaspora. Manuello is here applying a commonplace of Jewish apologia to the dispersion of his verses, with the "nations" being represented by the would-be-poets "who brought books full of verses from which they tried to glean among the sheaves."

As already shown elsewhere, the *topos* of "stolen wisdom" is of ancient origin.[49] In the present context, mention should also be made of the *Iggeret ha-Wikuaḥ* by Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera (ca. 1225–ca. 1295),[50] in which the author claims that the wisdom of the Jews has perished, thus obliging the Jews to read gentile texts.[51] Manoello, too, draws on this *topos* to justify his use of non-Jewish sources, claiming that it is legitimate because non-Jews have stolen the Jewish heritage.[52]

Very similar is Immanuel's ambition to edit a collection of all his poetic compositions so that the thieves would be shamed, or damned, as soon as the collection was published. Immanuel's claims recall the legend of the scattered verses of Homer, which, according to legend, had been repeatedly copied, forged, and altered before Peisistratos finally ordered the preparation of an official edition. The legend is alluded to by Horace in the *Ars poetica*:[53]

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cimento," http://www.nuovorinascimento.org/N-RINASC/saggi/rtf/maruca/metamorf.rtf (accessed February 19, 2008).

[49] See chapter 5, below, pp. 97–128.

[50] On his work see Sirat, *History*, 234–238; see also Mauro Zonta, *La filosofia antica nel Medioevo ebraico* (Brescia: Paideia, 1996), 204–212.

[51] Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov Falaquera, *Iggeret ha-Wikuaḥ*, 14.

[52] With reference to music and as a commentary on Genesis 40:15: "What does the art of music say to the Christians? 'I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews' (Genesis 40:15)," see Alfred Sendrey, *The Music of the Jews of the Diaspora (up to 1800): A Contribution to the Social and Cultural History of the Jews* (New York: Yoseloff, 1970), 133.

[53] *Ars poetica* 73–76. Modern edition: http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/horace/arspoet.shtml.

> Res gestae regumque ducumque et tristia bella
> quo scribi possent numero, monstrauit Homerus.
> Versibus impariter iunctis querimonia primum,
> post etiam inclusa est uoti sententia compos;

> Homer has demonstrated in what meter we should describe the deeds of kings and leaders as well as gloomy wars. Lament, first, was enclosed in unequally paired verses and later also our grateful thoughts for answered prayer. Scholars disagree about who originally published these brief elegiac verses, and it still is before the court as a matter of dispute.[54]

The legend of the edition of Homer's scattered poems could not have been unknown to Jewish scholars; it had also influenced the legend of the translation of the Septuagint, well into the Renaissance and later. The Septuagint legend found its place in Jewish literature in the *Sefer Josippon* and various *sidre 'olam* (compositions comparable to the Christian *chronica mundi*).[55] A century after Immanuel, the humanist Giannozzo Manetti quoted the legend of the seventy-two grammarians of Peisistratos to prove (!) the historicity of the legend of the Septuagint, which he had read in the version of Eusebius of Caesarea.[56]

Manoello's insistence on a publication of a collection of his poetry could also be a *negative* reference to another verse from Horace: "You can always blot out what you have not published; a word set loose, knows not how to return."[57] Publication of a work can serve equally as an indirect means of copyrighting ideas and composition.

Important in the present context is the comparison between poetry and prophecy, an element also stressed in the *Ars poetica*:

> Once it was deemed wisdom to keep what was public separate from what was private, what was sacred from what was not, to issue prohibitions against promiscuity, to set down laws for those who are married, to build towns, to inscribe laws on wooden tablets. In this way, honor and renown came to poets, inspired by the gods, and their songs. After these, Homer achieved fame and Tyrtaeus, with his poems, sharpened men's minds for the wars of Mars; *oracles were given in poetry*[58] and the way of life

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quis tamen exiguos elegos emiserit auctor,
grammatici certant et adhuc sub iudice lis est.

[54] Horace, "Ars Poetica," in *Horace for Students of Literature: The 'Ars Poetica' and Its Tradition*, trans. Leon Golden (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1995), http://www.english.emory.edu/DRAMA/ArsPoetica.html (accessed June 10, 2007).

[55] On these compositions see my *Gegenwart der Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 120–143.

[56] *Apologeticus adversus suae novae Psalterii traductionis obtrectatores libri 5*, still in manuscript according to Charles Trinkaus, "Italian Humanism and the Scriptures," in idem, *In Our Image and Likeness*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 588–589 and n. 75 (821), but now published: *Apologeticus*, ed. Alfonso De Petris (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1981).

[57] *Ars poetica* 379: "delere licebit quod non edideris; nescit uox missa reuerti."

[58] My italics.

> was demonstrated, and the grace of kings was tested by Pierian songs; and entertainment was discovered, that entertainment which brought to a close periods of extended labor. I say this so that you will not in any way feel shame for the skilled muse of the lyre and the divine singer of songs, Apollo.[59]

In his Paradise, Immanuel is welcomed as the prophet of the prophets, the poet of the poets;[60] his commentary on Yeshayahu (Isaiah) is praised as the ultimate commentary, unsurpassable by sage or prophet. Immanuel here adopts a Platonic category, according to which poetry and prophecy can be explained only by prophets and poets.[61]

A further similarity is the concept of excellence as deriving from subject matter:

> The foundation and source of literary excellence is wisdom. The works written about Socrates are able to reveal the true subject matter of poetry and, once the subject matter has been provided, words will freely follow.[62]

Manuello subsumes his entire poetic oeuvre under the rubric of biblical "commentary"; he is the commentator par excellence. In his *'Eden*, all the important authors of books of the Old Testament, be they prophets or poets, praise his skills as a commentator on Scripture, who has opened the sources of wisdom. Speaking to Manoello, Isaiah says, "Peace unto you, commentator, who have prophesied among the prophets and, because of your interpretation, you have earned the life to come."[63]

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[59] *Ars poetica* 396–407.
Fuit haec sapientia quondam,
publica priuatis secernere, sacra profanis,
concubitu prohibere uago, dare iura maritis,
oppida moliri, leges incidere ligno.
Sic honor et nomen diuinis uatibus atque
carminibus uenit. Post hos insignis Homerus
Tyrtaeusque mares animos in Martia bella
uersibus exacuit, dictae per carmina sortes,
et uitae monstrata uia est et gratia regum
Pieriis temptata modis ludusque repertus
et longorum operum finis: ne forte pudori
sit tibi Musa lyrae sollers et cantor Apollo.

[60] *'Eden*, 835; Battistoni and Levi, eds., *L'Inferno e il Paradiso*, 141.

[61] See further, below.

[62] *Ars poetica*, 310–322.

[63] *'Eden*, 864.

Immanuel, of course, makes an amalgam of theology/philosophy, prophecy, and poetry, following a tendency typical of the intellectual atmosphere of the century in which he lived. Some decades later, for example, Boccaccio makes the same identification in his *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods* (*Genealogia deorum gentilum libri*), written in 1360, and Francesco Petrarca in his letter to Brother Gherardo:[64]

> The fact is, poetry is very far from being opposed to theology. Does that surprise you? One may almost say that theology actually is poetry, poetry concerning God.

Petrarca cites Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 3.4), who considered that the first theologians had also been the first poets.[65] Manoello claims that *his* poetry is the highest form of knowledge, which is what induced the prince, the *sar*, to love him, even to grant him the crowning honor of being the guardian of the divine palace.

The evidence I have thus far mentioned is, admittedly, still rather loose, and, taken on its own, would not suffice for assigning to Manoello a firm place in the world of medieval and humanist rhetoric and in the development of the prophetic interpretation of philosophy. The allusions he makes could, individually, be considered as no more than that, with no further theoretical or practical importance. The decisive factor, however, can be seen, I believe, in the use Manoello makes of the doctrine of *psychagogia.* This, I would argue, is the core of Manuello's concept of poetry as a medium of philosophy. *Psychagogia* is the doctrine, taken from rhetoric, of leading (*agoge*) the soul (*psyche*) of the reader or listener.[66] Horace refers to this concept when he writes in his *Ars rhetorica* (99–100):

> Non satis est pulchra esse poemata; dulcia sunto
> et, quocumque uolent, animum auditoris agunto.
>
> It is not enough for poems to be "beautiful"; they must also yield delight and guide the listener's spirit wherever they wish.[67]

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[64] Letter to his Broder Gherardo: Francis Petrarch, *Familiar Letter*, in James Harvey Robinson, ed. and trans., *Petrarch: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1898), 261; http://history.hanover.edu/texts/petrarch/pet13.html.

[65] Ibid.: "Now we can see how Aristotle came to say that the first theologians and the first poets were one and the same."

[66] On the Platonic usage of the term, see James M. Rhodes, *Eros, Wisdom, and Silence: Plato's Erotic Dialogues* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003).

[67] Ibid. See above on the English translation.

By this means, the listeners can experience for themselves the truths of beauty and of the good. Manuello's model, Dante, describes the same concept in the *Divine Comedy* (*Purgatory* 24.52–54):

> …Count of me but as one
> Who am the scribe of love; that, when he breathes,
> Take up my pen, and, as he dictates, write.[68]

The love that inspires Dante's poetry is divine love, so that when God breathes and dictates he can write. Through this love the poet can lead the soul of his listener in a chain of interpretation/affection. A very similar image is employed by Immanuel in the *Maḥbarot*. In the very first *Maḥberet* he writes:

> My intellect is so high and powerful that I can put every word at the service of my soul and not the soul at the service of my words (*sikhli ʿalah we-nakhar ki shibadti kol ha-devarim le-nafshi we-lo nafshi le-davar*).[69]

And in the conclusion of the "Introduction" he ends with the words:

> That was the beginning of my work, having relied on the God of my faith and stretched out my hands to heaven that He may be the mouth of scribes, instructing us on what we shall say.[70]

There can be no doubt that Immanuel of Rome has here adopted the concept of poets being directly inspired, as guides to the soul of the listener. They are embodied in the figure of the *sar*, or *intellectus agens*. For Immanuel, the truest prince, the *sar*, can be none other than his cousin Judah. He is the "sun," because in his radiance Immanuel can see, and through Judah's intellect he can understand.[71] Judah is the personification of the active intellect, because he has succeeded in being united with it. Judah is thus seen as the Messiah, he who will gather the dispersed men of Judah and the exiles of Israel.[72]

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[68] "I' mi son un, che quando/Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo/ch'e' ditta dentro vo significando." English translation by H. F. Cary, *The Divine Comedy of Dante in Project Gutenberg Etext* (1997), ftp://opensource.nchc.org.tw/gutenberg/etext97/0ddcc10.txt.

[69] Immanuel Romano, *Maḥberet Prima (Il destino)*, ed. Stefano Fumagalli and M. Tiziana Mayer (Desio: Milano 2002), 112.

[70] *Haqdamah* 93–95; Battistoni and Levi, eds., *L'Inferno e il Paradiso*, 129.

[71] *Maḥberet* 10.584–590; see Sermoneta, "La dottrina dell'intelletto," 65.

[72] *Maḥberet* 10.618–621.

In analyzing Immanuel's poetic doctrine, the reader discovers a clear affirmation of the common nature of philosophy, as personified by Immanuel's cousin Judah; and poetry, as embodied by Immanuel's own compositions. What his cousin had achieved in gathering and collecting the wisdom of Israel that had been dispersed among the nations—this, too, was the task pursued by Immanuel in gathering all the dispersed verses of Judah into a unified poetic composition, of divine essence, capable of guiding all souls to union with the active intellect.

2.3 *The New Epoch: An Epilogue*

We began this chapter by speaking of a new epoch, a time in which new elements came to be included in medieval and early humanist thought, presaging the Renaissance. With respect to the development of philosophy and epistemology, the new epoch evinces the emergence of a strange and precarious balance between the established scholasticism of the universities and the incipient tendencies of (Neo-)Platonic schools to include mysticism and emotions among cognitive acts of the individual, a conception in which prophecy plays a role as an act of "inspiration."

The philosophical circle at the center of this emerging new world of thought was the Jewish community of Rome, where the Spanish physician, philosopher, and translator Zerahyah ben Shealtiel Gracian was active, along with Judah and Immanuel of Rome. In addition to his teachings on Maimonides, Zeraḥyah, must also have transmitted the concept of poetry and the poet found in Plato and Neoplatonic philosophy: poetry as magnetic energy radiated in the interchange between the divine word, the poet, and his audience (reader or commentator).[73] Also Platonic is the concept of *psychagogia*, the doctrine of the "leading of the soul," which was taken up by Horace in the *Ars poetica* and further disseminated in Italy by Dante Alighieri in the *Divine Comedy*.

According to Immanuel of Rome, poetry is the rhetorical and philosophical medium through which it becomes possible to reach the *intellectus agens*, to fulfill the *unio poetica/mystica* that becomes a source

[73] Plato, *Ion* 533d. See Morriss Henry Partee, *Plato's Poetics: The Authority of Beauty* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1981); further Abraham Avni, "Inspiration in Plato and the Hebrew Prophets," *Comparative Literature* 20 (1968): 55–63.

of discernment and wisdom. It is not without reason that this union between the active and the passive intellect is defined metaphorically as an expression of love and the attraction of beauty.[74] This is a pervasive motif in the history of Jewish philosophy, from Manuello to Leone Ebreo, the subject of our next chapter.

[74] First *Maḥberet*, ed. Fumagalli; see above.

CHAPTER THREE

LEONE EBREO'S CONCEPT OF JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

Leone Ebreo is considered the pre-eminent Jewish thinker of the sixteenth century, well acquainted, indeed imbued with the Neoplatonic conceptions, ideas, and expressions then current in the Italian Renaissance. His *Dialoghi d'amore*,[1] a composition whose form was quite common in the humanist period, is a celebration of cosmic love as the relationship between God, the universe, and man as the *intellectus agens*, in and of this world. Julius Guttmann maintained that Leone should be regarded as the "only truly Jewish Renaissance philosopher."[2] This opinion was shared by Carl Gebhardt, who saw in him the last truly Jewish philosopher before Spinoza, a precursor, even, of the latter's pantheistic vision. Offering a completely different interpretation, Colette Sirat considers Leone's thought not at all Jewish. She asserts categorically that "[The *Dialoghi* are] not a work of Jewish Philosophy, but a book of philosophy written by a Jew."[3] In this view, the *Dialoghi* are to be classified as a work of general philosophy, in the same category as such philosophical disquisitions as Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae*, which was renowned in the medieval Christian world as a work of both Christian and Muslim character; or as Simone Luzzatto's *Socrate*, the Jewish origins of which are apparent only from the author's name on the title page.[4]

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[1] All quotations from this work are from the first Blado edition of the *Dialoghi d'amore*, reprinted by Carl Gebhardt, ed., *Leone Ebreo. Dialoghi d'amore. Hebräische Gedichte* (Heidelberg: Curis Societatis Spinozanae, 1929). I have also consulted the edition of Santino Caramella, ed., *Leone Ebreo (Giuda Abarbanel). Dialoghi d'Amore* (Bari: Laterza, 1529). A new English translation of the Dialogues is in press: *Dialogues of Love (Dialoghi d'amore) by Leone Ebreo*, translated by Cosmos Damian Bacich and Rossella Pescatori (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

[2] Julius Guttmann, *Die Philosophie des Judentums* (Munich: Reinhadt, 1933; repr., Wiesbaden: Fourier, 1985), 271; see also Gebhardt, ed., *Leone Ebreo*, 4.

[3] Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (1985; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 408.

[4] *Socrate overo dell'humano sapere. Esercitio seriogiocoso di Simone Luzzatto Hebreo Venetiano. Opera nella quale si dimostra quanto sia imbecile l'humano intendimento, mentre non è diretto dalla divina rivelatione* (Venice: Tomasini, 1651).

This, however, was not the case with Leone, a thinker who in his writings never concealed his Jewishness.[5] It was a fact acknowledged both by his contemporaries and by later readers. It is arguable, in fact, that this Jewish consciousness was the very premise and essence of the philosophy that permeates his work. Guttmann was correct in stressing here the Jewish aspect of a philosophy outwardly clothed in the garment of Renaissance ideology, a product of the humanist premise inherent in all philosophy of the time. In the Christian world, however, Leone was regarded not as a Jewish philosopher, but rather as a skilled physician and author of courtly literature (a kind of *letterato cortese*). It was only in the Jewish community that he was considered a profound expert on Aristotelian philosophy. Was Leone a philosopher, a Jewish philosopher, or simply a writer with a philosophical background? That question remains open to debate.

The discussion as to where Leone should be located within the spectrum of Renaissance philosophy surfaces as early as the sixteenth century in mentions of his work. Amatus Lusitanus, a Portuguese physician, refers to him as a "Platonic philosopher" (*platonicus philosophus*) "who left for us, in writing, divine dialogues on love" (*qui nobis divinos de amore dialogos scriptos reliquit*). Lusitanus had met Leone's grandson, who also bore the name Judah Abravanel, in Saloniki in 1560. According to his account, a manuscript of a lost work by Leone, *De Harmonia mundi*, was in the grandson's possession, and it was this work that had been the subject of their philosophical discussions. Lusitanus maintained that the work had been expressly composed for Pico della Mirandola (*divini Mirandulensis Pici precibus composuerat*).[6] The historical evidence is unclear as to whether Leone actually had contact with Pico and whether he wrote a composition on the harmony of the universe, conceivably as the third part of the *Dialoghi*. I have no serious doubts as to the reliability of Lusitanus's testimony, but his account does leave many questions

[5] See *Dialoghi*, III, 125b: "…ch'io sia Mosaico." But compare *Dialoghi*, III, 75b, in which he mentions the Gospel of John; on this aspect, see also David Ruderman, "The Italian Renaissance and Jewish Thought," in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, ed. Albert Rabil, vol. 1, *Humanism in Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 411.

[6] *Curationum medicinalium centuriae septem, varia multiplicique rerum cognitione refertae & in hac ultima editione recognitae & valde correctae. Quibus praemissa est commentatio de introitu medici ad aegrotatem, deque crisi & diebus decretorijs. Accesserunt duo noui indices, centuria* VII, *cur*. 98 (Burdigalae: Gilbert Vernoy, 1620), 786f., quoted from Gebhardt, ed., *Leone Ebreo*, 15–16 of his "Regesten zur Lebensgeschichte Leone Ebreos" (at the end of the volume).

open. Is the *Harmonia* an Aristotelian composition[7] or a work inspired by Platonic-Pythagorean thought? Carl Gebhardt was of the opinion that Leone mentions the work in his *Dialoghi*. The main difficulty lies in the content of the text. The quotation in Leone's *Dialoghi* that allegedly stems from this lost work deals with astrological matters.[8] If we suppose that the *Harmonia* was really written as a separate composition, then it would have to have been a tractate on the harmony of the world that was in *opposition* to Pico's theses, for Pico did not approve of astrological speculation.[9] On the other hand, Lusitanus's note, "but written in a scholastic style," would tend to support the view that we are dealing with a separate composition, since the *Dialoghi* are not a scholastic treatise. At the same time, if Leone really was a *philosophus Platonicus*, it seems quite strange that he should compose a work in a scholastic Aristotelian style.

Perhaps Lusitanus's expression needs to be interpreted differently. It is of course possible to postulate an intellectual kinship between Pico and Leone and deduce from that a personal acquaintanceship. Both were concerned with the harmonization of Aristotelian and Platonic philosophies,[10] although tending, admittedly, in divergent anthropological directions. Harmonizing Plato with Aristotle was a project that had already been dreamed of in antiquity and been pursued throughout the Middle Ages down to the Renaissance (*philosophia perennis*). Nevertheless, Jewish philosophers, Leone among them, saw in Aristotle Plato's "bad disciple" who had contributed to the corruption of that wisdom which the ancient sages of Greece had learned from the Jews in Egypt. The harmonization of Aristotle and Plato is thus nothing more than a correction of Aristotle, a *reductio ad Platonem*. To sum up Lusitanus's testimony: indirectly, he provides a pointed description of the nature of Leone's philosophy, which consisted in a hesitation between Plato and Aristotle. To put it in Leone's own terms for these philosophers, it was a hesitation between "the physician who was the healer of (ancient

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[7] "In quo (opere) bonis ille Leo, quantum in philosophia valebat, satis indicaverat, scholastico tamen stilo inscriptum."

[8] Especially III, 51b.

[9] See Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* III, 19, mentioned by Eugenio Garin, *Filosofi italiani del Quattrocento* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1942), 460–462; see also M. Schiavone, *Problemi filosofici in Marsilio Ficino* (Milan: Marzorati, 1957), 197ff. See also Charles B. Schmitt, "Who Read Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola?," *Studies in the Renaissance* 11 (1964): 105–132, especially 119ff.

[10] Pico della Mirandola, *De Concordia Platonis et Aristotelis* (1496, fragments).

philosophical) illness by means of excess" (i.e., Plato), and "the physician who preserves the state of health already produced by Plato, by means of temperance" (*si che Platone fu medico curatore di malattia con escesso*,[11] *& Aristotile medico curatore di sanità già prodotta da l'opera di Platone, con l'uso del temperamento*).[12] It is, of course, not by chance that both Plato and Aristotle are referred to as "physicians," since Leone was himself a distinguished member of the profession, celebrated as such in Naples, Rome, and Venice.

The problem in determining Leone's position among Renaissance intellectuals is not the Jewishness of his speculations—as some modern authors maintain[13]—but the literary and philosophical value of his writings. In my opinion, the reception of his work, which went through twenty-five editions between 1535 and 1607 and saw various translations into French, Latin, Spanish, and Hebrew between 1551 and 1660,[14] is due precisely to its popular appeal, namely as an entertaining, non-academic disquisition on Platonic-Aristotelian doctrines, clothed in mystical, astrological raiment. The quotations from the *Dialoghi* found in Cervantes' *Galatea* and in *Don Quijote*, as well as the inclusion of the Latin version in the *Ars cabalistica* of Pistorius, would tend to support this interpretation. The fact that Leone stressed the Jewish origins of philosophy in general was no obstacle to the reception of his work in

[11] See *Dialoghi*, III, 116b: "Platone trovando li primi Filosofi di Grecia che non stimauano altre essentie, ne sustantie, ne belleze che le corporee, & fuora de li corpi pensauano essere nulla, fu bisogno come uerace medico curarli col contrario, mostrandoli che li corpi da se stessi, nissuna essentia, nissuna sustantia, nissuna belleza posseggono."

[12] *Dialoghi*, III, 117a. On temperance, note there: "Aristotile . . . gli parue tempo di temperare l'estremo in questo, qual' forse in processo uerria a escedere la meta Platonica."

[13] On the Jewishness of Leone and his Jewish readership, see the position of Arthur M. Lesley, "The Place of the *Dialoghi d'amore* in Contemporaneous Jewish Thought," in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David Ruderman (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 170–188; and Moshe Idel, "Kabbalah and Ancient Theology in R. Isaac and Judah Abravanel" (Hebrew), in *The Philosophy of Love of Leone Ebreo*, ed. Menahem Dorman and Zvi Levy (Haifa: Hakibutz Hameuhad, 1985), 73–112. A very careful and convincing answer to this position can be found in Ruderman, "The Italian Renaissance," passim and especially 431–432 n. 152. Lesly's argument for a Jewish readership of Leone is based on the assumption that the original language of Leone's work was Hebrew, a controversial point; for a different viewpoint, see Barbara Garvin, "The Language of Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'Amore*," *Italia* 13–14 (2001): 181–201.

[14] Cf. Gebhardt, ed., Leone *Ebreo*, 35–37.

Christian circles. Such accents were typical of Christian pansophic philosophies.

3.1 *The Jewish Origin of Philosophy*

Although the first and second Aldine editions (1541 and 1545) of the *Dialoghi* disseminated the story of his alleged conversion to Christianity (*Leone Medico, di Natione hebreo, et dipoi fatto Christiano*), Leone himself made no secret of his Jewishness, and even traced the origins of wisdom (*sophia*) to the religion of Moses. He views Jewish scholarship, and himself, as links in the chain of the tradition of ancient wisdom, the origins of which he saw as being Jewish.

It is significant in this context that in citing Jewish authors or personalities, Leone qualifies them with the possessive "our." Among Aristotelian commentators he mentions "our Rabbi Moses of Egypt,"[15] i.e., Maimonides; he refers to Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* as a Jewish[16] work, mentioning specifically "our Albenzubron," a name known in Christian circles. Moses and Aaron are termed "our saints."[17] Finally, Leone follows the traditional dating of the Jewish calendar, based on a count of years beginning with creation.[18] There was, however, nothing in these avowals of Jewishness that touched on points of controversy between Christian and Jews. The statements were not considered contentious, since they were historically evident. Rabbi Moses of Egypt and the *Fontes Vitae* had been to a certain extent canonized at Christian universities and in Christian philosophical treatises, not least because they had been quoted by Thomas Aquinas. The existence of a *computum hebraicum*, with a computation of years different from that of the Christian calendar and originating in the Masoretic tradition of the Bible, had been known

[15] *Dialoghi*, II, 69b: "il nostro Rabi Moise d'Egitto nel suo Morhe"; cf. III, 75b.

[16] *Dialoghi*, III, 51a: "come pone il nostro Albenzubron nel suo libro de fonte uite."

[17] *Dialoghi*, III, 5b: "Tale e stata la morte de nostri beati, che contemplando con sommo desiderio la belleza diuina, convertendo tutta l'Anima in quella, abandonorno il corpo, onde la sacra scrittura parlando della morte de dui santi pastori, Moise, et Aron, disse che morirono per bocca di Dio baciando la diuinità, cioè rapiti da l'amorosa contemplatione, et unione diuina."

[18] *Dialoghi*, III, 50b: "Et quanti hauiamo noi di queste sette milia anni. PHI. Siamo secondo la uerità Hebraica à cinque milia duecento sessanta due del principio de la creatione, & quando saran' finiti li sei milia anni si corromperà il mondo inferiore."

at least as far back as Augustine. Leone mentions nothing that could provoke the criticism of his Christian contemporaries.[19]

This includes his discussion of the creation of the world, which, in spite of its obvious divergence from Aristotelian philosophy, was not *terra incognita.* Leone states that the idea of time, as being infinite, is in accordance with the teachings of the ancient philosophers, but in contradiction with Jewish tradition.[20] As interpreted by most Jewish scholars, the Torah proclaims the absolute beginning of the world (Genesis 1:1): "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." In discussing the theories of the world's creation, Leone makes explicit reference to the historical superiority of Mosaic theology over Greek philosophy. At the ancient school of Jewish philosophers in Egypt, he states, Plato studied the "hidden wisdom" (*sapientia ascosa*);[21] this is the "second principle," which is dependent on the first, that is God. Although a disciple of Plato, Aristotle denied what he could not see, and made the second principle (wisdom) the first principle of the universe, God.

It is in this context that Leone mentions Plato's dependence on the Jewish elders of his time.[22] In order to acquire the highest wisdom, however, more was needed than Plato's affinity with Jewish literature and tradition. In Leone's words: "But Plato, who had learned from the elders in Egypt, could 'hear' [a Hebraism for 'learn'] further than others, although this was not enough to enable him to see the hidden principle of the highest wisdom."[23] The source of this statement is purely Christian, since it is only Christian tradition that speaks of an obstacle that, "providentially," Plato could not have avoided in his contact with

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[19] See also John C. Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love: The Context of Giordano Bruno's "Eroici furori"* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 85; and Angela Guidi, "Sapienza salomonica e sapere pagano. Tradizione ebraica e neoplatonismo nei 'Dialoghi d'amore' di Leone Ebreo" (PhD diss., University of Salerno, 2004–2005), 2–8 and passim.

[20] *Dialoghi*, III, 65b: "Il tempo secondo i Philosofi è infinito, ne hebbe principio, ne hauerà mai fine, ben' che noi fideli teniamo il contrario, ma secondo loro il tempo per essere infinito è incommensurabile di nissuna quantità di tempo finito, grande o piccola."

[21] On this aspect see Moshe Idel, "Kabbalah and Ancient Theology" (cited above).

[22] Giuseppe Veltri, "Dalla tesi giudeo-ellenistica del 'plagio' dei Greci al concetto rabbinico del verus Israel: Disputa sull'appartenenza della sofia," *Revista Catalana de Teologia* 17 (1992): 85–104; Norman Roth, "The 'Theft of Philosophy' by the Greeks from the Jews," *Classical Folia* 32 (1978): 53–67.

[23] *Dialoghi*, III, 125b: "Ma Platone hauendo da li vecchi in Egitto imparato, pote' piu oltre sentire se ben' non valse à uedere l'ascoso principio de la somma sapientia."

the Egyptian Jews: he could not admit the unity of God, for fear of "ending up being executed like Socrates"—according to the testimony of Pseudo-Justin.[24] This tradition was known in the Renaissance. A later contemporary of Leone's, and a member of the Florentine Academy, Francesco de' Vieri (1524–1591), wrote a *Compendio della dottrina di Platone in quello, che è conforme con la Fede nostra* (1577), in defense of Plato's ignorance of the unity of God. In the face of the evidence that "Plato did not sufficiently recognize that God is one in nature and essence," he affirms: "In defense of Plato, I say that although he was wise in terms of human wisdom and although he may have read the Old Testament, where these mysteries are unfolded and adumbrated, he deserves to be pardoned [for his inaccuracies]—because the mysteries were not explained to him by any member of God's elect. The same can be said of Aristotle, who held God to be one in essence and person."[25]

It is, therefore, not surprising that Leone introduces his discussion on the difference between Plato and Aristotle within the context of his treatment of the creation of the world and the origins of wisdom and matter. He considers the divinity to be one in essence, but triune in the prism of human perception, in the process of knowledge: "Sophia: If there is nothing in it but pure unity, from where comes that triune reverberation we are discussing? Philone: When its pure clarity impresses itself in an intellectual mirror, it produces that triune reverberation you have heard."[26] A very similar expression can be found in the Preface to Marsilio Ficino's *Theologia Platonica*, whose aim it was "to explore in the divinity of our own created mind, as if in a mirror placed at the center of the universe, the work of the creator himself, and to contemplate and worship his mind."[27]

As is evident from this text, and from an analysis of the third dialogue, Leone's conception of knowledge owes a great deal to Marsilio Ficino.

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[24] *Cohortatio ad Graecos*, 20. On the Plato-Moses relationship, see the testimonies gathered by Heinrich Dörrie, *Der hellenistische Rahmen des kaiserzeitlichen Platonismus* (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt, 1990), 36–72; for Pseudo-Justin, see p. 211. See also Alice S. Riginos, *Platonica. The Anecdotes Concerning the Life and Writings of Plato* (Leiden: Brill, 1976).

[25] All quotations are from John Monfasani, "Francesco de' Vieri," in *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts*, ed. Jill Kraye, vol. 1, *Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 173–174.

[26] "SO: Se in lui non è altro che pura unità, donde uiene questa trina reuerberatione, de la quale ragioniamo? PHI: Quando la sua pura chiareza s'imprime in uno specchio intellettuale fa' quella trina reuerberatione, che hai inteso."

[27] Translated by L. Deitz in *Cambridge Translations*, ed. J. Kraye, 148–149.

(1) In explaining the process of knowledge in the context of the unity of God, he draws on the example of light, the sun, and the mirror. Ficino did the same in his tractate entitled *Orphica comparatio Solis ad Deum*, written in 1449,[28] and in a later book, *De Sole*.[29] The symbolic images of the sun, the mirror, and light also play a significant role in the process of knowledge and in Ficino's theodicy:[30] the *Oratio ad Deum* begins with the verse, *Lumen immensum sine fine lucens | Te videns in te speculunsque cuncta.* Leone dedicated several pages of the third dialogue to a comparison between the sun and God.[31] (2) Leone, like Ficino refers to the theory of the unity of knowledge, starting from God and reaching plurality in man. In this context, he makes use of the triune form of knowledge,[32] again precisely like Ficino.[33] (3) Finally, he speaks of the triune nature of God as lover, beloved, and love, here too in the footsteps of Ficino.

It is not new to find Jewish authors accepting, even if only epistemologically, the triune nature of God. The first to note Jewish readiness to speak about this topic was Nicholas of Cusa, in dealing with the theory of divine names.[34] The postulate that the sensible signs of the Name of God change, even though the signified idea always remains the same,[35] can be seen in passages such as those of the *Excitationes I*[36]

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[28] *Opus*, 825ff.; see Paul O. Kristeller, *Il pensiero filosofico di Marsilio Ficino* (Florence: Sansoni, 1953), 93. In the *Orphyca comparatio*, he writes: "Quampropter Orphycum mysterium illud si nolumus fateri verum, saltem parumper fingamus quasi verum ut solem coelestem ita suspiciendo prospiciamus in eo supercelestem illum tamquam in speculo, qui in sole posuit tabernaculum."

[29] *Opus*, 965ff.

[30] See Schiavone, *Problemi*, 196.

[31] *Dialoghi*, III, 10a: "come nel' huomo (che è piccol' mondo) l'occhio fra tutte le sue parti corporee è come l'intelletto frà tutte le virtù de l'anima simulacro et seguace di quella, cosi nel grande mondo il sole fra tutti i corporali è come l'intelletto diuino fra tutti gli spirituali suo simulacro."

[32] *Dialoghi*, III, 10b–11a.

[33] Ficino writes: "Et sicut in videndo triplex est actus, motus scilicet coloris, aspectus oculi, fulgor luminis (op. lumini) connectens actus reliquos invicem, sic in intelligendo, ubi actus intelligibilium veritas a Platone vocatur, actus mentis scientia, actus utrorumque nodus apud Platonem est Deus qui (op. quin) efficit ut et mens scienter intelligat et res vere intelligatur, imo facit ut ipse intelligatur."

[34] On the extent of Cusanus's renown in Italy, cf. Edgar Wind, *Pagan mysteries in the Renaissance*, 2nd ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1968). Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino apparently had no direct knowledge of Cusanus's works.

[35] Wolf P. Klein, *Am Anfang war das Wort* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992), 36.

[36] See Jakob Guttmann, *Die Scholastik des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts in ihren Beziehungen zum Judenthum und zur jüdischen Literatur* (Breslau: Marcus, 1902; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1970), 170 n. 1.

where Nicholas speaks of an *interpretatio judaica* of the Trinity. In his view, the Jews had interpreted the dogma of the Trinity in terms of a triad of divine attributes. The novelty of Leone's statement is his claim that the doctrine of divine wisdom as a unique divinity known in triune form is of Jewish origin,[37] as is also the process of knowledge, which his contemporaries considered a Christian doctrine. The fact that Leone nowhere explicitly mentions his Christian counterpart—while making unacknowledged use of Christian doctrines and writings—underlines his subtly polemical attitude toward the academies of his time: in his view, the philosophy of love was plagiarized from genuine Jewish traditions. This polemical stance did not, however, elicit a response from any of Leone's learned contemporaries. What opinions or principles did his polemics target?

3.2 *A Lost Struggle and the Times*

Leone's philosophy of Judaism was too "pale" to be noticed by a contemporary Christian audience. If we compare his writings with Azariah de' Rossi's *Meo'r 'Enayim*, for example, it is astonishing how positively provocative the latter seems. In numerous passages, Azariah makes explicit reference to Christian doctrine, its false convictions, traditions and superstitions. Nowhere in Leone's writings do we find such references. What was the reason for this reticence? Consider the following quote from his autobiographical poem, the *Telunah 'al ha-zman* (Complaint against the Times),[38] where he presents his attitude toward the philosophical academies of his day:

106 It is for you to advance my teaching
for you to carry the light of my knowledge and wisdom
107 Which I inherited in part from my father and teacher,
the father of my learning, my guide and rabbi.
108 The rest I obtained with my own labors,
and conquered with my bow, my sword.
109 So that the power of my mind made the wise men of Edom no more than locusts compared to me.

[37] See further details here, below in next chapter, pp. 89f.
[38] See Guidi ("Sapienza salomonica," 313–330) for a commentary on the *Telunah 'al ha-zman.*

110 I visited their schools of learning
and there were none who could engage with me.
111 I vanquished all who rose in argument against me,
and forced my opponents to surrender, putting them to shame.
112 Who would dare to argue with me on the secrets of creation
and the mysteries of the chariot and its rider?
113 I have a soul which is higher and more splendid
than the souls of my worthless contemporaries
115 My form has been molded by the power of my God
and my soul is imprisoned within its cage.[39]

The first thing that strikes us in these highly revealing verses is Leone's consciousness of his own exceptional intelligence, as both an inheritance from his father and as something acquired through self-discipline and painstaking reflection. This is also witnessed by the testimony of his father and of Baruch Usiel Chesqetos in the latter's *Ma'yene ha-Yeshu'a*.[40] Chesqetos stresses the greatness of Leone's *Dialoghi* in the domains of both the natural and the divine sciences.

A second element, clearly perceptible in his complaint, is Leone's bitter observation that nobody takes him seriously as a philosopher: "nobody was ready to fight with me." Of course, we can interpret the text as a statement of victory over his adversaries who are "silent" before him, since this is also a biblical quotation about wisdom. On the other hand, it could also be a tacit comment on the impossibility of having an open and conclusive confrontation with his "adversaries." If we consult the Jewish and Christian testimony on Leone, published by Carl Gebhardt at the back of his reprint of the Aldine *Dialoghi*, it comes as a surprise to find that there are no Christian writers interested specifically in Leone's philosophy. The reception of his work among Italian, Spanish, and French authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is limited to its treatment of love rather than of philosophical themes. Only Jewish authors pointed out that Leone was indeed a Jewish philosopher.

The exceptional reception of his work was due not to the fact that it was a specifically Jewish work on love, but simply to the fact that it presented Platonic philosophy in a pleasant poetic style, functioning as a handbook of ideas then current throughout the Renaissance humanist

[39] Translation by Dan Almagor, Barbara Gavin, and Dan Jacobson, "A Complaint against the Time," *Jewish Quarterly* (Winter 1992–1993): 59.
[40] Ferrara 1551, fol. 3b, quoted from Gebhardt, ed., *Leone Ebreo*, "Regeste," 19.

world. Its handbook-like character is stressed by Alessandro Piccolomini in the dedication to his *Dell'Istitutione di tutta la vita dell'huomo nato nobile* in 1540. Piccolomini states that he is planning to write the fourth part of the *Dialoghi*, on the effects of love (*delli effetti dell'amore*).[41] The *Dialoghi* were recommended as the best book on love composed in the genre of courtly literature. Giuseppe Betussi,[42] Tullia d'Aragona,[43] Benedetto Varchi,[44] and Anton Francesco Doni were among the members of the Italian intellectual elite who showed an interest in Leone's work. His profession of Judaism posed no problem for the reception of the *Dialoghi* in Italy, Spain, Portugal, or France, although Pierre de Ronsard did compose a scathing diatribe on the poem, with clearly anti-Jewish undertones:

> Jamais Leon Hebreiu des Juifs n'eust prins naissance,
> Leon Hebrieu, qui donne aux Dames cognoissance
> D'un amour fabuleux, la mesme fiction:
> Faux, trompeur, mensonger, plein de fraude et d'astuce

[41] Alessandro Piccolomini, *Della institutione di tutta la vita dell'huomo nato nobile, et in città libera* (Venetiis: Hieronimus Scotus, 1542; Vinegia [Venice]: Giovanmaria Bonelli, 1552; Venice: Francesco dell'Imperadori, 1559), Dedication to Laudomia Forteguerri de Colombini (written 1540): "Di quanto poi per lettere di miei amici, intendo che desiderareste, che si manifestasse il quarto dialogo di Filone, & di Sofia, nel qual trattar si debba de gli effetti d'Amore, essendosi per quegli innanzi, della natura sua, del nascimento, & communità ragionato, & che se pur non si trovasse, non vi sarebbe discaro, ch'io pigliasse questa fatica, d'aggiungervi io stesso il Quarto, il qual seguendo il cominciato stile, si confermasse con la mente di quell'Ebreo, più Platonica che Peripatetica, dico (virtuosissima Commare) che in qual si voglia occasione havrei sempre caro di far cosa, ch'io stimassi che vi piacesse; ma dubito quanto a questo, che essendo sì divini i tre primi dialoghi, non potendo forse col quarto a quegli appressarmi, noi non ci pentissemo dell'impresa, oltra che ingiuria si farebbe tal volta al primo autore, se altro dialogo in numero co i suoi si ponesse. Là onde io giudico che sia meglio d'aspettar qualche mese se tal dialogo si scoprisse." Cited from the edition of 1552, online at http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it:6336/dynaweb/bibit/autori/p/piccolomini/istituzione_dell_uomo/@Generic_BookView (accessed June 19, 2007).

[42] "…mentre io era tutta rivolta con l'animo a considerare la diffinitione data ad Amore da Leone Hebreo, la quale molto mi piace per quel poco che con l'ingegno mio io posso discorrere.… Se dall'opre di quello Hebreo che sì divinamente n'ha scritto." Giuseppe Betussi, *Il Raverta: dialogo nel quale si ragiona d'amore e degli effetti suoi*, Pavia: Università degli studi di Pavia, 1995/1996), http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it/xtf/view?docId=bibit001254/bibit001254.xml.

[43] Tullia d' Aragona, *Dialogo della infinità di amore* [1547] (Milan: G. Daelli, 1864), 64. See also Tullia d'Aragona, *Della infinità di amore* (Venice, 1547), in *Trattati d'amore del cinquencento*, ed. Giuseppe Zonta (Bari: Laterza, 1912), 224. On Tullia d'Aragona, see Lisa Curtis-Wendlandt, "Conversing on Love: Text and Subtext in Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo della Infinità d'Amore*," *Hypatia* 19 (2004): 75–96.

[44] Benedetto Varchi, *L'Ercolano* (Florence: Giunti, 1570).

> Je croix qu'en luy coupant la peau de son prepuce
> On lui coupa le coeur et tout affection.[45]

Montaigne, too, seems to have shared this opinion:

> Les sciences traictent les choses trop finement, d'une mode artificielle, et differente à la commune et naturelle. Mon page fait l'amour, et l'entend: lisez luy Leon Hebreu, et Ficin: on parle de luy, de ses pensees, et de ses actions, et si n'y entend rien.[46]

On the other hand, the French translator Seigneuer Du Parc, in a 1551 sonnet on the content of Leone's work, was unequivocal in his praise:

> Mais vous, humains, desquels les volontés
> Tendre on ne voit qu'à la fin bien hereuse
> Lisez, lisez, en cest oeuvre amourese
> Pour mieux cognoistre et beautez et bontez.[47]

Even as late as the turn of the eighteenth century, after two centuries of oblivion, the entertaining and educational character of the *Dialoghi* receives only praise from the German poet Friedrich Schiller. In a letter to Goethe dated April 7, 1797, he writes: "the text had not only amused me very much, but also improved my knowledge of astrology. The mixture of chemical, mythological, and astrological things here is superb and can be readily used as poetic material."[48]

In conclusion, the *Dialoghi* are not a philosophical tractate, but a vulgarization of philosophical ideas proceeding from a distinctively Jewish point of view. This was an approach that was not open to dispute in humanistic and Renaissance circles, for it was the alchemical *pietra filosofale*, the philosopher's stone that makes it possible to convert all philosophies into the *philosophia perennis*. Seen in this way, Leone's writing was not a major departure and could thus even be welcomed

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[45] Pierre de Ronsard, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Gustave Cohen (Paris: Gallimard, 1950): 61.

[46] *Essais*, III, chapter 5, http://www.bribes.org/trismegiste/es3ch05.htm (accessed November 7, 2007). See Santino Caramella, ed., *Leone Ebreo*, 435.

[47] *Philosophie d'Amour de M. Leon Hébreu . . . traduite par le Seigneur du Parc* (Lyon, 1551; ed. Lyon, 1595), 3. On the French translation see Léon Hébreu, *Dialogues d'amour, the French translation attributed to Pontus de Tyard and published in Lyon, 1551, by Jean de Tournes*, ed. A. Perry (Chapel Hill, NC: University Press of North Carolina, 1974); Ulrich Köppen, *Die "Dialoghi d'amore" des Leone Ebreo in ihren französischen Übersetzungen. Buchgeschichte, Übersetzungstheorie und Übersetzungspraxis im 16. Jahrhundert* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1979).

[48] Cited by Gebhardt, ed., *Leone Ebreo*, 107–108; see the introduction, above, pp. 1–2.

for its poetic style. Leone made philosophical ideas understandable, a task at which Ficino had failed completely. Cosmic love, as emanated in the world of creation, is nothing but the kiss of the lover and the beloved, a kiss which leads back to the Godhead with the death of a human being—something like Moses and Aaron, who died kissing God, "morirono per bocca di Dio baciando la diuinità, cioè rapiti da l'amorosa contemplatione, et unione diuina." It was for this reason that the *Dialoghi* were destined to become a best-seller in the cultural world of the Renaissance—in spite of their Jewish origins, as Tullia d'Aragona affirms in recommending the book:

> Io prepongo Filone a tutti [scil. "quelli che hanno scritto d'amore"] se bene in alcune cose, e massimamente quando entra nelle cose della fede giudaica, piu tosto lo scuso che l'approvo.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCEPTIONS OF HISTORY: AZARIAH DE' ROSSI

Long before the awakening of the humanist "Sense of the Past,"[1] both Christian and Jewish scholars were concerned with describing how the exploration of history could yield new knowledge. In Christianity, the issue arose as soon the teachings of the Greek and Roman classics became important. Indeed, in the literary flowering of the twelfth century, a revival of the past can be seen, and an understanding of a sense of history (*historia*) is evident. The well-known aphorism of Bernard of Chartres (d. 1124/1130) states that we are "dwarfs on the shoulders of giants," that our predecessors are greater than we are, but we can see farther.[2]

Both the relevance of the present and the authority of the past are here harmonized in a clear, if philosophically somewhat naïve, image. In medieval Judaism, this Christian *topos* was used for the first time in the course of justifying a new interpretation of halakhah that diverged from its predecessors.[3] No matter how the aphorism was interpreted,

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[1] Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (London: Burke, 1969).

[2] See Forster E. Guyer, "The Dwarf on the Giant's Shoulders," *Modern Language Notes* 45 (1930): 398–402; Robert K. Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants: A Shandean Postscript* (New York: Free Press, 1965); Edouard Jeauneau, "'Nani gigantum humeris insidentes': Essai d'interpretation de Bernard de Chartres," *Vivarium* 5 (1967): 79–99; cf. Pierre de Blois, *Epistula XCII ad Reginaldum Episcopum* (*Patrologia Latina* 207:290): "We are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants. Therefore, we can see further. Their system of thought is devitalized by its age and therefore forgotten. Through a certain novelty of content, we can put new life into it."

[3] Zedekiah ben Avraham Anav ha-Rofeh, *Sefer Shibbole ha-Leqet*, ed. Salomon Buber (Vilna: Romm, 1886; repr., New York, 1958), 35. Anav's argument is based on Isaiah da Trani, *Teshuwot ha-Ri'd*, ed. Avraham J. Wertheimer (Jerusalem: Mekon ha-talmud ha-yisreeli ha-shalem, 1967), 302; cf. also Dov Zlotnick, "'Al meqor ha-mashal ha-nannas we-ha-ʿanaq we-gilgulaw," *Sinai* 77 (1975): 184–189; and Yaʿaqov Elbaum, "'Od al mashal ha-nannas we-ha-ʿanaq," *Sinai* 77 (1975): 287; Hillel Levine, "Dwarfs on the Shoulders of Giants. Case Study in the Impacts of Modernization on the Social Epistemology," *Jewish Social Studies* 40 (1978): 63–72; Lester A. Segal, *Historical Consciousness and Religious Tradition in Azaria de' Rossi's Me'or 'Enayim* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989): 153ff.; Robert Bonfil, *'Azariah de' Rossi. Selected Chapters from Sefer Me'or 'Enayim and Matseref la-Kessef* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1991): 40–41, together with the important bibliographical note on p. 68. See below for more on the same topic and further Abraham Melamed, *On the Shoulders of Giants: A History*

there is no doubt that it was used to explain how it is possible for the individual to acquire knowledge over the course of time.

Modern literature emphasizes the epistemological importance of this aphorism. The question thus arises as to whether it is possible to detect, as early as the Middle Ages, an understanding of knowledge as an ongoing process—of *veritas filia temporis*. Jacob Teicher[4] and subsequently Eugenio Garin opposed such a simplistic approach: "In the Middle Ages, the firm conviction prevails that, in fact, each scholarly discipline is complete in itself and can not at all be perfected ad infinitum. The process has its limits and is in the end merely apparent."[5] This categorization of the cultural mentality of the period as a whole is certainly true, but requires further explanation. Although the principle contained in the biblical postulate *nihil novum sub sole* (Ecclesiastes 1:10) was regularly emphasized, nevertheless—or perhaps for that very reason—there unfolded a lively debate, Augustinian in character, on the meaning of *memoria*.[6] *Memoria* implied not only making the past relevant, but also creating an image of the future.[7]

This interpretation suggests that the idea of continuing development existed *in nuce*, or was at least implicit. It is certainly true that, in the medieval view of history, knowledge about God and creation had been given once, and for all time, through the act of revelation. However, this view does not exclude the concept of a progressive *acquisition* of knowledge. A conception such as that of the *historia salutis* includes at least an awareness of progress that continues over centuries and generations. Moreover, if we take into account the apocalyptic movements

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of the Debate between Moderns and Ancients in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish Thought (in Hebrew) (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2003).

[4] Jacob Teicher, "Il principio 'veritas filia temporis' presso Azaria de Rossi," *Rendiconti della R. Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Classe Morali, Storiche e Filologiche*, ser. 6, 9 (1933): 268–275.

[5] Eugenio Garin, "Il concetto della storia nel pensiero del Rinascimento," *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia* 6 (1951): 108–118.

[6] On the terms *historia/memoria*, and for a general survey of the theory of historiography in the Middle Ages, see Gert Melville, "Wozu Geschichte schreiben. Stellung und Funktion der Historie im Mittelalter," in *Formen der Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. Reinhart Kosellek, Heinrich Lutz and Jörn Rüsen (Munich: dtv, 1982), 86–146.

[7] Heinrich von Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, Rer. Brit. 74.1: "Historia igitur praeterita quasi praesentia visui repraesentat; futura ex praeteritis imaginando dijudicat"; cf. also the Augustinian term *memoria* in *Confessiones* XI.18, 20; and Gert Melville, "Wozu Geschichte schreiben," 108ff.

and their views of history,[8] the thesis that *scientia* was entirely static, even closed, in the Middle Ages clearly loses its foundation.

The following introductory remarks on the premises of medieval historical consciousness will focus primarily on the question: Is the novelty of the historical method of Bruni, Guicciardini, or Machiavelli, to which attention is so frequently drawn, really so relevant for the interpretation of the humanist "sense of the past"? Or, in contrast, does the rediscovery of ancient paradigms by Renaissance scholars have its basis in conscious or unconscious philosophical premises, some of whose roots go back to the Middle Ages? In his programmatic remarks on the historiography of the sixteenth century, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi supports the former opinion, since he considers views of history as a rather unimportant aspect of historiographic research.[9] By this standard, Azariah de' Rossi, the Jewish scholar of the Italian Renaissance, is certainly not an historian *stricto sensu*—an opinion expressed by Salo W. Baron in his pioneering studies on Azariah's historical method.[10] Nevertheless, Baron was not unambiguous in his stand on de' Rossi's work. When comparing him to contemporary scholars, Baron refuses to qualify Azariah as a historian. Elsewhere, however, he refers to him as the only historian between Josephus Flavius and Isaak Marcus Jost (1793–1860).[11] This inconsistency is not due merely to chance. Azariah de' Rossi does not easily fit into specific historiographic categories.

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[8] Cp. Walter Jaeschke, *Die Suche nach den eschatologischen Wurzeln der Geschichtsphilosophie. Eine historische Kritik der Säkularisierungsthese* (Munich: Kaiser, 1976) and Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, "Philosophia perennis im Spätmittelalter. Eine Skizze," *Innovation und Originalität*, ed. Walter Haug and Burghart Wachinger (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), 15, 30ff.

[9] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Clio and the Jews: Reflections on Jewish Historiography in the Sixteenth Century," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 46–47 (1979–1980): 611–612. Cf. also idem, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982).

[10] In this context, three essays by Salo W. Baron should be mentioned: "Azaria de' Rossi's Attitude to Life," in *Jewish Studies in Memory of Israel Abrahams* (New York: Press of the Jewish Institute of Religion, 1927), 12–52; idem, "Adummim, ʿAzaria min" (in Hebrew), *Eshkol* 1 (1929): 689–693; idem, "La méthode historique d'Azaria de' Rossi," *Revue des Études Juives* 86 (1928): 151–175; 87 (1929): 43–78. All three, partly revised, are now published in idem, *History and Jewish Historians: Essays and Addresses*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg and Leon A. Feldman (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 167–239, 405–442. All quotations here will be taken from the latter. The opposing view is represented by Jacob Teicher, "Il principio," 279–280 n. 2.

[11] Baron, *History*, 174.

In order to better understand him, the thesis mentioned above must also be taken into consideration: the historiographic methods used by Greek and Roman authors (especially Livy) were not the only models used in the revival of historiography in the Renaissance. Consciously or even unconsciously, additional philosophical premises also provided an impulse. These premises will be examined in the following pages. Philosophers and historiographers of the Renaissance held that the primary task of the scholar was to *historeín*—to inquire into facts and causes. There is no doubt that the Christian view of history provided the ideological framework for these terms of references.

Drawing a clear line between this period and the Middle Ages requires caution, since—to play on the words of Carl Linnaeus—*historia non fecit saltus*. During the Renaissance, eternal knowledge of God and the creation is identified mainly with its concretization in history. This implies, however, the immanence of the Divine in the historical process that is under investigation. This identification was the central premise for both the canonization and the imitation of the ancient world and for the flourishing of scientific research. Christian revelation came to be seen as the pinnacle of creation, and Greek philosophy—particularly in its Hermetic and Neoplatonic forms—as both preparation and reconfirmation of the Gospel.

In that sense, the Renaissance reflects the scholarship of the Fathers in the first centuries of the church, when Lactantius, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Tertullian proclaimed the idea of a successive revelation of the truth, which reached its fulfillment in the Christian *kairòs*. Although (philosophical-historical) truth was to be considered as fully revealed only in Christianity, traces of it could also be found in earlier cultures. Investigation into the past could, therefore, be seen as the search for the *lógoi spermatikoì* (*rationes seminales*) of Christian truth. It is thus not surprising that the concepts of *prisca theologia* (primeval philosophy) and of *philosophia perennis* (perennial philosophy) first gained acceptance during the Renaissance, in accordance with ancient paradigms. From this time on, the past is seen as preserving values, and ancientness becomes a characteristic of truth.

4.1 *Azariah's Biography and the* Me'or Enayim

Azariah de' Rossi of Mantua[12] grew up within this humanist *Weltanschauung*. At the same time, however, he was also deeply influenced by the rabbinic teachings that, from an early age, had informed his beliefs. In this, he is the embodiment of the *aporia* that characterized Jewish scholars caught between the normative authority of Jewish tradition and the historical-philosophical consciousness of learned Christian contemporaries. His extensive knowledge and wide scholarship can be admired in his principal work, the *Me'or 'Enayim* (Light of the Eyes).[13] It is a late work, which he began only at the age of sixty. The list of pagan, Christian, and Hellenistic, rabbinic, and medieval Jewish authors he quotes is impressive. So too is the linguistic range of his sources—Hebrew, Aramaic, Latin, and Italian.[14] On his own testimony, his knowledge of Greek was rather poor.[15]

Of the details of Azariah's biography, we know little.[16] He was born in Mantua, in 1514, the son of an ancient family whose genealogy could be traced back to antiquity. He died in 1577. He was probably wealthy, as is suggested by the size of his library. Azariah lived in Venice, Ancona, and Bologna. Following the expulsion of the Jews from the Papal States in 1569 by a decree of Pius V, he moved to Ferrara. There, he survived the earthquake of November 18, 1570. It was this

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[12] 'Azarya ben Moshe min ha-Adummim or Buon'aiuto de' Rossi (ca. 1511–1578). Regarding his biography and his work see Leopold Zunz, "Toledot le-R' 'Azarya min ha-Adummim," *Kerem Chemed* 5 (1841): 131–158; 7 (1843): 119–124; Baron, *History*, 167–173. An introduction to Azariah is provided by Joanna Weinberg in her annotated translation of Azariah de' Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xiii–xlx.

[13] The edition used here is: 'Azariah min ha-Adummim (Buon'aiuto de' Rossi), *Sefer Me'or 'Enayim*, ed. David Cassel, 3 vols. (Vilnius: Romm, 1864–1866; repr., Jerusalem: Makor, 1970).

[14] Cassel compiled a list of authors in Azariah de' Rossi, *Sefer Maṣref la-kesef*, vol. 3, 147–176. See below for further information on this book.

[15] *Me'or 'Enayim*, Haqdamah (Cassel, 3); *Me'or 'Enayim*, Imrei Binah, 9 (Cassel, 146); cf. Baron, *History*, 427 n. 66.

[16] Cf. Baron, *History*, 167–173; Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 318–327; Shelomo Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1977), 634–637; and Bonfil, *'Azariah*, 16–37. Amatus Lusitanus, who met Azariah de' Rossi in 1548 or 1549, provides us with some information of his physical condition. Cf. Harry Friedenwald, "Two Jewish Physicians of the Sixteenth Century. The Doctor, Amatus Lusitanus, the Patient, Azariah dei Rossi," in idem, *The Jews and Medicine. Essays*, vol. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1944), 391–403.

event, he tells us, that had provided the impulse for his literary activity. Indeed, his account of the earthquake forms the first part of *Me'or 'Enayim*. In an allusion to Pythagoras, he entitled this section *Qol Elohim* (Voice of God).[17]

During these terrifying days, a Christian scholar, a friend of his, asked him whether there was a Hebrew version of the so-called *Letter of Aristeas*. Surprised by Azariah's negative response, the friend prompted him to translate Aristeas's letter into Hebrew—an occupation also useful for distracting him from the horrors he had witnessed. De' Rossi used the Latin version by Garbitius,[18] completing his translation in twenty days. He included it under the title *Hadrat Zeqenim* (The Radiance of the Elders) in the *Meor 'Eynayim.*[19]

It is doubtful whether the earthquake of Ferrara was, in fact, the starting point for Azariah's interest in Aristeas. His knowledge of the text, and of the Jewish-Hellenistic background to it, is so broad and detailed that he must have been dealing with the material for years.[20] But the reaction of the Christian to Jewish ignorance of this text must also be taken into account in order to understand Azariah's literary intentions: "He was surprised, how it was possible that such an honor had escaped Israel, while Israel could have rightly earned great esteem through it [sc. the letter of Aristeas]."[21]

This quotation contains *in nuce* the intention of Azariah's work: He wishes to restore to Israel the historical brilliance that it had already lost

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[17] *Me'or 'Enayim*, Qol Elohim (Cassel, 5–23). On the earthquake of Ferrara, cf. Nathan Shalem, "Una fonte ebraica poco nota sul terremoto di Ferrara del 1570," *Rivista Geografica Italiana* 45 (1938): 66–76; Joanna Weinberg, "'The Voice of God': Jewish and Christian Responses to the Ferrara Earthquake of November 1570," *Italian Studies* 46 (1991): 69–81. An Italian translation of Azariah's account can be found in Giulio Busi, "Il terremoto di Ferrara nel *Me'or 'Enayim* di 'Azaryah de' Rossi," in *We zo't le-Angelo. Raccolta di studi giudaici in memoria di Angelo Vivian*, ed. Giulio Busi (Bologna: AISG 1993), 53–92.

[18] On the reception of Aristeas in Italy, cf. Alberto Vaccari, "La lettera d'Aristea in Italia," in idem, *Scritti di erudizione e di filologia*, vol. 1, *Filologia biblica e patristica* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1952), 1–23. On the translation by Mattia Garbitius, cf. ibid., 9–10. There the author also mentions a second handwritten translation into Hebrew from Palmieri's Latin, by the convert Domenico Gerosolimitano.

[19] *Me'or 'Enayim*, Hadrat Zeqenim (Cassel, 27–69). For further material on this translation and on de' Rossi's opinion concerning the Septuagint see Joanna Weinberg, "Azariah de' Rossi and Septuagint Traditions," *Italia* 5 (1985): 7–35; Bonfil, *'Azariah*, 89–96; and my article "Le traduzioni bibliche come problema testuale e storiografico nel Rinascimento delle 'poliglotte' e d'Azaria de' Rossi," *Laurentianum* 35 (1994): 3–32.

[20] Weinberg, "Septuagint Tradition," 9.

[21] *Me'or 'Enayim*, Qol Elohim (Cassel, 22).

in antiquity. The *Letter of Aristeas*, dealing with the brilliant translation of the Torah into Greek, thus provides Azariah with an opportunity to draw attention to the wisdom of Israel in general—which was, in fact, the original intention of the Hellenistic text itself.

It is legitimate to ask whether Azariah was more a historian or an apologist for (Jewish) history. Baron misses in him the political commitment, the contemporary relevance implied by *historeín*, which was so characteristic of historiography at that time.[22] This cannot be explained by a fear of censorship on Azariah's part.[23] On the contrary, it is attributable to his decision to inquire into the historical roots of truth in the past. This explains also the strikingly polemical and apologetic tendency of his work,[24] which was intended for both a Christian and a Jewish readership.[25]

Since the days of Josephus, Jewish historiography had been closely associated with apology. This is what constitutes its political commitment. The *Contra Apionem* by Josephus and the *Praeparatio Evangelica* by Eusebius of Caesarea served as literary and apologetic models for Azariah. The contemporary relevance of the two ancient authors lay in their "source-critical" research, done for the purpose of understanding and justifying their own traditions and, to this end, making use of all available sources.[26] Azariah acted in a similar manner when he incorporated Christian patterns of explanation that were current in the Renaissance into the Jewish view of the world and history. On the other hand, how could Azariah pursue direct political intentions in his work at a time when the Jews were excluded from the *respublica*?[27] When

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[22] *History*, 208; cf. Bonfil, *'Azariah*, 38f.

[23] Baron, *History*, 209.

[24] Baron, *History*, 205–239; Robert Bonfil, "Some Reflections on the Place of Azaria de Rossi's *Me'or Enayim* in the Cultural Milieu of Italian Renaissance Jewry," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard Dov Cooperman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 23–48.

[25] From one of Azariah's letters we learn that Stefano Cattaneo da Novara, abbot of Montecassino, had bought his book. This document is published by L. Modona, "Une lettre d'Azaria de Rossi," *Revue des Ètudes Juives* 30 (1895): 313–316.

[26] Josephus'a *Contra Apionem*, Eusebius's *Praeparatio*, and Azarias *Me'or 'Enayim* have many similarities in respect to their methods and should rather by qualified as works of an "antiquarian" than of an "historian." For a discussion of this terminology see Arnaldo Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," in idem, *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome: Edizione di Storia e Letteratura 1955), 67–106.

[27] Cf. Isaac E. Barzilay, "The Italian and Berlin Haskalah (Parallels and Differences)," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 29 (1960–1961): 22 (17–54).

comparing Azariah and his contemporaries, the political condition of the Jews at that time cannot be ignored.

Me'or ʿEnayim is not a continuous treatise, but rather a collection of essays.[28] Azariah experiments in various literary genres, of medieval and humanist origin. His description of the earthquake and the translation of the letter of Aristeas are followed by the lengthiest section, a corpus entitled *Imre Binah* (Sayings of Understanding). The beginning of the treatise deals with the question as to why non-Jewish authors can be drawn upon to prove, or even to refute, Jewish sources. In chapters 3–6 of *Imre Binah* he discusses the works of Philo. In the following essay, Azariah's interest returns to the issue of Bible translations (*Imre Binah*, chaps. 7–9). In five further chapters, he addresses the form of priestly garments. This is followed by six chapters dealing with *varia* on the Hebrew language,[29] the alphabet, and *piyyutim.*[30] The main section deals with the issue of Jewish chronology.[31] It comprises sixteen chapters (chaps. 29–44) and was highly controversial in Jewish circles, with its daring thesis on the historical irrelevance of aggadah.[32] Azariah

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[28] In my opinion, the designiation *polyhistorian*, employed occasionally by Salo W. Baron, is not quite apt. For the use of this term in the Renaissance and its perpetuation in the term "universal scholarship" (*Universalwissenschaft*), cf. Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Topica Universalis. Eine Modellgeschichte humanistischer und barocker Wissenschaft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1983), 21ff. In Azariah's writings, any attempt to organize knowledge on the basis of philosophical categories is completely lacking. His work should be regarded rather as an imitation of the *Noctes Atticae* by Aulus Gellius (Baron, *History*, 211, and below). Concerning the various forms of the *ars scribendi*, cf. Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Der Gelehrte und sein Publikum im späten Mittelalter und in der Renaissance," in idem, *Humanismus und Renaissance*, vol. 2, ed. Eckhard Keßler (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1976), 223–243, 313–315.

[29] Cf. Jacob Teicher, "On the Excellency of the Hebrew Language," *The Hebrew Review* 2 (1935): 167–174.

[30] Cf. Adele Berlin, "Azariah de' Rossi on Biblical Poetry," *Prooftexts* 12 (1992): 175–183.

[31] On this issue, cf. Joanna Weinberg, "Azariah de' Rossi and the Forgeries of Amnius of Viterbo," in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 252–279.

[32] See David Kaufmann, "Contributions à l'histoire des luttes d'Azaria de' Rossi," *Revue des Études Juives* 33 (1896): 77–87; idem, "La défence de lire le Me'or Enayim d'Azaria de' Rossi," *Revue des Études Juives* 38 (1899): 280–281; Solomon J. Halberstam, "Sheloshah ketavim al-devar Sefer Me'or ʿEnayim," in *Festschrift zum achzigsten Geburstage Moritz Steinschneider's* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1896), 1–8; Joanna Weinberg, "Azariah dei Rossi: Towards a Reappraisal of the Last Years of his Life," *Annali della scuola Superiore di Pisa* 8 (1978): 493–511; Bonfil, "Some Reflections," 23–48; Me'ir Benayahu, "Hapulmus ʿal Sefer Me'or ʿEnayim le-rabbi ʿAzaryah min ha-'Adummin," *Asufot* 5 (1991): 217–264. Se also Sylvie Goldberg, *La Clepsydre. Essai sur la pluralité des tempes dans le judaïsme* (Paris : Albin Michel, 2000), 318–330.

translated chapter 35 into Italian, undoubtedly because the chronology was important for Christian scholars.[33]

To answer the criticism of his perception of chronology he wrote the small tractates *Maṣref la-kesef* and *Ṣedeq ʿOlamim*, which were not published during his lifetime.[34] The collection of essays does not claim to clarify historical contexts using the principle *historia magistra vitae* (Cicero, *De oratore* 2.36),[35] as was done by Bruni, Guicciardini, and Machiavelli. For Azariah, traditional halakhah is, incontestably, the highest ethical authority.[36] In his view, there is no progression in halakhah, which was given once, and for all times, at Sinai.[37] Neither can Azariah's work be classified as *historia* in the strict sense, since it lacks a *narratio* of events. Even the "narration" of the earthquake in Ferrara serves primarily as an excuse for remarks on *raʿash* in the sacred texts, in rabbinic literature and in the classical world. Not least, it also offers the reader a plausible motive for Azariah's literary efforts.

In comparison with other Jewish historiographers of the period, Azariah is conspicuous in his lack of interest in contemporary events. Most strikingly, he does not elaborate even on the most formative event in the history of European Jewry until that time: the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492.[38] This event is present in the literary and historiographic works of Abraham Zacuto (c. 1452–1515),[39] Salomon ibn Verga (died ca. 1559),[40] Samuel Usque (fifteenth–sixteenth c.),[41]

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[33] Bodleian Mich. 308, fol. 133b–115b; see Weinberg, "Azariah dei Rossi," 499.

[34] For further details cf. Weinberg, "Azariah dei Rossi," 493–511. Azariah also wrote a treatise in Italian on corrections of the Gospels based on the Syriac text: *Osservazioni di Buonaiuto de' Rossi ebreo, sopra diversi luoghi degli Evangelisti, nuovamente esposti secondo La vera Lezione Siriaca*. See now *Azaria de' Rossi's Observations on the Syriac New Testament*, ed. Joanna Weinberg (London: The Warburg Institute – Nino Aragno editore, 2005).

[35] But compare *Meʾor ʿEnayim*, Imre Binah 27 (Cassel, 264).

[36] Cf. Baron, *History*, 199ff.; Bonfil, "Some Reflections," 23–48; idem, *ʿAzariah*, 62ff.

[37] By contrast, compare the Renaissance humanist view of the historicity of the law; see Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past*, 32–38.

[38] But see the very interesting article by Ivan G. Marcus, "Beyond the Sefardic Mystique," *Orim* 1 (1985–1986): 35–53.

[39] *Sefer Yuḥasin ha-shalem* (Constantinople 1566); *Liber Juchassin sive Lexicon Biographicum et Historicum […] compilatum ab illustri Rabbi Abraham Zacuti*, ed. Zwi H. Filipowski, 2nd ed. revised by Abraham H. Freimann (Frankfurt am Main: Wahrmann, 1925; repr., Jerusalem 1963).

[40] *Sefer Shevet Yehudah* (Adrianopel, 1554); *Sefer Shevet Yehudah*, ed. Yitzhak Baer and Azriel Shohet (Jerusalem: Bialik 1947); cf. also Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *The Lisbon Massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yehudah* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute, 1976).

[41] *Consolaçam ás tribulaçoens de Israel*, ed. Mendés dos Remedios (Coimbra: França Amado, 1906); *Samuel Usque's Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, trans. Martin A. Cohen

Joseph ha-Kohen (1496–1578),[42] Gedalyah ibn Yaḥia (1515–1578) of Spain and Portugal,[43] Elia Capsali (ca. 1483–after 1555) of Crete,[44] and David Gans (1541–1613) of Westphalia[45] (also active in Krakow and Prague).[46] Unlike these scholars, Azariah deals in his writings exclusively with antiquity. Among Jewish precedents in this field, the *Dialoghi d'amore* by Judah Abravanel (c. 1460–1523, Leone Ebreo), a work influenced by (neo-) Platonism, deserves particular mention.[47]

Azariah's treatment of Christianity is not a complete novelty, either—not even in Renaissance Jewish scholarship. Profiat Duran's *Kelimmat ha-Goyim*,[48] Abraham Farissol's *Magen Avraham*,[49] and Lazzaro

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(Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America. Philadelphia, 1965); idem, *Consolação às tribulações de Israel*, reprint of the Ferrara ed. (1553), with introductory studies by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and José V. de Pina Martins, 2 vols. (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1989).

[42] *'Emeq ha-bakha* (1558), ed. Meir Letteris (Cracow: Faust, 1895). *'Emeq ha-bakha (The Vale of Tears with the Chronicle of the Anonymous Corrector)*, ed. Karin Almbladh (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1981).

[43] *Shalshelet ha-qabbalah* (Venice, 1587; Warsaw: Isaak ben Aaron aus Prossnitz, 1596).

[44] *Divre ha-yamim le-malkhut Veneṣya* (1517); *Seder Eliyyahu zuṭa* (1523); modern edition: *Seder Eliyahu zuta: History of the Ottomans and of Venice and that of the Jews in Turkey, Spain and Venice*, ed. Aryeh Shmuelevitz, Salomon Simonsohn, and Me'ir Benayahu, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1975–1983). Cf. also Meir Benayahu, *Rabbi Eliyahu Capsali of Crete* (in Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv, 1983).

[45] *Semaḥ Dawid* (Prague: Kohen, 1592); modern edition: *Zemah David: a Chronicle of Jewish and World History (Prague, 1592)*, ed. Mordechai Breuer (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983). See Mordechai Breuer, "Modernism and Traditionalism in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Historiography: A Study of David Gans's *Tzemah David*," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Dov B. Cooperman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 49–88.

[46] On this subject see Yerushalmi, "Clio and the Jews," 620ff.

[47] See chapter 3, above, for references. See further Moses A. Shulvass, "The Knowledge of Antiquity Among the Italian Jews of the Renaissance," *Proceedings of the American Association of Jewish Research* 18 (1948–1949): 291–299.

[48] Treatise ed. by Zeev A. Posnanski in *Ha-ṣofe me-ereṣ hagar* 3 (1914–1915): 99–119, 143–148; 4 (1914–1915) 37–48, 81–96; modern edition: *The Polemical Writings of Profiat Duran: The reproach of the gentiles and* "*Be not like unto thy fathers*," ed. Frank Talmage (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center and Dinur Center, 1981); idem, *Cinco cuestiones debatidas de polémica*, ed. José Vicente Niclós Albarracín and Carlos del Valle (Madrid: Aben Ezra, 1999). See Jeremy Cohen, "Profiat Duran's *The Reproach of the Gentiles* and the Development of Jewish Anti-Christian Polemic," in *Shelomo Simonsohn Jubilee Volume. Studies on the History of the Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance Period* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1993), 71–84.

[49] David S. Löwinger, "Liqquṭim mi-sefer magen avraham," *Ha-Ṣofe le-Ḥokhmat Yisra'el* 12 (1928): 277–297. Cf. David Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew: The Life and Thought of Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1981).

da Viterbo,[50] among others, had already paved the way. Two characteristics distinguish Azariah's work from these, however. First, he makes extensive use of non-Jewish (or Hellenistic-Jewish) literature.[51] Secondly, he uses this literature impartially, both to confirm and to disprove rabbinic dates and narratives—this, however, only on condition that the sources were not polemical in intent[52] and that the essence of Torah was not their subject.[53] These sources include the writings of Philo of Alexandria. Azariah's criticism of Philo will provide us with a useful means of better understanding the conflict between his own philosophical consciousness and the normative tradition.

4.2 *Philo and the* Philosophia perennis

By making use of Hellenistic Jewish literature, Azariah challenges its implicit rejection by the Sages. A search for traces of Aristobulos, Artapanus, Aristeas, or the Greek apologists in rabbinic literature is pointless. The fragments that remain are preserved only in writings of the church fathers. The well-known Greek translation of the Torah, the so-called Septuagint, is mentioned in teachings and in the midrash, but the Sages transmit only those passages they consider deviations from the Hebrew original. Moreover, most of these mentions have been corrupted in transmission.[54] If we were to depend solely on the rabbinic testimony, we would have only scanty evidence concerning the community of Alexandria.[55] We would also be confronted with the difficulty of interpreting hints on "heretics," including the

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[50] See David Kaufmann, "Lazarus de Viterbo's Epistle to Cardinal Sirleto Concerning the Integrity of the Text of the Bible," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 7 (1895): 283–296.

[51] Cf. Abraham Melamed, "The Perception of Jewish History in Italian Jewish Thought of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. A Re-examination," in *Italia Judaica. Gli Ebrei in Italia tra Rinascimento ed Età barocca* (Rome: Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1986), 161 (139–70).

[52] Cf. *Me'or 'Enayim*, Imre Binah 12 (Cassel, 183); *Me'or 'Enayim*, Imre Binah 2 (Cassel, 81); Weinberg, "Forgeries," 254.

[53] Both these elements are underscored by Martin Kohn, "Jewish Historiography and Jewish Self-Understanding in the Period of Renaissance and Reformation" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1978), 72ff.

[54] See my book *Eine Tora für den König Talmai. Untersuchungen zum jüdisch-hellenistischen und rabbinischen Übersetzungsverständnis* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1994).

[55] For rabbinic passages on the Alexandrian Jewish comunity see Aryeh Kasher, "The Alexandrian Jewish Comunity in Talmudic Traditions," in idem, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985), 346–355.

Judeo-Christians.[56] Only in medieval literature can a timid, but growing, interest in the literary output of Hellenistic Jewish origin be found.[57] The writings of Josephus are retold in *Sefer Josippon* and at the same time harmonized with Christian elements. Prior to the Renaissance, this "translation" of Josephus remained nearly the only source for the history of the Jews.[58]

It was in the circles of a Jewish anti-rabbinic sect, the so-called Karaites, that the writings of Philo of Alexandria were evaluated for the first time in a Jewish context.[59] Especially where their halakhah differs from rabbinic norms, similarities to Philo's understanding of the law can be found.[60] We find a mention of Philo at the beginning of the humanist period in the *excerpta* of Yeraḥme'el (57:1), a medieval compiler who introduces him as "Philo, the friend of Yosef ben Gorion."[61]

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[56] For further information on this topic see Philip S. Alexander, "'The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," in *Jews and Christians. The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), 1–25 (esp. 6–11 regarding the terminology). The issue of possible contacts between Jews and Christians is dealt with by Johann Maier, *Jüdische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Christentum in der Antike* (Darmstadt: Buchgesellschaft, 1982), 1ff.; cf. also idem, *Geschichte der jüdischen Religion*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1992), 426ff. A general survey of Christian influences on Judaism in the area of historiography can be found in my article "Die Entstehung der Septuaginta in der jüdisch-mittelalterlichen Historiographie. Rezeption des Josephus und Einfluß christlicher Quellen," *Laurentianum* 33 (1992): 89–116.

[57] For the legendary retelling of the story of the Maccabees see *Megillat Antiochus*; on the bibliography see Günter Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, 8th ed. (Munich: Beck, 1992), 323f. Editions: Moses Gaster, "The Scroll of Hasmonenas," in idem, *Studies and Texts* (London: Maggs, 1928; repr., New York: Ktav, 1971), 1:165–183, 3:33–43; Menachem Z. Kedari, "Megillat Antiochos ha-'aramit," *Bar-Ilan* 1 (1963): 81–105; 2 (1964): 178–214; Angelo Vivian, "La *Megillat Antiochus*: Una reinterpretazione dell'epopea maccabaica," in *Aspetti della storiografia ebraica. Atti del IV congresso internazionale dell'AISG. S. Miniato, 7–10 novembre 1983*, ed. Fausto Parente (Rome: Carucci, 1987), 163–195. An Aramaic translation of the *Wisdom of Solomon* seems to have circulated in Spain. Nachmanides mentions it in his commentary on the Pentateuch, cf. Alexander Marx, "An Aramaic Fragment of the Wisdom of Solomon," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 40 (1921): 57–69; Gershom Scholem, *Kiryat Sefer* 1 (1924–1925): 163–64; R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Philo and the Zohar. A Note on the Methods of the *scientia nuova* in Jewish Studies," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 10 (1959): 30.

[58] See my article "Die Entstehung der Septuaginta."

[59] On the reception of Philo in Christianity and Judaism see David T. Riuna, *Philo in Early Christian Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 3ff.

[60] See Bernard Revel, "Inquiry into the Sources of Karaite Halakha," *Jewish Quarterly Review* n.s. 3 (1912–1913): 359–396; and Zeev A. Posnansky, "Philon dans l'ancienne littérature judéo-arabe," *Revue des Études Juives* 50 (1905): 10–31.

[61] *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel*, trans. by M. Gaster (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1899; repr., New York: Ktav, 1971), 165; *The Hebrew Fragments of Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, ed. and trans. Daniel J. Harrington (Cambridge, MA.: Society

Recent scholarship has noted the literary proximity of certain Kabbalistic terms to the thought of Philo, but it has not been possible to demonstrate any direct influence of the works of the Alexandrian on the Kabbalists.[62] Interest in Philo among Jewish scholars does not reappear until the Renaissance.[63] Avraham Zacuto refers to Philo as follows: "An excellent Jewish wise man, called Philo the Jew, priest, wrote a book on the soul in Greek."[64] According to Azariah de' Rossi, the brothers Provençale (Judah, David, and Moses) were enthusiastic followers of Philo.[65] In addition, David Provençale was said to have composed a defense in favor of the Alexandrian,[66] which has not been preserved. Azariah, on the other hand, dissociates himself from this enthusiasm, writing at the end of his analysis of Philo's writings:[67]

> In my view, this was a man who had fallen between two stools, so that it is impossible to form a clear opinion about him. Based on what was discussed in this chapter, I tell the children of Israel: I will not pass judgment on this Yedidyah, or Philo—as he is called in Greek—on his purity or impurity, as regards the importance or respect that is due to him. I will call him neither *Rav* nor *Ḥakham*,[68] nor will I call him a heretic or an Epicurean. The name I will use is Yedidyah, the Alexandrian. And wherever I quote him in my book, I will not quote him as a member of my people. We will mention him in the same manner as the other sages of the world [Christians] in order to clarify side aspects (*milleta be-ʿalma*), but not regarding the essence (*u-be-may de-la shayyeke be-gawwe*).[69] With regard to the rest of his ideas and books, the reader should be able to form his own judgment, in keeping with his own opinion.

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of Biblical Literature, 1974), 42. On the chronicle, cf. my article "Die Entstehung der Septuaginta," 107–110.

[62] Cf. Itzhak F. Baer, *Zion* 22–24 (1959): 143ff.; Samuel Belkin, "Midrash ha-neʿelam u-meqorotaw ba-midrashim ha-aleksandroniyim ha-qedumim," *Sura* 3 (1958): 25–92; and R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Philo and the Zohar," 25–44, 113–135.

[63] On the subject matter of this paragraph, cf. the very detailed studies by Ralph Marcus, "A 16th Century Hebrew Critique of Philo (Azariah dei Rossi's *Me'or Enayim*, Pt I, cc. 3–6)," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 21 (1948): 29–71; Joanna Weinberg, "The Quest for Philo in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Historiography," in *Jewish History. Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein (London: Halban, 1988), 163–187; Bonfil, *ʿAzariah*, 82–89.

[64] *Sefer Yuḥasin*, 148r. Zacuto seems to have taken this information from Christian circles. There, Philo was known as *Philo Judaeus*.

[65] *Me'or ʿEnayim*, Cassel, 145, 149.

[66] Weinberg, "Philo," 178.

[67] *Me'or ʿEnayim*, Imre Binah 6 (Cassel, 129).

[68] According to Weinberg, "Philo," 181 n. 23, an allusion to Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Metzia* 86b.

[69] This same idea can be found in *Me'or ʿEnayim*, Imre Binah 12 (Cassel, 183).

These concluding remarks contain, *in nuce*, the intent behind Azariah's discussion of Philo. Here too, the points he stresses are significant. He considered it impossible to pass judgment on Philo because, in his view, the pros and cons balanced each other out. Beyond that, he saw no reason, based on Philo's teachings, to consider him a *Rav* or a *Ḥakham*. That is why he is treated only as a secular teacher, competent only on *milleta be-ʿalma*, that is, topics that do not pertain to the essence (*gaw*) of tradition.[70]

The reader is held to be a *lector prudens*—as Azariah's *qore maskil* is presumably to be translated.[71] It is up to the reader to freely develop his own opinion of Philo's writings. In this manner, two main issues are touched on: (1) the position of Philo in the Renaissance, at the crossroads of Christianity and Judaism; and (2) the distinction between the essential aspects of Jewish tradition and the side aspects, on which both Azariah himself and his *lector prudens* must form a personal judgment, based on the sources.

Divine Attributes and Trinity

In Renaissance scholarship,[72] Philo is primarily cited in the context of *prisca theologia*.[73] Marsilio Ficino and Symphorien Champier of Lyon refer

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[70] Cp. also Baron, *History*, 219–221.

[71] In his translation of chap. 35 of *Me'or ʿEnayim* into Italian (Bodleian Mich. 308, fol. 133b–115b), Azariah renders *qore maskil* as "intelligent reader," as Joanna Weinberg informs to me. For *qore maskil* as "intelligent readers," see also Bonfil, "Some Reflections," 48 n. 88. Azariah mentions the *maskilim* also in the context of the death of Titus (*Me'or ʿEnayim*, Imre Binah 16 [Cassel, 215]) and while discussing the difference between Onkelos and Aquilas (Cassel, 383); cf. also Segal, *Historical Consciousness*, 69–86. In my opinion, the perception of *qore maskil* is close to the one of Hieronymus, *Apol. in Ruf.* 1.16 [CCL 79:14–15]: "lector prudens, cum diversas explanationes legerit, et multorum vel probanda vel improbanda didicerit, iudicet quid verius sit et, quasi bonus trapezita, adulterinae monetae pecuniam reprobet." Azariah stresses the adjective *verius*. That is why he addresses the *anshe ha-emet*. On the reception and dissemination of *lector prudens* in the Renaissance, see Anthony Grafton, "On the Scholarship of Politian and its Context," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 40 (1977): 187f., appendix 2.

[72] For more on Philo in the Renaissance see Howard L. Goodhart and Erwin R. Goodenough, in Erwin R. Goodenough, *The Politics of Philo Judaeus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938), 125–321 (esp. nos. 1508–1579); Edgar Wind, *Heidnische Mysterien in der Renaissance*, 2nd edition (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1984), 243ff. together with n. 64; Thomas H. Billings, *The Platonism of Philo Judaeus* (Chicago: Garland, 1919); Weinberg, "Philo," 163.

[73] Cf. Charles B. Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966): 505–532, newly published in idem, *Studies in Renaissance Philosophy and Science*, (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981), 505–532; see further idem, "*Prisca theologia* e *philosophia perennis*: due temi del Rinascimento italiano

to him as a Platonist who studied the Christian mysteries.[74] According to a widespread legend in the Middle Ages, Philo had converted to Christianity.[75]

Although the Renaissance scholars no longer made this assumption, they considered his works as *testimonia trinitatis*. That is why Azariah is primarily anxious to regain Philo as an author representing Jewish intellectual life of the period. In chapter three, he conjectures that Philo was a member of the Essenians or Therapeutae,[76] whom he identifies with the *betusim* (*ha-betusim*)[77] mentioned in rabbinic literature. As evidence for Philo's adherence to the *betusim*, he cites their agreement on the exegesis of the halakhic principle of "an eye for an eye" (*ʿayin taḥat ʿayin*, Exodus 21:34).[78] Both support a literal understanding—in contrast to the more lenient reading of the Sages. Azariah's methodological and historiographic approach to reappropriating Philo for Judaism is also behind his indirect polemics against Christian scholarship. Ever since Eusebius's *History*,[79] the Therapeutae/Essenes were considered to have been Christian monks. For that reason, Azariah describes them as follows:

> They observe the same instructions which can be seen today among Christian *fraters*, regulating all aspects of their community. Thus can it be concluded that the latter developed from the former and learned from them.[80]

On reading Azariah's analysis of Philo's intellectual world,[81] one has the impression that Azariah is inclined to defend Philo's conceptualizations

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e la loro fortuna," in *Il pensiero italiano del Rinascimento e il tempo nostro*, ed. Giovannangiola Tarugi (Florence: Olschki, 1970), 211–236, now in idem, *Studies in Renaissance Philosophy*, 211–236. Reference to Azariah is made by Baron in *History*, 222; Bonfil, *ʿAzariah*, 86.

[74] Weinberg, "Philo," 166.

[75] Cf. J. Edgar Bruns, "Philo Christianus: The Debris of a Legend," *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (1973): 141–145; Riuna, *Philo*, 3–7.

[76] He explains that according to both Josephus and Eusebius, there is no difference between the two groups.

[77] From **ביתוס** (Greek: *Boēthós*), founder of a sect that shows similarities to the Sadducees; cf. *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* A, §5. Regarding the Betusians see Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 108a; Tosefta, *Yoma* 1:8 (Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 19b in contrast reads **צדוקי**).

[78] *Me'or ʿEnayim*, Imre Binah 3 (Cassel, 92ff.); cf. also *Me'or ʿEnayim*, Imre Binah 6 (Cassel, 129).

[79] *Hist. Eccl.* 2.17, 16.2.

[80] *Me'or ʿEnayim*, Imre Binah (Cassel, 94).

[81] This is not the place to expand on this point. Further information can be found in the articles by Marcus and Weinberg, mentioned above, n. 63.

(e.g., *aeternitas materiae* et al.) and to excuse his "errors" and "deficiencies." According to Azariah, Philo's only real (albeit serious) deficiency is his ignorance of Hebrew,[82] of the Masora, and of Palestinian halakhah. It is not by chance that Azariah chooses to point out precisely these failings, since in his eyes, the Hebrew Scriptures and the Palestinian halakhah make up the essence of Jewish tradition. This is why he quotes Philo only on side issues that do not touch upon the core of tradition.

Azariah gives the following definition of Philo's intentions: he wrote not only for Jews, but also for Greeks and Romans "to teach them how many advantages (*maʿalot ṭovot*) are contained in our Torah."[83] In this, Azariah is projecting Philo's later importance in Christianity backwards onto antiquity and, in the process, clearly revealing his own apologetic slant. That is why he dedicates such an important part of his analysis to the question of how the theory of creation was transmitted, and to awareness of it outside the Jewish world.[84] Philo's description of the creation of the visible world is interpreted by Azariah as the Kabbalistic theory of emanation. In this way, Azariah builds a bridge between the Platonic Philo and the world of medieval Judaism. This view he has adopted from the Christian Kabbalists.[85] It is one of the striking examples of the direct influence of such scholars as Marsilio Ficino, "the great Christian Sage,"[86] whom Azariah frequently quotes, and the French scholar Symphorien Champier,[87] who had disseminated

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[82] On this topic, Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609) writes: "Hebriasmi tamen adeo imperitus fuit Philo ut tirunculi Christianorum, nedum Judaeorum, possint eum in partes vocare." For the evidence of sources and a detailed commentary on Scaliger's work, cf. Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger. A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship*, vol. 2, *Historical Chronology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 416f.

[83] *Me'or ʿEnayim*, Imre Binah 6 (Cassel, 120).

[84] *Me'or ʿEnayim*, Imre Binah 4 (Cassel, 100ff.); cf. also the very interesting remarks on this chapter by Bonfil, *ʿAzariah*, 252ff.

[85] On Hermetic traditions in Judaism down to the Renaissance and the influence of Alemanno on his student Pico, cf. Moshe Idel, "Hermeticism and Judaism," in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1988), 59–76. For (neo-)Platonism in the Renaissance and its relationship to the *prisca theologia* see Daniel P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology. Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1972), 22–131.

[86] *Me'or ʿEnayim*, Imre Binah 4 (Cassel, 100). In this context, Azariah quotes the introduction of Ficino to his translation of Poimandres.

[87] *Symphoriani Champerii De quadruplici vita. Theologia Asclepii, Hermetis Trismegisti discipuli cum commentariis eiusdem domini Simphoriani, Lugdunum 1507 (Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Ai 951); cp. idem, Symphoriani Champerii De Triplici disciplina, cuius partes sunt: philosophia naturalis, medicina, theologia, moralis philosophia integrantes quadruvium, Lugdunum 1507* (Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Ai 953).

Ficino's Platonism.[88] Taking the superiority of the Mosaic Torah as their point of departure, these scholars propounded the idea that the esoteric conceptions of creation as emanation had been passed on in an unbroken tradition from Moses and Hermes Trismegistos through Plato and Philo to the Kabbala.[89] Azariah found nothing unorthodox in this doctrine. He puts it as follows:

> The abstract conception of God is divided into parts in our limited understanding, but there remains the principle of oneness. Is it not then merely a problem of terminology, if we use the terms "son," "emanation," "light," "*sefirah*," or "idea"—as Plato calls the *logos*? In his medical writings, Galen states in several passages that cannot perceive the differences between individuals on the basis of their names.[90]

In addition to the influence of the scholars already named, one also recognizes here traces of Cusanus's theory of (divine) names,[91] according to which, while the sensual signs of the Name of God change, the idea signified always remains the same.[92] One thinks here of such passages as the following, from *Excitationes* I:

> Verum Judaei volentes trinitatem evadere dicunt per trinitatem, quae in eorum libris exprimitur tres proprietates intelligi debere, scilicet divinam sapientiam, bonitatem et potentiam, per quas proprietates dicunt creata. Et hoc Nicolaus de Lira destruit in libello quodam contra Judaeos pluribus ostendens auctoritatibus veteris testamenti trinitatem. Ego etiam aliquando disputando deprehendi sapientes Judaeos ad credendam trinitatem inducibiles, et hoc non est eis difficile persuadere. Sed quod filius in divinis sit incarnatus, hoc est, in quo sunt indurati, nec rationes nec prophetas audire volunt.[93]

Accordingly, in Cusanus's view, the Jews had interpreted the doctrine of the Trinity as a referring to a triad of divine attributes. These are the *proprietates*, seen by de' Rossi as *kinnuyim* through which the uniqueness of the individual cannot be defined, as he shows by citing Galen.

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[88] Walker, *Theology*, 64ff.

[89] On the Name of God, cf. Brian P. Copenhaver, "Lefèvre d'Etaples, Symphorien Champier and the Secret Names of God," JWCI 40 (1977) 189–211.

[90] *Me'or 'Enayim*, Imre Binah 4 (Cassel, 100).

[91] Nicholas of Cusa is not mentioned by Azariah, as a perusal of Cassel's index indicates.

[92] Wolf Peter Klein, *Am Anfang war das Wort* (Berlin, 1992), 36.

[93] Cited from Jacob Guttmann, *Die Scholastik des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts in ihren Beziehungen zum Judenthum und zur jüdischen Literatur* (Breslau: Marcus, 1902; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1970), 170 n. 1.

The discussion of the name "Son of God," used by both the author of the Hermetica and by Philo as a term for light, should also be seen in this context. Here, Azariah cites the expression "qaddiša abba,"[94] etc., described in passing as Kabbalistic. In fact, the source being quoted is of Christian Kabbalistic origin, presumably from Spain. In other words, as Joanna Weinberg has shown, this allegedly Kabbalistic term is an Aramaic translation of a Christian interpretation of the threefold "Holy" of Isaiah 6:3. Azariah most probably took it from the polemical work of Petrus Galatinus, *De arcanis catholicae veritatis* (1518).[95] There we find, among other things, the following:

> Rabbi vero Ionathan ita caldaice inquit *qadish abba, qadish bera, qadish ruḥa qadisha*. Id est sanctus hic est pater, sanctus hic est filius, sanctus hic est spiritus sanctus.[96]

In his work *Magen Avraham* (1514), Abraham Farissol proved this expression to be a forgery. Nevertheless, Azariah uses it, since for him, description of God is just a matter of terminology, as long as the principle of unity is not violated.

Although Azariah's approach is not anti-Christian, the passage cited shows clearly how he attempts to reinterpret genuine Christian terminology in order to prove the advantages of the Jewish religion. He is not afraid to integrate Christian theology into Judaism in order to shed light on what he considers the truth. He is convinced that *prisca theologia* is a Jewish expression. It is up to the historian to discover the "seeds" of this theology. In this respect, the formative influence of Renaissance thought is obvious; thinkers like Pico della Mirandola or Ficino

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[94] On this subject, cf. also Bonfil, *'Azariah*, 87–88.

[95] *Opus toti christianae Reipublicae maxime utile, de arcanis catholicae ueritatis, contra obstinatissimam Iudaeorum nostrae tempestatis perfidiam: ex Talmud, aliisque hebraicis libris nuper excerptum: & quadruplici linguarum genere eleganter congestum* (Orthonae Maris: Suncinus, 1518). Amatus Lusitanus tells us that in 1548 or 1549 he met de' Rossi in a library while he was discussing the work of Galatinus. Cf. Friedenwald, "Two Jewish Physicians," 393.

[96] *De arcanis*, xxxi/r according to Weinberg, "Philo," 171. The Jewish convert, Paolo Ricci, physician to Maximilian I, refers to the Zohar as evidence for the Trinity, however with reference to the threefold repetition of "God" in the *Shema'*: "Ex multis uero tria duntaxat breuitatis causa in medium hic proferam. Primum est illud praememoratum Deuteron. oraculum: Audi Israel! Deus Deus noster, Deus unus est. Ubi idem Rabi Simeon libro splendoris dicto Zohar, tria haec nomina personarum Trinitati adaptat, Patrem, Filium, ¦ Sanctum spiritum palam pronuncians" ("De Coelesti Agricultura," in *Ars cabalistica*, ed. Ioannes Pistorius (Basel: Sebastianus Henriepetri, 1587; repr., Frankfurt a.M.: Minerva, 1970), fol. 61.

were fascinated by the traces of the Trinity (*vestigia trinitatis*) they saw in Plotinus's writings.[97] Historiographic research was deeply influenced by these approaches, taking antiquity as the conveyor of values, and the historiographer as the critic of history.

Epistemologically, this approach became possible only when scholars began to compare Jewish-Christian wisdom with the wisdom of the "pagans." The question of the (historical) relationship between the different forms of knowledge that had developed during the centuries leading up to the (Christian) *Kairòs* was solved by assigning them a hierarchical order, in which Jewish wisdom was considered the most ancient. Two ways were found to explain the silence of the Greeks regarding Jewish wisdom. Both were repeated from antiquity through the Renaissance. According to one group, the pagans had "plagiarized" the wisdom of the Jews.[98] The second theory derives from the first and, in an historical sense, it might be the more plausible. It holds that terms are convertible, all being connected with each other, no matter whether they were of Greek, Egyptian, or Babylonian origin.[99] This concept can also be found in Azariah's effort to compare Christian and Jewish theology, particularly with respect to the Kabbalistic emanation theory. Names can be interchanged on condition that this in no way challenges the dogma of God's unity. The view of history underlying Azariah's speculations thus takes as its starting point the concept of a harmonious and progressive development of knowledge, in which each truth is contained within a hierarchical order. This is the precondition for Azariah's use of both Jewish and non-Jewish sources.[100]

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[97] Edgar Wind, "Heidnische Mysterien," 276ff.

[98] Among Hellenistic Jewish apologists, this is a common explanation; see Norman Roth, "The Theft of Philosophy by the Greeks from the Jews," *Classica Folia* 32 (1978): 53–67; and my article "Dalla tesi giudeo-ellenistica del 'plagio' dei Greci al concetto rabbinico del *verus Israel*. Disputa sull'appartenenza della *sofia*," *RCT* 17 (1992) 85–104. Azariah believed that Aristotle, towards the end of his life, had converted to Judaism; cf. Nathan Samter, "Der 'Jude' Aristoteles," *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentum* 45 (1901): 453–459.

[99] Cf. Thomas Leinkauf, *Mundus combinatus. Studien zur Struktur der barocken Universalwissenschaft am Beispiel Athanasius Kirchers SJ (1602–1680)* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), 248ff.

[100] Cf. Baron, *History*, 226.

Questions of Method

Given the number of seemingly obscure topics he discussed, and his extensive use of non-Jewish sources, an unusual practice among Jewish authors, Azariah felt himself compelled to offer some justification. In doing so, he also explains why he occupies himself with the "useless past":[101]

> Indeed, dear reader, from the beginning I see that you might ask yourself if this study is not a waste of your time[102] or perhaps even worse. Since what does it matter to him or us? What is past, is past! Centuries ago or even more.
>
> You should be able to find your answer by considering the following: First, what is the nature of this truth in itself, [since it was] studied by thousands of Ḥakhamim in investigations much more ancient than this one. Is that not like a seal of the God of Truth, like the virtue of a beautiful soul, and worth everyone's effort? Secondly, and more importantly: In the course of this inquiry you will see that we will have the opportunity to understand better the sense of some passages of the Holy Scriptures. And you know already, from the fourth chapter of *Zevaḥim*[103] regarding the issue of *Piggul*[104] in things done outdoors; as in the chapter "Four death penalties"[105] regarding the daughter of a priest prostituting herself; in the first chapter of *Yoma*[106] regarding the question of how Moses dressed Aaron, from all these passages you know that the [Ḥakhamim] express the opinion that useless issues—without any relevance today—must be studied and understood, be it to understand the meaning of the verses, [or] be it because of the principle "study and gain merit."[107] […] And this is the third reason for my inquiries being not at all useless: from this discussion, the *hilketa de-meshiḥa* are being clarified, that is: according to many important sources (the Messiah) about to come.

Azariah sees his research as a contribution to exegesis. It is not at all a waste of time, but a contribution to an understanding of the *hilkheta de-meshiḥa*, and thus directly relevant to the imminent end of the world. His main topic is nothing less than the calculation of Jewish chronology.

The distinguishing characteristics of Azariah's work are to be found not so much in the content of his studies as in the method of

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[101] *Me'or ʿEnayim*, Imre Binah 29 (Cassel, 275f.).
[102] For this expression cf. Bonfil, *ʿAzariah*, 322 n. 18.
[103] Babylonian Talmud, *Zevaḥim* 45a.
[104] Offerings invalid because of unsoundness of mind.
[105] Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 55b.
[106] Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 5b.
[107] Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 51b.

his research, particularly in the authority he assigns to the past. This constitutes his "innovation." As we have already seen in dealing with Philo's conceptual world, de' Rossi distinguishes between the essence of tradition, which is eternal and untouchable, and the *milleta be-'alma* (i.e., side aspects), on which a plurality of opinions is possible. Azariah's continued insistence that his deviations from Jewish authority, be it the authority of antiquity or of his own time, are strictly limited to side issues should not be seen as merely a polite formula, typically Baroque in style. Neither is it a sign of Azariah's insecurity, as Baron would have it.[108] On the contrary, it is clear that Azariah subscribes to the principle of autonomous judgment by the individual, if only on side issues. He is neither a halakhic expert nor a Talmudist, nor even a philosopher in the strict sense, but a scholar referring in his studies to the achievements of scholarly analysis. In this, his work echoes the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*[109] that marked the Renaissance, in spite of—or, more probably, because of—its cult of antiquity. This can be illustrated, once again, with Azariah's own words:[110]

> There is no doubt that everything we received from our Sages regarding the commandments of Torah, from the roots to the top of the branches, all of it is the Word of God. In love and in fear we set it as a crown upon our heads […]. Secondly, and as any well-minded person will easily understand, whatever our Sages say on scholarly topics, such as astrology or the form of heaven and earth, and so on, originates purely in their own human minds. When engaging in these kinds of studies, each of them did it according to his own talents, or based on the traditions of the previous generation of whatever nation. There is no gift of prophecy involved. In this domain (of scholarship). we have their permission to listen to those who opposed their views, in order to test them according to our level of knowledge. This does not imply any judgment on the value of one side or the other. The Rabbanan of Yavneh used to say (in the perek *haya qore*):[111] "I am a creature and my companion is a creature." The explanation of the Tosafist is as follows: "He has the same ability as myself to distinguish between good and evil." And indeed this is what they say in perek *keṣad ma'awarin* (*b. Erub.* 53a): "The mind of the former is like the entrance into an arcade, the mind of the latter is like the eye

[108] Baron, *History*, 231f.

[109] Cf. Hans Baron, "The Querelle of the Ancients and Moderns as a Problem for Renaissance Scholarship," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959): 3–22.

[110] *Me'or 'Enayim*, Imre Binah 14 (Cassel, 196). The importance of this passage was first pointed out by Jacob Teicher, "Il principio," 269ff.

[111] Babylonian Talmud, *Berachot* 17a.

> of a needle." Or as it is said in several places:[112] "If the former were humans, we are fools and so on." And in the first paragraph of Yoma (*b.* Yoma 9b): "Better the fingernail of the former than the belly of the latter." Truly, the descendants received what the predecessors achieved, in addition to their [the descendants'] own achievement. Doesn't the parable of the dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants apply, which the author of *Shibbole ha-Leqeṭ* attributes in his introduction to an ancient sage? In this way, you can rightly postulate that there is a correspondence between the superiority of the former over the latter with respect to prophecy—because they were closer to the prophets—and the superiority of the latter over the former with respect to the newly growing twig of scholarship and experiments.[113]

The dangers inherent in this notion did not escape the notice of the *Maharal* of Prague (Judah ben Bezalel Löw, d. 1609). In opposition to Azariah, he stresses his conviction that from the time of the Sages down to the present, nothing but a process of degeneration can be perceived: there is no progress in knowledge. He states that today the fountain of knowledge that welled up in Jewish antiquity has dwindled.[114] Autonomy of judgment, even in scientific matters, is therefore not possible.[115]

4.3 *Renaissance, Reformation, and Reception*

Azariah de' Rossi remained unknown in the Jewish world for some two centuries, even though his work had often been plagiarized by his contemporaries. In the Christian world, he was frequently quoted, often even as *the* Jewish opinion. Not until he finds mention in the

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[112] See Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 112b; Cassel, 196, note.

[113] In opposition to Jacob Teicher (loc. cit.) and Hillel Levine ("Dwarfs," 65), I would hold that Azariah does not intend to postulate the autonomy of mind in respect to faith. Rather, he wishes to mention an additional source of truth. What sense would any research make if truth were already given and our predecessors had transmitted it to us complete? For every single person can and shall judge by himself, if the matter is not halakhah. The noetic autonomy of research is thus Azariah's principle regarding everything apart from the halakhah and biblical dogma. No doubt, the scientific and geographic discoveries of his time prompted him to deal with the philosophical issue of the acquisition of knowledge. This does not at all imply any "Galilean" separation between faith and science.

[114] *Be'er ha-Golah* (Prague 1598; New York: Judaica Press, 1953; 1969), 3ff. Cf. also Segal, *Historical Consciousness*, 153ff.

[115] See Jacob Elbaum, "Rabbi Judah Loew of Prag and his Attitude to the Aggadah," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971): 28–47; André Neher, *Le puits de l'exil. Tradition et modernité: la pensée du Maharal de Prague* (Paris: Cerf, 1991).

introduction of Moses Mendelssohn's translations of the Bible[116] and Leopold Zunz's *Toledot*[117] can one speak of a reception of his ideas in Judaism. From that time on, however, he is considered the "Father of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*," a revolutionary, from an age unable to appreciate him.[118] The novelty of his achievement, however, does not lie in his contribution to scholarship—critical analysis of the aggadah, a theory of Bible translation, critical analysis of Philo, research in *piyyuṭ*, Jewish chronology, and so forth. Rather, it is Azariah's methodological approach that sets him apart. The distinction he draws between the "essence" and the "side issues" of tradition, that is, between the constant and its variants, introduces a new element into Jewish self-perception. This new element is that of the possibility of autonomous judgment, based on the state of the sources. This might have had revolutionary consequences. The idea of a "sense of the past," bound to the consciousness of the individual, was an achievement of the humanists, who took Genesis 1:26 ("Let us make man in our image, after our likeness") as a programmatic expression of the *dignitas hominis*. Azariah's "sense of the past" recognizes the inviolable limits set by halakhah, the fence around the Torah, valid for everyone. At the same time, however, he would sanction the freedom to inquire into the *milleta be-ʿalma*, into noetic truth, the knowledge that has steadily been accruing since the birth of humanity. This is what gives descendants the appearance of dwarfs on the shoulders of giants.

Unfortunately, Azariah's efforts had very little immediate effect. The political and ideological power of the Counter-Reformation, along with the dissemination of Lurianic Kabbalah—both expressions of a withdrawal mentality[119]—contributed to an atmosphere that consigned the novelty of his approach to oblivion. There was no longer any place for a discourse between philosophical-historical consciousness and normative tradition. Azariah's theory of Bible translation would be taken up only by Moses Mendelssohn, and his reception of Philo

[116] Moses Mendelssohn, "Or li-ntiva" (1783), in *Hebräische Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. Haim Borodianski (Breslau, 1938; repr. Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1972), 229–248. Cf. especially 236ff.

[117] See above.

[118] But see Lionel Kochan, *The Jew and His History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 50ff.

[119] Cf. Isaac E. Barzilay, "The Italian and Berlin Haskalah," 19.

only in the nineteenth century by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*,[120] when history became a value in Jewish consciousness, and the philological and historical study of Jewish tradition in antiquity came to be seen as an expression of emancipation.

[120] Cf. Debora Rose Sills, "Re-inventing the Past: Philo and the Historiography of Jewish Identity" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1984), 119–235.

CHAPTER FIVE

SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT AND THE EXEGETICAL MIND, WITH AN ESSAY ON THE LIFE AND WORKS OF RABBI JUDAH LOEW

In view of the widespread conviction that the Renaissance and the early modern period were the grand epoch of the sciences, the key issue that confronts us here is the concept of science itself. Let me start with the seminal work by Steinschneider entitled *Jewish Literature*. First written in German, as an essay for Ersch and Gruber's *Encyclopaedia* (1845–1847), and published thereafter in English translation in 1856,[1] it offers a first approach to the question. In his customary bibliographical and archival style, Steinschneider lists works by Italian scientists, or encyclopedists with some interest in the sciences, under the heading "mathematics and physical sciences." Steinschneider notes that mathematics, already in the preceding period, had developed into an "independent science" and that recent theories clashed only marginally with the "peculiar tendency of Jewish literature," which was now more favorably disposed toward theoretical and scientific subjects.

With his customary *brevitas*, Steinschneider, the famous bibliographer, focuses on two important aspects of the question, unfortunately without providing the reader with an introduction to the complex of issues implicated in this abbreviated formulation: (1) the role of mathematics in the early modern period; and (2) Jewish (and Christian) use of mathematical categories. According to Steinschneider, interest in mathematics developed not only in explanation of, or stimulated by, rabbinic and philosophical literature—for example, guided by a passage of the *Moreh* of Maimonides, Moses Provençale[2] composed a treatise on

[1] Moritz Steinschneider, *Jewish Literature from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Century with an Introduction on Talmud and Midrash. A Historical Essay* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1857; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1967): 260–265.

[2] On Moses Provençale see now Umberto Piperno, "Rabbi Moshe Provenzalo tra tradizione e rinnovamento," in *Scritti sull'ebraismo in memoria di Emanuele Menachem Artom*, ed. Sergio J. Sierra and Elena Lea Artom (Jerusalem: Sinai, 1996), 244–257; see also the entry in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 16:636.

a theorem of Euclid—but also autonomously, in works such as those on arithmetic by Emanuel Porto (1627), in Hebrew, and by Iseppo Luzzatto (1670),[3] in Italian. For Steinschneider and the scholars of this period, mathematics also includes astronomy, a science in fashion at the time because of the "complete revolution" then underway in the field. In mathematics, Steinschneider saw a powerful stimulus for writing various exegetical, historical, polemical, and practical treatises on the sciences. By "physical sciences," Steinschneider meant only medicine. Enumerating the discoveries of Amatus Lusitanus,[4] the *De Auro* of Abraham Portaleone,[5] and the activity of Joseph Solomon Del Medigo (1629),[6] who translated the *Aphorisms* of Hippocrates from the Latin and wrote various treatises on physics, Steinschneider complains that medical literature "is wanting in Hebrew works."

Reading Steinschneider's work, one gets the impression that his main interest in this field is the activity of Jews in mathematics and astronomy. He viewed this realm as distinctive, a "complete revolution," while medicine seems to have held out little interest for him. But even when it comes to mathematics, the harvest is not abundant. Jewish scholars of astronomy and mathematics were interested above all in problems connected with the calendar. Steinschneider believed that Jewish mathematicians of the fifteenth century had only limited importance, even

[3] On both of them see Asher Salah, *La République des Lettres Rabbins, écrivains et médecins juifs en Italie au XVIII^e siècle* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), s.v., along with the bibliography provided there.

[4] On Lusitanus see now Eleazar Gutwirth, "Amatus Lusitanus and the Location of Sixteenth-Century Cultures," in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, ed. David Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 216–238.

[5] Abraham ben David Portaleone, *De auro dialogi tres. In quibus non solum de auri in re medica facultate, verum etiam de specifica eius, & caeterarum rerum forma, ac duplici potestate, qua mixtis in omnibus illa operatur, copiose disputantur* (Venice: Jo. Baptista a Porta, 1584); see Alessandro Guetta, "Avraham Portaleone, le scientifique repenti. Science et religion chez un savant juif entre le 16ème et le 17ème siècle," in *Torah et science: perspectives historiques et théoriques. Études offertes à Charles Touati*, ed. Gad Freudenthal (Louvain-Paris: Peeters, 2001), 213–227. More bibliographic references on Portaleone below, in n. 40, p. 137.

[6] Published in *Sefer Elim* (Amsterdam: Manasseh Ben Israel, 1629), www.seforimonline.com; see M. David, ed. "Critical edition of Hippocrates' Aphorisms, translated into Hebrew by J. S. Delmedigo (1591–1655)," *Koroth* 7 (1980): 764–794. On Del Medigo see Gad B. Sarfatti, "Un discepolo di Galileo, J. S. Delmedigo," *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 36 (1970): 363–371; Isaac Barzilay, *Yoseph Shlomo Delmedigo (Yashar of Candia). His Life, Works and Times* (Leiden: Brill, 1974); Jacob Adler, "J. S. Delmedigo and the Liquid-in-Glass Thermometer," *Annals of Science* 54 (1997): 293–299.

for specialists.[7] This raises a new question: If mathematics was already an autonomous science, and medicine had no noteworthy achievements or new discoveries to boast of, can we speak of the "Jewish sciences" in the modern period at all? I would suspect that Steinschneider's answer would have been an emphatic "no."

In his epoch-making introduction to the "Jewish" Renaissance, Cecil Roth put primary stress on the role of the physicians, but he did not ignore the impact of new discoveries on Jewish attitudes to geography[8] and astronomy, or the contribution of Italian Jews to mathematics, technology, alchemy, and so forth. From the very outset, Roth stressed that Jewish proficiency in medicine, this very common Jewish profession, was not the result of a new spirit. As he put it: "This was not because they breathed the spirit of the new age, but rather because in a way they were custodians of the spirit of the old."[9] Like Steinschneider, Roth was of the opinion that medicine was indeed practiced above all by Jews—they had finally obtained special permission to enroll in universities or medical schools and, under special conditions, also to practice among Christians. But we have only a meager result in terms of the contribution of Hebrew works to medical science, given the scale of the translation and transmission process of the Middle Ages. Speaking of the contribution of Jewish physicians to medicine in this period, Roth takes into consideration a "somewhat different factor": "The most memorable of those who will have to be taken into account belong to the category of the Marranos."[10] Among the Marranos, he comments, "the proportion of physicians was for one reason or another extremely high,"[11] with no further hint as to what the "reason" may have been. Referring to Italy, he mentions the figure of Amatus Lusitanus and cites the importance of this most excellent physician for the history of medicine, due to his discovery of the valves of the veins and their importance for the circulation of the blood. Among the other sciences,

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[7] Moritz Steinschneider, *Mathematik bei den Juden* (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, Leipzig 1894; repr., Hildsheim: Olms, 2001), 185; see also Adeline Goldberg, *Die jüdischen Mathematiker und die jüdischen anonymen mathematischen Schriften zugleich ein Index zu M. Steinschneider's Mathematik bei den Juden* (Frankfurt a. M.: Kauffmann 1901).

[8] On this topic see now Johann Maier, "The Relevance of the Geography for the Jewish Religion," in *Religious confessions and the Sciences in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Jürgen Helm and Annette Winkelmann (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 136–158.

[9] Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance*, 213.

[10] Ibid., 225.

[11] Ibid.

Roth also lists astrology and astronomy, stressing the role of mathematics and, especially, the work of Moses Provençale and his mathematical commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* (I.73).[12]

Like Steinschneider, Roth is negatively impressed by Jewish medicine in the Renaissance and early modern period, because it is based on medical schooling, i.e., tradition, and not on experiment, like the *Tabulae anatomicae*[13] or the *Anatomia* of Andreas Vesalius.[14] Neither Steinschneider nor Roth nor later scholars confronted the question of how to approach and define the sciences in the Renaissance period. Even in speaking about medicine, we cannot subsume all elements of this ancient profession under the term "science," ignoring its political, religious, and social role, and the difficulty that Jewish physicians encountered in trying to practice it. The human sciences cannot be defined only from the point of view of new discoveries and scientific achievements.

David Ruderman's valuable work tries to close the gap between scientific thought and discovery among Jewish intellectuals of the modern period. He began with a consideration of Abraham Yagel's *Gei Ḥizzayon* and then proceeded with a series of interesting studies that culminated in his *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*.[15] Ruderman approaches the wide array of questions addressed here with a richness of detail and a mastery of the sources. He carefully examines enrollment in medical schools, noting that the graduation of hundreds of Jews from the University of Padua, the best in Europe in this period, led "to the evolution of a definable social and cultural group of Jewish intellectuals."[16] He also explores the question of the disproportionate number of physicians in the Marrano community and their contribution to the history of science, shifting the focus from that of earlier scholarship to the question of Marrano cultural identity. Ruderman's major contribution, of course, centers on the question of Jewish attitudes to scientific thought and discoveries. He has analyzed the relationship of scholars of the natural sciences to the Kabbalah in connection with

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[12] Part I:73, prop. 3. Ms Bodleiana 2033,8.

[13] *Tabulae Anatomicae Sex* (Venice: Vitalis, 1538).

[14] Vesalius, *Anatomia in qua tota humani corporis fabrica* (Basel: Oporinus, 1543; 1555). For an English version see Andreas Vesalius, *On the Fabric of the Human Body*, Books 1 and 2, transl. W. F. Richardson, in collaboration with J. B. Carman (San Francisco: Norman, 1998).

[15] *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

[16] *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 115.

Leone Modena, Joseph Del Medigo, Samson Morpurgo of Ancona, and Solomon Aviad Sar Shalom Basilea of Mantua; and the attitude to new and contemporary sciences in Judah del Bene, Azariah Figo, Isaac Lampronti, and others. The picture the reader obtains in regarding the various aspects considered by the author is at once both multifaceted and intriguing. Naturally, however, it does not exhaust the full extent of viewpoints and questions evoked by a social and intellectual community whose geographical scope covers the traditional four corners of the Old World and the New.

The issue of geographical extension is also the crucial question here, namely whether there was, at this time, a clear concept of what we can call the sciences, valid from Italy to Poland, and from England to Egypt. Science in the Renaissance period is a concept in transition, with the attempt being made to move from a typical ancient, and then medieval, generalized conceptualization of all sciences (as ordered bodies of knowledge, a kind of wisdom) to a concentration on distinct areas of knowledge like medicine, astronomy, and so on. I speak of an "attempt" because the origins of the modern disciplines should be seen rather in the nineteenth century, and projects of encyclopedias of science, pansophic observation of reality, and the mixture of observation and speculation are as vital in the Renaissance as in the preceding and subsequent periods.

I would like to summarize here some results of the history of science in this period, concentrating on certain specific questions: Roth's negation of the "spirit of the new age"; the inclusion of the sciences in the educational curriculum; the role of antiquarian and encyclopedic works in disseminating the sciences, and new hermeneutic accents on the sciences and the Torah. The focus of this chapter will be a Jewish theologian, Rabbi Löw of Prague, and his legend, because he has been seen as epitomizing what we can call the exegetical interpretation and hermeneutic transfiguration of the new challenges and discoveries of the early modern period.

5.1 *The Spirit of the New Age*

On May 26, 1575, the daughter of Gabriel Ṣarfati gave birth to a creature with two heads and four hands but conjoined from the waist down. As an anonymous chronicle reports, news of the abnormal birth spread throughout the ghetto and among the neighboring Christians. It

became a sensation with a curious power of attraction. Due to constant exposure, but also in conformity with the high mortality rate in such cases, the Siamese twins died some eight days later. The story had no end. After their death, the family turned them over, as a "gift," to the *gemilut ḥasadim*, who preserved them in a solution and carried the embalmed remains of the monstrosities from place to place, trying to earn money by exhibiting this trick of nature.[17]

Abraham ben Hananiah Yagel, author of the *Gei Ḥizzayon*, the "Valley of Vision,"[18] a modern form of autobiography, reports this episode, taking it as a pretext for presenting a fictitious dialogue between the twins themselves, on their Siamese birth.

The most interesting aspect of the story is the attempts by Yagel, and his underlying source, to explain the phenomenon. The first explanation, proposed by the first twin, portrays this (abnormal) birth as a divine creation whose secret meaning escapes our knowledge. The second twin does not totally accept this explanation. He refuses to consider the abnormality solely as something unfathomable, although he acknowledges that "the essential reason is hidden to the eyes of all [who are] living and man truly is incapable of knowing it."[19]

> Nevertheless, [he adds] it is fitting that we should search for it [at least] as far as our arms reach. As the philosopher wrote in his introduction to the *Metaphysics*, every person by his very nature has a desire to know and understand everything; the little that we do understand of divine matters is good, etc.[20]

Yagel's use of the twins' story as a statement on epistemology sheds light on three important elements of the Jewish, and non-Jewish, attitude toward scientific thought and discoveries: (1) the rejection of a "simple" reference to divine creation, without any attempt to understand what it is possible to investigate; (2) the role of the empirical observation of "naked" but "strange" facts as an epistemological means of learning

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[17] For a detailed summary of the "occurrence" see Ruderman, *Valley of Vision*, 40ff., quoted below, to whom I am indebted for these notes.

[18] *Gei Ḥizzayon* (Alexandria: Mizrachi, 1880); English translation: *A Valley of Vision: The Heavenly Journey of Abraham ben Hananiah Yagel*, trans. from the Hebrew with an introduction and commentary by David B. Ruderman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990). On this book, see the study of David B. Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[19] Ruderman, *A Valley of Vision*, 141.

[20] Ibid.

the whole order of creation; (3) the use of non-Jewish authors such as Aristotle to support and even defend the alternative of a more rational understanding of natural phenomenon. This entire complex is what could be termed "scientific curiosity."

As I see it, curiosity[21] and necessity are the two main motives that drive scientific thought and discovery, and are operative as well in almost every aspect of human life. Curiosity is explained in the episode of the Siamese twins: it is based on the wish to explain everything that defies understanding within the categories of so-called normality. As modern epistemology of science maintains, one of the driving forces behind the development of the sciences is, without any doubt, the occurrence of new phenomena that cannot be interpreted using old, commonly accepted rules and theories, and which therefore require new explanations capable of explaining them. Moreover, those explanations should also be applicable to other observed phenomena. I am not arguing here that the world of Renaissance scholarship lay at the beginning of what Thomas Kuhn calls the theory of paradigms and revolution.[22] Nevertheless, this was the first step in that direction. It is no coincidence that the question of method, also echoed by Jewish intellectuals, first arises in this period. I would recall here Rabbi Loew's criticism of Azariah de' Rossi, which begins with the famous sentence: "And now, in our generation, which is characterized by imperfection and stupidity, there is someone standing up and speaking against holy men, who lived more than a millennium before us, and saying 'Observe my method and be wise'" (see below). The question of the *proper means* for acquiring knowledge will indeed be the central debate of the seventeenth century.

The second reason to produce science and art is much more important, as was claimed by Simone Luzzatto in 1638:

> The majority of men claim that nature has thrust upon them, and vexed them with, obligations and necessities in greater abundance than other animals, who are deprived of reason. But these men complain of duty, because poverty and need are the true stimuli and incentives that result

[21] On curiosity see Klaus Krüger, ed., *Curiositas: Welterfahrung und ästhetische Neugierde in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002); and Eleazer Gutwirth, "Jewish Bodies and Renaissance Melancholy: Culture and the City in Italy and the Ottoman Empire," in *The Jewish Body. Corporeality, Society, and Identity in the Renaissance and Early Modern Period*, ed. Maria Diemling and Giuseppe Veltri (Leiden: Brill, 2008) (in press).

[22] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

> in the inventions and discoveries of the most worthy and excellent arts, which so ennoble the human race.[23]

Seen from this perspective, the medical profession was not a "natural" vocation of the Jews, but an attempt to break the isolation of the Jewish community by offering the assistance and care required by everyone. It goes without saying that, in the initial stage, mastery of "oriental" languages was an advantage for Jews, giving them access to the medical literature in these languages. Around the beginning of the second half of the sixteenth century, and thanks to energetic editorial and translation activity by Christian scholars, the privileged Jewish position began to erode. Jewish scholars noted this change with worry, for which reason, as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Provençale brothers proposed to build a "Jewish university," designed to educate young scholars to deal with the challenges of the present.

5.2 *Educational and Encyclopedic Projects and the Sciences*

Jewish attitudes toward the place of the "sciences" in the curriculum are guided, in the main, by a pragmatic mentality and approach. In rabbinic times, the academies officially allowed only a certain elite to engage in the study of the *ḥokhmah yewwanit* ("Greek wisdom"), which included the so-called sciences, with the primary intent of understanding, or even influencing, imperial decisions regarding the Jews. In his *Moreh Nevukhim*, Maimonides explains interest in the foreign sciences as a reappropriation of wisdom that other peoples and scholars had stolen from Jewish sources.[24] In the Renaissance, the study of foreign sciences was considered both a challenge for the present, in completing the curriculum of a *vir doctus* (*ḥakham kolel*), and a fulfillment of pragmatic purposes for the Jewish community.

A first project of pedagogic importance was put forward by Abraham Provençale in his proposal to create a new academy (*waad*) in Mantua in 1564. In his view, the Jewish people were running the risk of losing their scholars, while the number of Christian experts in the sciences

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[23] *Discorso, consideration IV*. See *Discorso circa il stato de gl'Hebrei et in particolare dimoranti nell'inclita Città di Venetia* (Venice: Calleoni, 1638). The English translation is from a draft by Ariella Lang. A full English translation of the book will be soon published. For further details on Luzzatto see below, chapter 9.

[24] *Moreh*, I:71.

and technology was constantly increasing. Among the disciplines to be taught in such a college, he listed the study of the Torah, philosophy, Hebrew grammar, Latin, arithmetic, geometry, geography, and astrology. Commenting on Latin, he notes:

> Those who are versed in Latin can read scientific books dealing with logic, philosophy, and medicine and thus become acquainted with them step by step. In this way, students desiring to become physicians need not waste their time in a university among Christians, in sinful neglect of Jewish studies. On the contrary, through his own reading, he should inform himself gradually of all that he needs to know. Then, if he should later study in a university for a brief period, he will be able, with God´s help, to obtain his degree. But even those who do not as yet know any Latin may read such scientific books as have already been translated into Hebrew, and thus save time: for the basic thing in knowledge is not language but content.[25]

Provençale's program for an academy was not novel, and doubtless is in part derived from the ideas of Messer Leon and his pupil Yoḥanan Alemanno, who proposed the study of the *trivium* and *quadrivium* together with the study of halakhah and aggadah.[26] Messer Leon's goal was clearly to prepare the students for the study of medicine at the university. Also the study of astrology, proposed by Yoḥanan Alemanno, aims at searching out the influence of the stars on human health, a major branch of traditional astrology subsumed under the term "medical astrology."

A pragmatic, but purely skeptical, attitude is also to be found in R. Yeḥiel Nissim (Vitale)[27] da Pisa, *Minḥat Kena'ot*. For him, the natural sciences, such as geometry and medicine, are wisdom, whereas knowledge beyond

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[25] Gianfranco Miletto, "The Teaching Program of David ben Abraham and His Son Abraham Provenzali in Its Historical-Cultural Context," in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, ed. David Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 130–131.

[26] *Nofet Ṣufim*, I.13.12; *The Book of The Honeycomb's Flow by Judah Messer Leon*, ed. Isaac Rabinowitz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 141; see also Warren Harvey, "The Bible as Honeycomb: an Introduction to Rabbi Judah Messer Leon's Concept of Rhetoric," *Yavneh Review* 5 (1966): 47–57; Robert Bonfil, "'The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow' by Judah Messer Leon. The Rhetorical Dimension of Jewish Humanism in Fifteenth-Century Italy," in *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume*, ed. Barry Walfish, vol. 2 (Haifa: University Press, 1992), 21–33; Giulio Busi, "Retorica e poetica ebraica nei secoli XVI e XVII," in idem, *Il succo dei favi. Studi sull'umanesimo ebraico* (Bologna: Fattoadarte, 1992): 37–63.

[27] See Alessandro Guetta, "Religious Life and Jewish Erudition in Pisa: Yechiel Nissim da Pisa and the Crisis of Aristotelianism," *Journal des Études de la Cabale* 2 (1999), http://www.chez.com/jec2/alexpise.htm (accessed May 2008).

nature (namely metaphysics), which seeks to explain all phenomena through logical argumentation, is subject to doubt and arrives at false conclusions. An animated scholarly discussion took place concerning the world of the Torah and its connection to the theoretical and practical sciences, as the development of antiquarian and encyclopedic works proves.

The encyclopedic and antiquarian tendency of humanistic scholarship has also been studied from the perspective of *ars memoriae*, the art of memorizing the world of wisdom and sciences, as a technique that aimed at acquiring knowledge by constructing a harmonic and self-referential world of signs and symbols. Judaism adopts the genre of the encyclopedic organization of the universe of wisdom and sciences as an apologetic need, as a fence around the Torah. Jewish scholars wrote to provide those fellow Jews who had been attracted by the non-Jewish environment with a modern, i.e., humanist, garment in which to clothe accepted Jewish religious ideas and traditions—and, above all, to reappropriate traditions now believed to be of Christian or general origin. That is the case in antiquarian works like Azariah de' Rossi's *Me'or 'Enayim* and encyclopedias like Portaleone's *Shilṭe ha-gibborim*.[28] Azariah's collection of articles on different questions of Jewish antiquities tries to incorporate foreign sources into the evaluation of rabbinic *realia*.[29] His work is interesting for the history of the Jewish sciences as a first attempt to establish truth by comparing Jewish and non-Jewish sources, seeking to deconstruct rabbinic traditions on scientific observations as irrelevant for the modern sciences. That is, in principle, what Steinschneider termed the creation of "independent science," science that was not in contradiction with Jewish literature, which was favorably disposed toward theoretical and scientific subjects. Unfortunately, Steinschneider did not expressly mention that whoever attacked rabbinic tradition in the name of the "independent sciences" suffered a fate the same as, or similar to, that of Galileo Galilei.

In the case of the physician Abraham Portaleone's encyclopedic work, the scholar's primary aim is to comprehend the universe of knowledge, as already encrypted in the word of the written Torah. It is up to the reader to search out and find that universe. In his description of the

[28] Gianfranco Miletto, *Glauben und Wissen im Zeitalter der Reformation* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004).

[29] See chapter 4, below.

Temple of Solomon, he inserted many chapters on such secular sciences as biology and botany. The underlying assumption is that the Torah "owns" or subsumes all of the sciences, an opinion that was also shared by Azariah Figo in his sermons, published in 1648 under the title *Sefer binah le-'ittim*:

> Someone cannot be an astronomer without prior knowledge of physics and mathematics, nor a doctor without prior knowledge of natural philosophy. Nor can a person acquire any knowledge unless he is accustomed to logic. […] It follows, that one [field] justifies and prepares for the next, otherwise, the one that follows would have no foundation. But our Torah does not require any other wisdom nor any external knowledge, for everything is in it; it guides and informs itself with its own conclusions, principles, and ideas.[30]

Figo places the Torah at a higher level of knowledge, which he believes is more reliable than reason, because human reason is "weak, inadequate and bound to falter."[31]

That is also the opinion of Simone Luzzatto, who expressly raises the question of the validity of knowledge in general. Luzzatto's major work, the *Socrate overo dell'humano sapere*, is a very important milestone in modern skepticism, and his detailed introduction to the question of human knowledge is a testimony to the Venetian reception of European scholarship. In this work, he deals with the unreliability of the human senses, a topic popular in early modern philosophy of science, and calls to account the falsity of knowledge in general. Other rabbis before him, such as Abraham Portaleone, tried to resolve the conflict between science and religion by deriving all aspects of knowledge, even recent technical advances and discoveries such as gunpowder,[32] "philologically" from the Bible—an extreme consequence of the principle that all wisdom belongs to Israel, a notion also stated by Maimonides.[33]

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[30] Isaac Barzilay, *Between Reason and Faith: Anti-rationalism in Italian Jewish thought 1250–1650* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), 180.

[31] *Sefer binah le-'ittim*, vol. 2, sermon 43, p. 26b; Barzilay, *Between Reason*, 201.

[32] See Gianfranco Miletto, "Die Bibel als Handbuch der Kriegskunst nach der Interpretation Abraham ben David Portaleones," in *An der Schwelle zur Moderne. Juden in der Renaissance*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri and Annette Winkelmann (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 78–89.

[33] See Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim* I.71. What Maimonides is dealing with is an indirect reference to the legend of the "theft of wisdom" by non-Jews. See Giuseppe Veltri, "Dalla tesi giudeo-ellenistica del »plagio« dei Greci al concetto rabbinico del verus Israel: Disputa sullappartenenza della sofia," *Revista Catalana de Teologia* 17 (1992): 85–104 (ancient sources); idem, "The Humanist Sense of History and the Jewish Idea

Luzzatto's book is a skeptical approach to ancient and modern epistemology. His intention—as Ruderman, using Luzzato's own terms, rightly stresses—is to subvert "human knowledge" by adopting a mode of reflection that is "'tentative, sceptical, and doubting' rather than 'dogmatic and assertive.'"[34] In the introduction to the "benigno lettore," Luzzatto is unmistakably clear: "Socrates confutes human, not inspired, knowledge, which has been infused by a superior mind."[35] The most intriguing element of *Socrate*'s negative attitude to human knowledge is that Luzzatto presents here the most common achievements of the new sciences, negating their absolute validity. That is also the position of Rabbi Löw of Prague.

5.3 *The Sciences and Hermeneutics: Rabbi Löw of Prague*

Known as "the High Rabbi Löw" or by his Hebrew acronym, "the Maharal" (*Morenu Ha-Rabbi Liw'a*, "our teacher, [the] Rabbi Löw"), Judah b. Betzalel was portrayed in his lifetime above all as a Talmud teacher and rabbi. Due to numerous posthumous legends, however, which spread even beyond the world of the Ashkenazim, he became famous as the creator par excellence of the golem, and he was extolled as the rabbi who had been granted the highest possible favor, namely that of having been summoned to the *Hrad* (Prague Castle) by the

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of Tradition: Azaria de Rossi's Critique of Philo Alexandrinus," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2 (1995): 372–393 (humanist echoes); Norman Roth, "The Theft of Philosophy by the Greeks from the Jews," *Classical Folia* 32 (1978): 53–67; Eliezer Gutwirth, "The 'Stranger's Wisdom: Translation and Otherness in Fifteenth-Century Iberia," *Portuguese Studies* 13 (1997): 130–142. For an evaluation of Maimonides' statement, see Giuseppe Veltri, "Die humanistischen Wurzeln der 'jüdischen Philosophie': Zur Konzeption einer konfessionellen Ontologie und Genealogie des Wissens," *Die philosophische Aktualität der jüdischen Tradition*, ed. Werner Stegmaier (Frankfurter a. M: Suhrkamp 2000), 264–272.

[34] Ruderman, "Science," 163.

[35] *Socrate overo dell'humano sapere. Esercitio seriogiocoso di Simone Luzzatto Hebreo Venetiano. Opera nella quale si dimostra quanto sia imbecile l'humano intendimento, mentre non è diretto dalla divina rivelatione*, (Venice: Tomasini, 1651), 1: "…confuta Socrate il sapere humano, non l'inspirato, & infuso da mente superiore." On this aspect, see also David B. Ruderman, "Science and Scepticism: Simone Luzzatto on Perceiving the Natural World," in idem, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 161–184; Ariel Viterbo, "La mitzwàh di studiare le scienze nell'opera di Rav Simchah (Simone) Luzzatto," *Segulat Israel* 4 (1997): 54–67; idem, "Socrate nel ghetto: lo scetticismo mascherato di Simone Luzzatto," *Studi Veneziani* 38 (1999): 79–128.

German Emperor Rudolf II, to discuss with him secret matters (Kabbalah and alchemy).

Until well into the 1950s, Rabbi Judah had received scant attention from scholars. Indeed, Gershom Scholem wrote in 1957 that Löw's writings were "well-nigh forgotten."[36] In the last thirty years, however, scholarly interest in his work has undergone a veritable revival. Innumerable studies have been, and are being, devoted to different aspects of his *Weltanschauung* and philosophy. Rabbi Löw is even regarded as the only philosopher of the Ashkenazic world of his day to have constructed a school of thought with wider significance.[37]

Judah Löw was among the leading lights of Prague Jewry's so-called *aetas aurea*. This Golden Age was a short period in which an atmosphere of relative tolerance between Christians and Jews is said to have prevailed, lasting from the end of the sixteenth century until about 1611.[38] Löw left behind a legacy steeped in legend but pallid in historical detail, as if his pupils and contemporaries had intentionally tried to imbue him with a saintly aura, rather than pass down authentic facts about the nature of his work. But he is also one of those figures who themselves contribute to a fusing of their own lives with their teachings and politics, to the extent that it would be hazardous to undertake any analysis of his ideas without taking all these factors into consideration.

The following is thus an attempt to sketch the main strands of his vita, interwoven with some of the ideas of his theological system. At the outset, however, it should be pointed out that changes and developments in his thought are hardly noticeable. It was not unusual for Rabbi Löw to prepare his writings and sermons in a parallel fashion, a sign of his efforts to have his systematic teachings appear consistent and monolithic.

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[36] Gershom Scholem, *Die jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1957), 372.

[37] Thus Jacob Katz, *Ben yehudim le-goyim* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1960), 140.

[38] Thus Leopold Zunz, *Zur Geschichte und Literatur*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Veit und Comp, 1845; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1976), 269: "The happiest epoch of all of Prague's Jewish community seems to have been the last quarter of that [scil. sixteenth] century until about 1611 during the reign of Rudolf, when Rabbi Löw was the chief rabbi and the generous Mardochai ben Samuel Meisel leader of the community."

On His Life and Work

The Maharal was born at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Due to the lack of reliable sources, it is extremely difficult to ascertain any more precise details about his life. As a rule, most modern scholars follow the speculations of his first biographer and distant relative Moses Meir Perels, who in 1718 authored a "Book of the Genealogy of the Maharal of Prague" (*Megillat Yuḥasin Maharal mi-Prag*) for his relative Isaiah Katz.[39] Because of this family connection, it is usually assumed that the contents of Perels's memoirs were somehow reported to him, but no proof for this is available.

Perels's *Genealogy* turns out to be a hagiography. This is already evident in the places where the author praises the virtuousness and erudition of the whole Löw family, namely Judah's great-grandfather, his grandfather Chayyim, his father Betsalel, and the Maharal's own four sons. It is no mere coincidence that the biographer underscores the origins of the Löw family: he wants to stress precisely the line of continuity from Judah to his great-grandfather, claiming that on the younger man's tombstone in Prague the following words were engraved:

> Our master and teacher, the Rabbi Judah Liw'ai. And this for Judah, as a teaching and a testimony, a sage, versed in the six orders of the Talmud; in the whole world there is nobody who can equal him in acuity of understanding and comprehensive knowledge and memory. He is from the line of the Ge'onim, who are descended from our Lord David, the son of Isai.[40]

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[39] Meir Perels, *Megillat Yuḥasin Maharal mi-Prag* (Warsaw: n.p., 1864). A German translation by Salomon H. Lieben is available: "Megillath Juchassin Mehral miprag. Die Deszendenztafel des hohen Rabbi Löw von Rabbi Meir Perels," *Jahrbuch der jüdisch-literarischen Gesellschaft* 20 (1929): 315–336. A thorough analysis and discussion of the sources and secondary literature on Löw's life is provided by Byron L. Sherwin, *Mystical Theology and Social Dissent. The Life and Works of Judah Loew of Prague* (London: Littman, 1982), 187–189.

[40] Lieben, "Megillath Juchassin," 320. To my knowledge, however, such a tombstone is not preserved. Perels's reliability is to be doubted. He writes [according to Lieben's German translation] about Rabbi Löw's tombstone thus: "He [scil. R. Löw] rests with his wife under a tombstone, and because of the pious modesty of both of them, neither the title of Rabbi nor Rabbi's Wife is mentioned, but only: Here rests (!) R. Jehuda ben Bezalel and his like-minded wife Perels, daughter of R. Samuel." The rendering is quite imprecise and does not at all correspond to the wording of the tombstone, which has been preserved. On the latter, see Otto Muneles, ed., *Epitaphs from the Ancient Jewish Cemetery of Prague* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Menahem Press, 1988), no. 162, 272–278.

Some of the problems in the biography of Löw and his family are elegantly solved by Perels. This is the case, for instance, with the question of the supposed reason for Löw's migration to the East. Perels considers Poland to have already been a center of scholarship in the days of grandfather Ḥayyim. This is supposed to explain why Judah's father, Betsalel, moved to Poland despite the difficulties involved. Indeed, it is true that this country was noted for its scholarship at that time: Jacob Polak (1460–1532) and later his pupils Solomon Luria (1510–1574) and Moses Isserles (d. 1572) taught there. But it was actually the general anti-Jewish climate of fifteenth-century Germany, with its diverse expulsions and pogroms, that would have been the more likely catalyst to migration.[41]

Perels states that Löw was born in 1512. Nathan Grün, who published the first critical biography of R. Löw in 1885,[42] already voiced doubts about the reliability of this claim. Based on observations concerning the birth date of the Maharal's older brother Ḥayyim, a school comrade of Moses Isserles, he suggests an alternative to Perels's view. His proposed date of 1520 is, however, even more problematic, as Byron L. Sherwin has thoroughly demonstrated. Determination of the exact birth date is, accordingly, extremely difficult, while it is clear that only the period from 1512 (Perels) to 1525 (a date provided without further evidence)[43] comes into question.

In Löw's case, establishing his exact date of birth is not merely an idle pursuit. It is worth noting that it is primarily scholars who prefer him to have attained biblical longevity. This makes it possible to date the beginning of his published teachings to his mature years. André Neher, a French scholar who has devoted several important studies to the Maharal, writes on this point: "We take 1512 to be the year of the Maharal's birth. No serious reason can be invoked for a later date, for this would have the effect of shortening the Maharal's life and of making his oeuvre a more youthful product."[44] It is difficult to support this

[41] On this, see Bernard D. Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100 to 1800* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973), 39 and n. 26 (p. 339); cf. Sherwin, *Theology*, 25.

[42] Nathan Grün, *Der hohe R. Löw und sein Sagenkreis* (Prague: Jakob B. Brandeis, 1885).

[43] *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 10 (1971), 374. Neither does the new edition (2007) explain this choice of date.

[44] André Neher, *Le puits de l'exil. Tradition et modernité: la pensée du Maharal de Prague*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991), 10 n. 2: "Nous adoptons la date de 1512 pour

dubious reasoning. Perels's claims are not historically reliable, regardless of any bearing the rabbi's longevity may have on an evaluation of his work—a connection Neher has still failed to explain.

Although Worms is often mentioned in the secondary literature as the rabbi's birthplace, there is no historical documentation to confirm this. Even Perels's text, which clearly speaks of him as emigrating from Worms, cannot be adduced as proof. The assertion that Löw's family originally hailed from this Rhineland town is doubtless correct, for ancestors of his had flourished there: his great-grandfather, Judah, after whom he was named, was the maternal uncle of Avigdor ben Isaac Kara (d. 1439), chief rabbi of Prague, who was said to have had a special relationship with King Wenceslas IV of Bohemia (1378–1419). There are, however, two sources that allow us to assume, with good reason, that R. Judah was born in Polish Poznan: an autobiographical remark by his older brother Ḥayyim, according to which he himself was born in Poznan;[45] and a responsum by Solomon Luria, according to which his grandfather Isaac Klauber, a relative of Löw's family, had lived in Poznan, as had also been the case with Löw's family.[46]

Nothing is known about Löw's youth. In this respect, too, his biographer Perels is at pains to blend the historical with the legendary. A third of his story about Löw's vita is concerned with the circumstances surrounding his marriage to Mrs. R. Löw, since criminally corrupt courts had left her wealthy father with "nothing but his bare life," and only by a miracle did she manage to obtain a dowry and thus marry the respected rabbi. It is worth our while to look at this episode in Lieben's verbatim translation:[47]

> From my fathers I heard that at the age of 32 he [scil. R. Löw] took a wife under special circumstances. Namely, he was betrothed to the daughter of the (community's) leading official, the honorable and glorious Rabbi Samuel, son of R. Jacob, who through wealth, property and good standing was a great man of his day and also had close relations to the

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la naissance du Maharal, aucune raison sérieuse ne pouvant être invoquée pour une date postérieure, qui aurait pour effet de raccourcir la vie due Maharal et de rajeunir son œuvre."

[45] See Ḥayyim ben Betsalel's introduction to his book *Wikuaḥ Mayim Ḥayyim*; and also Byron L. Sherwin, "In the Shadows of Greatness: Rabbi Hayyim b. Betsalel of Friedberg," *Jewish Social Studies* 37 (1975): 35–61 (here p. 36).

[46] Solomon Luria, *She'elot u-teshuvot Maharshal*, 7th ed. (Jerusalem: Otsar ha-Sefarim, 1969), no. 12; cf. Sherwin, *Theology*, 196 n. 1.

[47] Lieben, "Megillath Juchassin," 322.

court; this "rich Schmelke," as he was called, sent him to Przemysl at his expense to study with Gaon Maharshal.[48] Schmelke himself had a very respected son in Przemysl named Joshua Schmelke, from whom the line of the Schmelkes branches off, e.g., the Gaon our master and teacher, the rabbi Rabbi Schmelke from Ostra, and the Gaon our master and teacher Schmelke, head of the Levites. Horvitz, who was the head of the court of the holy Trani community, the son of the great rabbi our master and teacher Joshua haaruch (?), head of the Levites.

Meanwhile four evil, criminal courts fell over Prague, and the man was so fleeced by them that only his bare life was left him. The man was already old, advanced in years and unable to move about as before; he therefore wrote his son-in-law that it was impossible for him to carry out his duties, but he did not want, God forbid, to make marriage impossible for him; therefore he was leaving it up to him to enter another marriage if he saw fit to do so.

However, the son-in-law replied to him that he did want to keep his promise, but—if he [i.e., Schmelke] feared she would otherwise remain unmarried—he should marry her off elsewhere; then he would know what to do, (for) he hoped for God's help. The bride now set up a business for herself, in order to feed her elderly parents by selling bread and other baked goods.

It was then a time of war; one day there came a rider on horseback, a spear in his hand, who thrust it into a loaf of bread, intending to make off with it. The maiden grasped the reins of the horse and wept and implored him not to rob her of the bread, as she was poor and had to feed her aged parents with her little business. The rider answered: "Look, I've been gripped by hunger; for three days now I have tasted no bread, should I then die of hunger? On my horse I have a Pastav (?) cloth which I'll give to you as a pawn for the loaf of bread; (even) if I bring you the two groschen for it within 24 hours, take the cloth as compensation."

And so it happened. After a longer while she opened up the cloth and found gold ducats amidst all its seams. Whereupon he [scil. the father] wrote and let his son-in-law know that he wanted to come to the wedding, for through a miracle he had become rich. At that time the bride was 28 years old, the bridegroom 32; her name was Perel, a pearl (Perle) with no imperfections.

The story with its fairytale-like features serves to extol, in literary fashion, the virtuousness of Löw's wife, from whom Perels's family name descended. The only historical fact to be derived from this story is the legend of the origin of Perels's family. If it does contain a historical core, then it is the information that Judah Löw was quite poor. In the financing of his rabbinical studies, he was supported by his father-in-law.

[48] I.e., Solomon Luria.

Only once does Rabbi Löw speak of his teachers, and then without naming any names.[49] By contrast, his brother Ḥayyim shows no reluctance to mention (in his introduction to the *Be'er Mayim Ḥayyim*) his teacher Sefardi, who had instructed him in the Pentateuch with Rashi's commentary. The fact that Rabbi Löw does not mention his teachers does not necessarily imply that he wished to distance himself from them.[50] It indicates rather his awareness that he was the *homo novus* of the new generation. Löw seldom refers to contemporary scholars by name. Apart from his brother Ḥayyim, he cites the following figures and works in his polemics: Azariah de' Rossi's (ca. 1511–1578) *Me'or 'Enayim* (Light of the Eyes), Eliezer Ashkenazi's (1513–1586) *Ma'aseh ha-Shem* (The Deed of the Lord) and Don Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508). Moses Isserles and his *Torat ha-'Olah* (The Teaching of the Whole Sacrifice) are not mentioned explicitly, but are, however, referred to implicitly several times.[51] This silence, as well as the harsh polemics he directs against his contemporaries, is consciously intended to highlight the "stupidity"—a word he often uses—of his generation. This aspect also has ontological connotations (see details below).

The verifiable facts of his biography concern the period from 1559 to 1573, when Löw—according to the historiographer David Gans—was rabbi of Nikolsburg and chief rabbi of Moravia.[52] His leadership of the Jewish community of Moravia demonstrates how closely his personal experiences, and consequently his plans for the reform of Jewish life, were bound up with his philosophical premises. During his time as chief rabbi of Moravia, the statutes that had been in effect until then were codified. The first 311 paragraphs, which, under the direction of Menahem Krochmal, served after 1662 as the basis of a binding canon for the Moravian Jewish communities, dealt with matters of education and schools, the funding of support for Palestine, the standardization of the election of the elders, and the organization of the community. It is

[49] In his sermon on the Great Sabbath published in 1589 (*Derasha le-Sabbat ha-gadol*).

[50] Sherwin, *Theology*, 197 n. 9.

[51] For the details, see Sherwin, *Theology*, 25.

[52] Cf. David Gans, *Zemah David*, Anno 352, quoted according to the edition: *Zemah David. A Chronicle of Jewish and World History (Prague, 1592)*, ed. Mordechai Breuer (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), 145f.

not certain, however, which of these statutes date back to the sixteenth century and the influence of Rabbi Löw.[53]

The task of reorganizing the Jewish communities was twofold in nature: political, developing as it did out of the circumstances of the rabbinical office in Moravia; and theoretical, resulting from reflections on the rabbinical office. Throughout his work Rabbi Löw complains about the then prevailing situation, in which a rabbi's election was subject to government influence,[54] and the term of office was limited to only three years. In this way, the rabbis were compelled to follow the will of the community, as they would otherwise fear not being re-elected. Moravia's *Constitutiones* contain a prayer, usually ascribed to Rabbi Löw, for those who obtained their office without the benefit of government influence.

Rabbi Löw's concern that the rabbinical leadership would lose its authority if it were influenced by lay people and their demands—which indeed corresponded to the situation at that time—was, above all, of a theological nature, at least in the reasoning behind it. A rabbi's authority did not derive from his election by the community, but rather from the *semikhah*, the rabbinic ordination. A rabbi, like a king, should be able to assume the leadership of his people; and as a king is distinct from his entourage, so is a rabbi distinct from his followers. He should be the *forma*, and the community his *materia*. While the emphasis on the royal dignity of the rabbinical office reflects the messianic expectations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, basing its authority on the *semikhah* probably reflects a parallel discussion in the world of Christianity. The papal view of the priesthood, which had been expressed in the Council of Trent some decades before, emphasized specifically its separation from the community, which was why, for example, priests were vowed to celibacy. According to the Council, he owed his vested authority not, as Luther thought, to the community, but to his ordination by the bishop in his jurisdiction.

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[53] On this, see Helmut Teufel, "Zur politischen und sozialen Geschichte der Juden in Mähren vom Antritt der Habsburger bis zur Schlacht am Weißen Berg (1526–1620)" (PhD diss., Friedrich-Alexander Universität, Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1971), 302–305.

[54] Moses Isserles offered another opinion, basing his argument on the principle that "The law of the king is the law in force." Accordingly, he recognized the appointment of a rabbi by the king.

A further problem, which likewise had theological-philosophical implications and was presumably also raised in Moravia, concerned the use of non-Jewish wine. The reason for its prohibition had already been provided by classical rabbinic Judaism: as non-Jewish wine may have served as a libation for idolatrous purposes, a Jew who drank of it could thus be guilty of idolatry. Most authorities, however, had ended up sanctioning its use because Christians were not (or were no longer) regarded as idolaters.[55] Löw's resistance to this relaxation of the rabbinic halakhah was due less to the tendency to no longer treat Christians as idolaters, than to the need to preserve the isolation of the Jewish community. Israel, the first effect of the creation, is the "form," and the nations are the "substance." That Israel is a community of "chosen" people is no accident, but the very determinant of its being. In the exodus from Egypt, and in accepting the gift of the Torah on Mount Sinai, Israel chose between "being" and "not-being."

In *Gevurot ha-Shem* 72 (cf. *Tif'eret Yisra'el* 1) R. Löw explains the relationship between Israel, to whom the gifts of the Holy Spirit and of prophecy were vouchsafed, and the other nations, as a natural (God-given?) one between human beings and other creatures: human beings were bestowed with an intellect higher than that of other creatures. The nations had no such natural disposition from the outset. In this way, he explains the rabbinic aggadah about the rejection of the Torah by the nations of the world.[56] Therefore, the nations and Israel share no common ground; between them is only opposition, as between form and substance, which are only in antithesis to each other.

Neither privately, nor as a rabbi, was his life in Moravia crowned by great success; this circumstance comes to light in a polemic against an odd custom that is known as "Nadlerism."[57] *Nadler* is Middle High German for "bastard," a widely used swearword at the time, especially among the upper classes. Nadlerism thus came to be used as a term for the use of nasty swearwords, such as "bastard," by Jews against fellow Jews. In his ethical treatise *Netivot 'Olam*, Löw quotes a letter from his former pupil Israel of Moravia. Besides excessively praising Rabbi Löw,

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[55] In the Middle Ages, this issue was a *vexata quaestio*; see Louis Jacobs, *A Tree of Life. Diversity, Flexibility and Creativity in Jewish Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 93f.

[56] On this aspect, see Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance. Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford: University Press, 1961), 140–141. On this point, Katz thinks R. Löw was relying on Judah Halevy, *Kusari*.

[57] See Sherwin, *Theology*, 31, 169–172.

Israel complains that the rabbinic authorities were not succeeding in preventing the scandal of Nadlerism within the Jewish community. If Rabbi Löw, however, would only take a stand on it, then the Jewish people of Moravia would obey and the problem would be eliminated.[58] Whether Israel of Moravia actually wrote him such a letter cannot be conclusively determined. However, we have good reason to doubt that Rabbi Löw's authority was so highly respected that everyone would have approved of his intervention. From the "letter" we can infer that it was precisely the rabbi's claim to authority that was being called into question, at least in this matter, since Rabbi Löw, as chief rabbi of Moravia, had also not been able to solve this problem.

This conclusion is confirmed by another source, where we learn about his special interest in the subject. Solomon Luria, already mentioned above, treats Nadlerism in *Yad shel Shelomo* and in several of his responsa. In fact, in one responsum he condemns Nadlerism with reference to a particular family who had been affected by it: Rabbi Löw's own family. In view of this, the "letter" takes on a very personal dimension: Rabbi Löw's complaint that he suffered from a continual loss of authority in Moravia and his struggle against an unpleasant custom under which he himself suffered.

Under his direction, a meeting of all the rabbis in Moravia took place in 1573. What they discussed has not been handed down.[59] It is also not certain whether doubts were cast on R. Löw's leadership at this meeting, or whether his reform plans were quashed, as some scholars maintain. It is a matter of certainty, however, that for unknown reasons he resigned his office in 1573 and moved to Prague, where, with the support of the Jewish patron Marcus Mordekhai Mayzl (Meisel), he was appointed head of the Klaus synagogue (Die Klaus).[60] The move

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[58] *Netivot 'Olam*, Netiv ha-lashon, 8.

[59] On this, see Hugo Schwenger, "Geschichte der Juden in Lundenburg," in *Die Juden und Judengemeinden Mährens in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, ed. Hugo Gold (Brünn-Prag: Jüdischer Buch- und Kunstverlag, 1929), 321 and 328, no. 8.

[60] Hardly any critical historical literature about the personality of Mayzl (Meisel or Meysel) is available. In an essay published in 1893, Alexander Kisch clearly pointed out Maysel's role as R. Löw's patron; see Alexander Kisch, "Das Testament Mardochai Meysels mitgetheilt und nach handschriftlichen Quellen beleuchtet," *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 37 (1893): 25–40, 82–91, 131–146, esp. 87–88: "Without a doubt it seems to me that Meisel's great humanistic deeds are partly due to R. Löw's spiritual inspiration, and, conversely, that the work of the high Rabbi was only possible because of Meisel's material support." See now Giuseppe Veltri, "'Ohne Recht und Gerechtigkeit': Rudolph II. und sein Bankier Markus Meyzl," in

to Prague apparently implied no loss of personal authority, because Mayzl's patronage had considerable weight, both within the community and outside it. One episode illustrates this point. Ten years after the founding of the *Ḥevrah Qadisha*, the "holy society" responsible for religious burials, it became necessary to draw up new statutes in order to continue carrying out this work. It was not the incumbent rabbi of Prague, Isaac Melnik, who was entrusted with the task, however, but Rabbi Löw.[61]

When Isaac Melnik died, in 1578, R. Löw would seem to have been the most promising candidate for the vacant rabbinical post of Prague. A confirmation of this impression is the invitation he received to deliver the sermon for the Sabbath of Repentance (*Shabbat Tshuvah*) in the Old-New Synagogue (*Altneuschul*)—a privilege normally reserved for Prague's chief rabbi. It is difficult to establish whether it was the contents of his quite vehement sermon, or even internal conflicts within the community, that were to blame for his failure to secure the office.[62] Instead of R. Löw, his brother-in-law Isaac Ḥayyot became Melnik's successor. This choice could be interpreted as being directed against R. Löw, because R. Ḥayyot subscribed to the *pilpul* (lit. "pepper") hermeneutical method (i.e., sharp-witted handling of the casuistry of halakhic and haggadic questions), a method that R. Löw opposed, considering it dangerous for the education of young people.

A paucity of sources leaves us without certainty about Löw's life from 1578 to 1597. Between 1584 and 1587 he seems to have been chief rabbi of Poznan, and from 1588 to 1592 once again head of the Klaus synagogue. In 1589, he delivered a sermon on the occasion of the Great Sabbath (*Shabbat ha-Gadol*) of Passover. Although the post of chief rabbi was vacant, his candidacy was again refused and Rabbi Mordekhai Yaffe was selected instead. Presumably with the help of the influential Mayzl, he had a meeting with the German Emperor Rudolf II, as David Gans reports.[63] What they discussed, however, has not been handed down. The opinion of the historiographer David Gans, who claims that they dealt with "coded, sealed, hidden things" should not be understood as

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An der Schwelle zur Moderne: Juden in der Renaissance, ed. Giuseppe Veltri and Annette Winkelmann (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 233–255.

[61] Here I am following the interpretation of Sherwin, *Theology*, 30. Considerable doubts remain, however: Did Löw owe his authority primarily to Mayzl's influence or rather to the low opinion in which Melnik was held?

[62] Cf. Grün, *Der Hohe R. Löw*, 19–22.

[63] *Zemah David*, Anno 352.

meaning that Rudolf II and R. Löw talked about esoterica, in particular alchemy and Kabbalah, but merely that the subject matter was kept secret. This is also the most reasonable interpretation of the tradition originating with Löw's son-in-law, Isaac Katz, according to which Löw and Rudolf spoke about *nistarot* ("something secret").[64]

Several months after paying the visit to the *Hrad*, R. Löw left Prague and moved to Poznan where he became chief rabbi of Poland. In 1597, he returned to Prague once more, where he held the rabbinical office from 1599 until his death in 1609. His time as chief rabbi was not a quiet one. The attempt to set up his son Bezalel as his direct successor in the office failed. Thereupon, his only son left Prague for the Bohemian town of Kolin, where he died shortly afterward, in 1600. In the following year R. Löw suffered a second major loss: his patron, Marcus Mordekhai Mayzl, died on March 14, 1601; as a result, the Prague community lost an influential connection to the court of the emperor. The bitter consequences of this loss were first felt later that year when the president of the Bohemian Chamber and Emperor Rudolf II confiscated Mayzl's entire property: the cash alone amounted to 516,250 gulden. In the following year, the Jewish community had to endure a rather gloomy episode. On July 27, 1602, R. Löw, along with other community figures, was arrested in the town hall, accused by two informers of the murder of Elias Pollak. In consequence, the synagogues of the city were closed. Only after the payment of a large sum of money were those arrested set free. This obscure episode from R. Löw's life came to light only recently, when Abraham David discovered a chronicle of the Jews of Prague dating back to 1615.[65] The episode—assuming it really took place—documents that any goodwill the emperor may have previously shown toward Prague's Jews turned sour following the death of the banker and patron Mayzl—that is to say, the true avaricious face of imperial politics revealed itself. Similarly, it can be inferred that use of the term *aetas aurea* with reference to the circumstances of Prague Jewry at this time must be considered extremely problematic, at least for the later part of Rudolf's rule.

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[64] For other opinions see Robert J. W. Evans, *Rudolf II and His World. A Study in Intellectual History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), chapters 6–7; Ben Zion Bokser, *From the World of the Cabbalah: The Philosophy of Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 47.

[65] English translation in Abraham David, *A Hebrew Chronicle from Prague, c. 1615* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 55–67.

Judah Löw died in 1609. His tomb, as Me'ir Perels reports, is "a very handsome, splendid construction," which can still be admired today. He was buried there together with his wife. The legends of the rabbi who met with the emperor and created the golem began to evolve only later.

Rabbi Löw's literary production is impressive. The most widely used edition of his works, which is, however, by no means complete, numbers eighteen volumes. Much has certainly been lost or was destroyed in the fire that engulfed Prague in 1689. Indeed, hardly any of the halakhic writings and responsa are extant, although he doubtless had to make many such decisions in the course of his work as a rabbi. Of his extant works, the following deserve special mention:

(1) *Gur Aryeh* (The Lion's Cub), a supercommentary on Rashi's commentary on the Pentateuch, which appeared in 1578;
(2) the encyclopedic, anonymously published (1582) *Gevurot ha-Shem* (The Powers of God), where he sketched a plan for his future literary activity;
(3) *Tif'eret Yisra'el* (1599, The Glory of Israel), dedicated to the festival of Shavu'ot, and dealing with revelation;
(4) *Neṣaḥ Yisra'el*, a book bearing the imprint of messianic ideas, which Löw dedicated to the Ninth of Av; published in 1600, it deals with exile and salvation.

Other works not included in his original plan and dedicated to Jewish festivals are:

(5) *Or Ḥadash* (The New Light) for Purim;
(6) *Ner Miṣvah* (Candelabra of the Commandment) for Hanukkah.

These appeared together with the apologetic work:

(7) *Be'er ha-Golah* (The Fountain of Exile) in 1600.

In addition, two ethical works appeared in 1589 and 1595:

(8) *Derekh Ḥayyim* (The Way of Life) and
(9) *Netivot ha-'Olam* (The Eternal Paths), a commentary on the Mishnaic tractate *Pirqe Avot* (The Sayings of the Fathers).

In the end, Löw's entire, wide-ranging literary oeuvre is, in fact, only a single continuous commentary, and a study of Talmudic stories, the Aggadot, to which he devoted a further, specialized commentary:

(10) *Ḥiddushe Aggadot (*Commentary on the Aggadot), which has only recently been discovered and published.

Hermeneutic Approach and Scientific Achievements

Löw saw himself as a commentator on and exegete of the Jewish past, the wisdom vouchsafed by God to the people of Israel. When wisdom is given, once and for all time, the task of the recipient consists in jealously guarding the treasure and carefully passing it on to future generations. Seen in this way, it is possible to understand his harsh polemics against the typical humanist view of the past, which was characterized by an approach that drew upon recent scientific achievements and was critical of the "simple-minded" past. In his polemic with Azariah de' Rossi of Mantua, R. Löw formulates his conception of the past in clear and, at times, even outlandish polemical language; this conception of the past forms the background to his philosophy of Judaism as an ontological unit. It was concerned above all with truth, and the authority of the rabbinic tradition derived from it.

Several centuries earlier, Maimonides (1136–1204) had already expressed doubts as to the historical credibility of the non-legal rabbinic literature, interpreting it in a rationalist-literary way. In his *Moreh Nevukhim* (Guide for the Perplexed, 1190) he described the Aggadot as "poetic parables."[66] Critics regarded this attitude as dangerous, not only because of reservations about Maimonides' rationalist slant, but also in view of the danger of Christian exploitation of internal Jewish quarrels. One need only mention that the evaluation of the rabbinic storytelling art, the aggadah, was one of the main subjects of the compulsory disputations of Paris in 1240 (Nicholas Donin and R. Yehi'el ben Yosef), of Barcelona in 1263 (Fray Pablo Christiani and Moses b. Nachman), and of Tortosa in 1413–1414 (Geronimo de Santa Fe and Joseph Albo).[67] In any case, rabbinic writings were spoken of in

[66] William G. Braude, "Maimonides' Attitude Towards Midrash," in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography, History and Literature in Honor of I. E. Kiev*, ed. Charles Berlin (New York: Ktav, 1971), 75–82; see also my "Zur jüdischen und christlichen Wertung der Aggada," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 22 (1995): 61–75.

[67] On this, see Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial. Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Littman, 1982).

denigrating terms. Petrus Venerabilis, for instance, referred to them as "diabolici libri."[68]

Not until the Renaissance, however, did the subject of Judaism's critical attitude to its own tradition lead to an open dispute, when the Mantuan scholar Azariah de' Rossi, influenced also by the thinking of Christian contemporaries, dismissed the Aggadot as unreliable, and considered them to be an invention whose significance was primarily ethical. Azariah was of the opinion that the Aggadot could not be considered history and ought not to be taken literally,[69] since they consisted of "fabricated conjectures." He reached this opinion, however, based on a comparison of pagan, Christian, and Jewish sources. One of the most famous examples he cites, as proof that the aggadah is a fabrication, is its treatment of the death of the emperor Titus. The aggadah, which regarded him as deserving of punishment for the destruction of the Temple, attributed his death to a mosquito, which, after the Jewish War, had gotten into his nose and bored itself into his brain. The creature was found during the autopsy which Titus himself had ordered, but the rabbis voiced differing opinions about its—in any case enormous—size and appearance. Azariah disputed this fairy tale, not only because of its physiological impossibility, but also—and this was something new—on the basis of non-Jewish descriptions of the death of Titus, who died of a fever, perhaps malaria, which at least still had a certain connection to the deadly insect.[70]

Rabbi Löw saw Azariah's ideas as being opposed to Jewish tradition; thus, he sharply attacked them in the sixth chapter of his apology for Judaism, his tractate "Fountain of Exile" (*Be'er ha-Golah*), which appeared in 1600:

> I would have already ended what I had to say, if a book from someone belonging to our people had not reached my hands. I was told that the book contains some new ideas. When I saw it, I was very pleased, as a bridegroom is very pleased when he looks at his bride. While reading it, however, my heart broke and my spirit poured out in my insides. Woe unto the eyes that have seen it! Woe unto the ears that have heard such words! Cursed be the day that these things were published and made known! A human being who is not in a position to understand the words

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[68] Hans Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte (11.–13. Jh.)* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1991), 186.

[69] On this, see Joanna Weinberg, "The Me'or 'Enayim of Ayariah de' Rossi: A Critical Study and Selected Translations" (PhD diss., London, 1982), 219.

[70] Weinberg, "Me'or 'Enayim," 224; see also my "Wertung der Aggada," 73ff.

> of the Sages, not even one of the most minor points, much less the deeper ones? How could he dare to speak against them and to discuss with them as if they were men of his generation or even his fellows?

Rabbi Löw vehemently refuses any comparison of the rabbinic authorities with the new scholarly disciplines. In his view, even the mere mention of foreign authorities was to be rebuked:[71]

> Each generation has its scholars, each its sages. Have we had anything to compare with them? If you look attentively at them, you will find that the *Amora'im* did not contradict their predecessors (*rishonim*), the *Tanna'im.* Also the successors of the *Amora'im* did not contradict them, being well aware of their worth. Indeed, those who follow are not the equals of those who have gone earlier, who were close to the Prophets. And now, in our generation, which is characterized by imperfection and stupidity, someone is standing up and speaking against the holy ones who lived more than a millennium before us and saying: "Observe my method and be wise!" In several places, he has drawn upon the support of worldly and idolatrous writings and treated the words of our sacred Sages, who were faithful to God, like trivial and inconstant speeches.

The ideas that the Maharal would obviously like to combat are contained in Azariah's work, quoted above:[72]

> Moreover, there is a second thing [to take into account], which is a matter of course for every honest person, and that is, that what is found in their [the rabbis'] works about science, such as, e.g., astrology, the form of heaven and earth, etc., comes entirely from their human comprehension. For they devoted themselves to their inquiries, each according to his intellectual gifts or on the basis of what he received as tradition from the Sages of the preceding generations, from whatever nation. All this occurred with the gifts of the Prophets or their help. In this area [of science] we are permitted, with their consent, to listen to those who wrote against them and to investigate the issues according to our knowledge.… Truly, after what the predecessors (*rishonim*) accomplished has come (down) to the descendants (*aḥaronim*) and gone beyond what they (the descendants) themselves achieved, doesn't it seem that the parable of the dwarf riding on the shoulders of giants applies to these very attainments, a parable that the author of the *Shibbole ha-Leqeṭ* mentions in the name of an ancient Sage in his introduction? In this way one can rightfully claim that the superiority, which the First possess over the Last with respect to prophecy—because they were closer to the Prophets—corresponds to

[71] On this text see also the preceding chapter, pp. 93–95.
[72] *Me'or 'Enayim*, Imre Bina 14 (Cassel, 196); see below.

> that which the Last possess over the First in the newly sprouting branch of science and experimentation.

Azariah gives us clearly to understand that in his study of the past he represents the principle of individual judgment. He was a scholar, who in his studies refers to the achievements of scientific analysis. Thus his work is an echo of the *Querelle des anciens et des modernes*,[73] which took place in the Renaissance despite, or probably precisely because of, the cult of reverence for antiquity.

The idea that is expressed by Maharal is, however, Platonic in nature: in the beginning, wisdom was perfect; from the fall of man up to our time, things have only been going downhill. The sources of wisdom have already been sealed. In his worldview, the earlier generations are closer to the truth than the later ones, which is the reason why all criticism is *per se* taboo. Hope rests in the *tiqqun ʿolam*, the restoration of the original status. If the profane sciences, where we can use them, contradict the texts of the Sages, then it is our fault. Because of the decline of wisdom, this does not permit us to draw any conclusions about the truth of tradition.

As for the legend about Titus, once again the Maharal affirms that Azariah has not understood anything. The story is the expression of a deeper science. Of course, the Sages do not speak of a mosquito in the material sense, but about the effective force that penetrated Titus's brain. Titus, the destroyer of the Temple, the arch-villain of Jewish history who wanted to drive a wedge between God and Israel, was vanquished by one of the smallest creatures of the divine creation.

It is difficult to classify Rabbi Löw within clearly defined categories. For his critical attitude towards Ashkenazi *pilpul*, as well as for his educational reform plans, he certainly deserves a place among scholars of the Late Renaissance.[74] His pronounced interest in the natural sciences, albeit limited to certain areas, he owed to the Prague intellectual scene of his time. Tycho Brahe (1546–1601, Danish astronomer) and Johannes Kepler (1571–1630, German astronomer) were contemporaries whom

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[73] On this, see Hans Baron, "Querelle of Ancients and Moderns," in *Renaissance Essays*, ed. Paul Kristeller and Philip W. Weiner (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 95–114.

[74] Cf. Johann Maier, *Geschichte der jüdischen Religion*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1992), 527.

he came to know through David Gans.[75] Nevertheless, his attitude toward secular scholarship, his total opposition to the critical use of non-Jewish sources by commentators on Jewish traditional literature, and hence his rejection of the ideas of Jewish Renaissance figures such as Elias Levita, Azariah de' Rossi, Leone Ebreo, and also Eli'ezer Ashkenazi, indicate that his thinking went more in an anti-humanistic direction—particularly if one sees a critical view of the past, and belief in progress, as essential to the humanist worldview. Neher sees Löw as the precursor to the neo-Orthodoxy of the likes of Samson Rafael Hirsch, Meir Loeb and Isaak Breuer, just as Azariah de' Rossi left his mark on what came to be known as Jewish studies (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*).[76] I shall leave the question open as to whether this is a more plausible picture of the long-term influence of the rabbi from Poznan.

Rabbi Löw was both a theologian as well as a philosopher of Judaism. His view of the sciences and of history can in no way be said to stem from a brusquely reactionary attitude, nor is it at all tantamount to a relapse into the dogmatic religious ideas of the Middle Ages, as some modern authors maintain. His philosophy of Judaism is an attempt to reflect philosophically on Jewish tradition. He sees creation as inseparable from the revelation on Mount Sinai; the latter is, for him, the actualization of an essential choice, which had already been effected in God's first act. The wisdom handed down to Israel belongs intrinsically to its being and can, from an ontological point of view, no longer be separated from it. The nations, by contrast, were created after Israel, and represent the *materia*: ontologically they can add nothing to the form, i.e., Israel. This explains why there is no common ground between the nations and Israel, only mutual opposition. It is safe to say that this radical stance was due to the then prevailing anti-Jewish atmosphere, both in Moravia as well as in Bohemia, sometimes in contrast to the moderate policies of the emperor.

Doubts as to the reliability of antiquity would destroy the holistic nature of the system of tradition, which was based on the assumption that the revelation had taken place once, and for all time. For this reason the rabbinic authorities are not to be reproached, or their utterances to be decried as mere worldly wisdom. The search for the

[75] André Neher, *David Gans (1541–1613), disciple du Maharal de Prague, assistant de Tycho Brahe et de Jean Kepler* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1974).

[76] Neher, *Le puits de l'exil*, 81.

"real meaning" or, as Löw expresses it, the *sibbat ha-sibbot* (*causa causarum*), should be the task of exegetes. The fact that rabbinic sayings are occasionally not accepted, because they are allegedly inconsistent with reason, only means that people have not understood anything. The truth always lies beyond the *causa proxima* (*sibbah qeruvah*), the literal meaning. It is hidden.

One example will explain this attitude. In the sixth section of his *Be'er ha-Golah*, Löw deals with the criticism of rabbinic literature formulated in scholarly circles, who claimed that the Sages had hardly any idea or knowledge of the human sciences. Although they were not so far away from them, they nevertheless spoke about the sciences as if these were something completely foreign to them. The criticism was even more scathing: the scholars alleged that the rabbis had attributed wholly wrong causes to phenomena of the natural sciences. The Maharal replied that the critics had failed to recognize the truth. What they regard as the cause is merely the visible reality, i.e., the natural, which is close to the matter, not to the cause. This could only satisfy physicists and mathematicians, but not the Sages. The latter had spoken of supernatural causes, *causa causarum* (*sibbat ha-sibbot*).

To explain his meaning, Rabbi Löw cites an example from the Babylonian Talmud, *Sukkah* 29a:

> *Eclipses of the sun occur for four reasons: because of the lack of prayers for the dead on the part of the head (high priest) of the Sanhedrin; because of the lack of aid to a fiancée who has asked the city for help when at the point of being raped; because of homosexuality; because of the simultaneous murder of two brothers. Eclipses of the moon and sun are also due to four reasons: because of those who falsify records (or signatures); because of those who allow false witnesses to step forward; because of those who breed small animals in the land of Israel; because of those who chop down trees in good condition.*
>
> These causes of eclipses of celestial bodies named by the rabbis according to their knowledge are rejected by human understanding (*ha-ḥush ha-nigleh*). For it is known that eclipses of celestial bodies depend on the paths of these bodies, on their conjunction and opposition, on their remoteness or closeness, on their length or width. Thus, how can they say that eclipses depend on such things when we know the exact point of time based on a calculation? How is it that the rabbis want to make these things dependent on certain sins? The question is wrongly put. For it was not in the interests of the rabbis to determine the *causa proxima* (*ha-sibbah ha-qeruvah*)—for it is a truism that eclipses of celestial bodies are influenced by their paths—but they named the *causa causorum*. If we had no sin in the world, we would have no eclipses of celestial bodies. For there is no doubt that the eclipse of a celestial body is an imperfection and

> a flaw in the universe. If there were no sin, the order of creation would not permit eclipses to happen, because they constitute an imperfection and a flaw in the universe, as everyone realizes.

The core of the discussion is that the perfection of the universe and the world is only a paradisiacal condition, which, because of sins, no longer exists. The rabbi plays on the word *lqh*, at first as the *terminus technicus* for eclipses of the sun and celestial bodies and then as a verb and noun meaning "fault," "defect," and also "punishment." He does not tell us why certain sins cause eclipses of the sun and celestial bodies.[77] To answer this—according to the rabbi—exceeds the limits of human understanding. In this way, Rabbi Löw reaffirms his refrain, the main concern of his studies, namely to prove that the knowledge of the rabbis is on a level different from that of the scholars of the world. Mentioning (Christian) sages in connection with rabbinic literature is therefore inappropriate.

It is evident that Rabbi Löw sees the sciences as merely *ancillae theologiae*; yet he also considers them dangerous, because of the autonomy they claim. One could illustrate the scientific vision of the Maharal by the image of the legend that is associated with him, the legend of the golem that he created. First the abbreviated version of the Prague legend, by Scholem:

> Rabbi Löw [is reputed] to have made a golem, which, it is true, served its master in every possible task throughout the whole week; but because all creatures rest on the Sabbath, the Rabbi transformed the golem back into clay before the onset of the Sabbath, each time by removing the life-giving name of God. However, one time the Rabbi forgot to remove the *Shem*. The community was already gathered for the service in the synagogue, indeed had already recited the Sabbath-Psalm 92, when the golem, with all his tremendous strength, began to go wild, shaking houses and threatening to destroy everything. Rabbi Löw was summoned; it was still twilight and the Sabbath had actually not yet begun. He rushed to the maniacal golem and snatched the *Shem* from him and the golem crumbled into earth. […] The Rabbi was not able to reawaken the golem

[77] The theory of a connection between sins and atmospheric events is very old. Hesiod (*Erga* 240–245) maintained that because of the sins of an evil person there are famines and infectious diseases. See Giuliana Lanata, *Medicina magica e religione popolare in Grecia fino all'età di Ippocrate* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1967), 30–31.

> to life and buried his remains in the attic of the ancient synagogue, where they still lie.[78]

Secular science is the golem, as it is like a handmaiden of theology—*ancilla* was the name already given to it by the Scholastics. It functions, driven by the motor of God's name, as long as it submits to Him. But in the case of a programming mistake, the golem, i.e., science, runs amok. The Maharal saw himself forced to snatch the theological support from a science gone wildly out of control, in order thereby to halt the march of the (heteronomous) sciences. The remains of (secular) scholarship still lie today in moldering university records.

Rabbi Löw exemplifies the humanists' striving to link the past with the present, trying only to harmonize their findings with the tools of (critical) hermeneutic reappraisal. Hermeneutics is the key word, enabling us to penetrate his holistic world and to understand the theoretical premises of his interpretive scholarship. He lived in a world full of polemical attacks against Judaism, but also full of exploitative (legal?) proceedings in which Judaism was seen only as a precursor of Christianity. His commitment to Judaism is the philosophers' stone, the alchemical formula that accounts for his philosophy. More than anything else, he strove to be a defender of rabbinic literature, in a period when the wisdom of antiquity was revered and canonized, just as it was also pronounced historically unreliable. His philosophy of Judaism constitutes for him a categorical imperative, by means of which he attempted to justify Judaism's existence hermeneutically and to determine it historically.

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[78] Translated from the German text of Gershom Scholem, "Die Vorstellung vom Golem in ihren tellurischen und magischen Beziehungen," in idem, *Zur Kabbala und ihrer Symbolik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), 257–258 (English translation, "The Idea of the Golem," in idem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* [New York: Schocken, 1965], 158–204); see also Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); idem, "The Golem in Jewish Magic and Mysticism," in *Golem! Danger, Deliverance, and Art*, ed. Emily D. Bilski (New York: Jewish Museum, 1988), 15–35; Byron L. Sherwin, *Golem Legend: Origins and Implications* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985). Some examples of the legends are also to be found in Klaus Völker, ed., *Künstliche Menschen. Dichtungen und Dokumente über Golems, Homunculi, lebende Statuen und Androiden* (Frankfurt am Main: Hanser, 1994); see further Hillel Joseph Kieval, "Pursuing the Golem of Prague. Jewish Culture and the Invention of a Tradition," *Modern Judaism* 17 (1997): 1–23.

CHAPTER SIX

MATHEMATICAL AND BIBLICAL EXEGESIS: JEWISH SOURCES OF ATHANASIUS KIRCHER'S MUSICAL THEORY[1]

The Jesuit Athanasius Kircher[2] was an eminent scholar of the European Baroque. His extensive epistolary correspondence, now preserved in the Pontificia Università Gregoriana in Rome,[3] documents Kircher's relations with contemporary scientists, scholars, philosophers, and princes.[4] His fertile scholarly activity, evidenced by more then forty printed books, offers an exemplary, multifaceted picture of the cultural world of his time. Misled by his interdisciplinary approach and the variety of the subjects he dealt with in his work, modern scholarship has concluded that his thinking was unsystematic, and that he had produced only a confused collection of notices that provide us only with unscientific reports of popular beliefs and superstitions. This opinion of him had already been current in his own time. Although, or perhaps because, Kircher's scholarly contemporaries admired his tremendous learning,[5] they did not avoid sharp and ironic attacks on his credulity

[1] This chapter was written together with Gianfranco Miletto.

[2] Kircher was born May 2, 1601, in Geisa (Upper Rhone, Buchonia), and died in Rome, November 28, 1680. See his autobiography *P. Athan. Kircheri vita a semetipsa conscripta*, manuscripts at Vienna and Munich, ed. Hieronymus Ambrosius Langenmantel in his *Fasciculus epistolarum* (Augsburg: Utzschneider, 1684). For further biographical notes, see http://www.phonurgia.se/rendel/cgi-bin/kircher/kircherianum1.cgi (accessed May 2008).

[3] Ms. Pont. Univ. Greg. 555–568 (I–XIV); see Ulf Scharlau, *Athanasius Kircher (1601–1680) als Musikschriftsteller. Ein Beitrag zur Musikanschauung des Barock* (Marburg: Görich & Weiershäuser, 1969), 22–26; see Carlo M. Chierotti, "La musurgia mirifica di Athanasius Kircher: la composizione musicale alla portata di tutti nell´età barocca," *Musica/Realtà* 13 (1992): 107–127.

[4] See John Fletcher, "Athanasius Kircher and his Correspondence," in *Athanasius Kircher und seine Beziehungen zum gelehrten Europa seiner Zeit*, ed. John Fletcher (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988): 139–178.

[5] In his introduction to the *Physiologia Kircheriana Experimentalis*, (Rome, 1675; repr., Amsterdam, 1680) Johann Kestler, a pupil of Kircher, defined him as a "prodigiosum nostri saeculi miraculum." See also Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 12 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923–1958), 7:568, 8:224.

and ingenuousness.[6] Evangelista Torricelli, a skilled mathematician who served as Galileo's secretary from 1641 to 1642, and succeeded him as court mathematician to Grand Duke Ferdinando II of Tuscany, wrote to him about Kircher's book on magnets:[7]

> This printed work is a very big volume on the magnet, enriched with a tool of various sides. You can take notice of astrolabes, clocks, and anemoscopes with the help of a very odd vocabulary. Among other things, there are a very huge number of decanters of different size, epigrams, distichs, epitaphs, inscriptions in Latin, Greek, Arabian, Hebrew and other languages. Among the wonderful things, you can find a score for music that is said to be an antidote to tarantula poison. Enough! Mr. Nardi, Magiotti, and I laughed a lot![8]

The ironic "scientific" reaction to Kircher's skills as a composer cannot obscure the fact that the so-called natural sciences did not, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, have clear-cut criteria and methods for distinguishing between "superstitions" and scientific discoveries. The sciences and meta-sciences were very close to each other. *Pars pro toto*: the main scientific interest of Tycho Brahe's successor at the Rudolphine court, Johannes Kepler,[9] was in finding the harmonic principle of the world,[10] the principle guiding the movement of all parts of the cosmos. The mathematical findings of his astronomy were, for him, not so very important; he considered them an art useful for making a living. The harmony of the world's spheres and the idea of an interaction between macrocosm und microcosm fascinated the seventeenth-century (as well as the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century) imagination. This

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[6] See Thorndike, *History of Magic*, 8:177.

[7] *Magnes sive de arte magnetica opus tripartitum* (Rome, 1641; repr. 1643; Cologne, 1643; and Rome, 1654 [revised and enlarged edition]).

[8] "L'opera stampata è un volume assai grosso sopra la calamita; un volume arricchito con una gran suppellettile di bei rami. Sentirà astrolabii, horologi, anemoscopi con una mano poi di vocaboli stravagantissimi. Fra le altre cose poi vi sono moltissime caraffe e caraffoni, epigrammi, distici, epitaffii, inscrittioni, parte in latino, parte in greco, parte in arabico, parte in hebraico et altre lingue. Fra le cose belle vi è in partitura quella musica che dice essere antidoto del veleno della tarantola. Basta: il sig. Nardi, Magiotti et io habbiamo riso un pezzo," in *Le opere di Galileo Galilei*, 20 vols. (Florence: Barbera, 1890–1909), 18:332; quoted by Paolo Rossi, *La nascita della scienza moderna in Europa* (Rome: Laterza, 1997), 241.

[9] See A. Grafton, "Humanism and Science in Rudolphine Prague: Kepler in Context," in idem, *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991; repr., 1994), 178–203.

[10] *Harmonices mundi libri V* (Lincii Austriæ: Tampachius, 1619; Bologna: Forni, 1969).

was an elaboration on ideas that had originated in a commentary by Macrobius on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (*De Republica* VI): *ideo physici mundum magnum hominem et hominem brevem mundum esse dixerunt*. Kircher is a faithful follower of this tradition of wisdom as the pansophic and theosophical interpretation of knowledge.

As an epistemological method of acquiring knowledge, the pansophic approach goes back to the encyclopedism of Ramon Llull (1233–1316).[11] Applied to Hermetic and Kabbalistic topics, particularly in Jesuit schools,[12] it formed the substratum of what was referred to, even in earlier centuries, as *prisca theologia* and *philosophia perennis*.[13] The concept of the *prisca theologia* endured until the end of the seventeenth century, despite critical voices such as that of Isaac Casaubon,[14] who, in his critique of Cesare Baronio's *Annales ecclesiastici*,[15] disputed the attribution of the *Corpus Hermeticum* to an ancient Egyptian priest and conjectured a more recent date, in the first century of the Christian era, as more probable. Only three years after the publication of Casaubon's critique, the first volume of Robert Fludd's *Utriusque cosmi, maioris scilicet et minoris, methaphysica, physica atque technical historia*[16] appeared (2 vols., Oppenheim, 1617–1619). Ignoring Casaubon's critical remarks, Fludd unscrupulously quotes Ficino's translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, identifying Hermes Trismegistos as an Egyptian priest, a *priscus theologus* more important than Plato. He ascribes to the Hermetic tradition an authority as high

[11] On the influence of Lullism upon encyclopedism and on his speculations about a universal method in seventeenth century, see Paolo Rossi, *Clavis Universalis. Arte delle memoria e logica combinatoria da Lullo a Leibniz* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1983), esp. 199–219.

[12] On the Jesuit diffusion of Lullism and Hermeticism in the Baroque period see Thorndike, *History of Magic*, 7:577–578; and Rossi, *Clavis Universalis*, 215–216.

[13] On the concept of philosophia perennis and its development from antiquity to the early modern times, see Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia perennis. Historische Umrisse abendländische Spiritualität in Antike, Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1998). On the adoption of this topos in Judaism, see chapter 1, above.

[14] Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614), author of *De rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis exercitationes CVI* (London: Officina Nortoniana apud Ioan. Billium, 1614), intended to write a critical revision of Baronio's work (see the next note). Because of his death, his project remained unfulfilled. On Casaubon see Francis Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 398–403 and passim.

[15] Cesare Barone, lat. Baronius (Sora, Frosinone, 1538–Rome 1607) Italian cardinal and ecclesiastical historian, author of *Annales Ecclesiatici* (1588–1607), a Counter-Reformation work which marked an epoch in Catholic historiography. See Yates, *Bruno*, 399–401. In the first volume, Baronius dedicated a huge chapter to the "pagan" prophecies on the coming of Christ. Following the Christian church father Lactantius, he enumerated among the "pagan" prophets Hermes Trismegistos, Idaspe, and the Sibyls.

[16] Oppenheim, Francfort: Johann Theodor de Bry, 1617–1621.

as that of Hebrew (and Christian) Scripture because it reveals the same religious beliefs. To the Hermetic tradition of Ficino, Fludd adds other Kabbalistic elements taken from Pico della Mirandola and, above all, from Reuchlin.[17]

This Hermetic-Kabbalistic *materia prima* is also the theoretical foundation of Kircher's work. One of his major interests, a source of admiration and esteem from his contemporaries, was the study of Egyptian archaeology and, in particular, of hieroglyphics. It was due to his renown as an Egyptologist, which endured until the notably more scientific decoding of the Rosetta stone by Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832),[18] that Pope Urbanus VIII nominated him, in 1633, as professor of mathematics, physics, and oriental languages at the Collegio Romano with the specific task of studying hieroglyphics. The results of his research were published in two volumes of his *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (between 1652 and 1654).[19] His interpretation of hieroglyphics, as well as of the archaeology of Egypt, was based on Hermetic-Kabbalistic premises. Kircher takes as his starting point the standard Renaissance assumption that hieroglyphics concealed divine mysteries. Following Marsilio Ficino, he attributes them to Hermes.[20] Hermes Trismegistos, the alleged author of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, is reputed by the Jesuit Kircher to have been a contemporary of Abraham and the depository of an ancient wisdom that prefigured such Christian doctrines[21] as, for example, the Trinity. Hermes was the first to draw the connection

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[17] In his work *Philosophia moysaica* (Gouda: Petrus Rammazenius, 1638), Fludd relates the sefirot to the pseudo-Dionysian angelic hierarchy; see Yates, *Bruno*, 405. Cf. also François Secret, *Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance*, 2nd ed. (Milan: Arma Artis, 1985), 165. On Fludd's *theatrum memoriae* see Wilhem Schmidt-Biggemann, "Robert Fludds *Theatrum memoriae*," in *Macrocosmo in Microcosmo: Die Welt in der Stube. Zur Geschichte des Sammelns 1450 bis 1800*, ed. Andreas Grote (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 1994), 154–169.

[18] See V. Rivosecchi, *Esotismo in Roma barocca. Studi sul Padre Kircher* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1982), 165.

[19] *Athanasii Kircherii e soc. Iesu Oedipus Aegyptiacus. Hoc est Universalis Hieroglyphicae Veterum Doctrinae temporum iniuria abolitae instauratio. Opus ex omni Orientalium doctrina et sapientia conditum, nec non viginti divinarum linguarum authoritate stabilitum, felicibus auspiciis Ferdinandi III austriaci sapientissimi et invictissimi Romanorum Imperatoris semper Augusti e tenebris erutum atque Bono Reipublicae literariae consecratum*, 3 vols. (Rome: Mascardi, 1652–1654).

[20] Kircher, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, 3:568.

[21] Ibid., 2:506. Following Ficino (*De vita coelitus comparanda*, p. 556), Kircher maintains that the *crux ansata* of the Egyptians, which he calls *crux hermetica*, prefigures the Christian cross.

between the mathematical and physical sciences and theology.[22] After him, the *prisca theologia* was cultivated by Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Philolaos, up to Plato, with whom the tradition ends.[23]

It is not by chance that Kircher reports on the tradition of a connection between mathematics and theology. Its origin is a Hermetic-Pythagorean conception of numbers, which sees them as symbols of an innermost mystical and universal harmony, through which they take on mystical and cosmological meaning.[24] The Jesuit scholar claims that Hermes was the first to deal with this numerological matter before Pythagoras. In the second volume of the *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, an entire chapter is dedicated to the *Arithmetica Hieroglyphica*. In the introduction, Kircher informs the reader that numbers here shall be not considered as mathematical units, that is, as used for tasks of computation and calculation, but in their character as esoteric symbols of arcane, divine truths. These truths are present in the four worlds of Kircher's conception of the cosmos: the archetypal or intelligible world, in which are located all ideas of all things contained in the divine intellect; the angelic or intellectual world, place of the angelic choirs; the sidereal world, where the sun and the heavenly spheres are located; and the elemental world, in which are found the four elements (air, water, earth, and fire).[25] Numbers express the universal harmony, the most intimate connection and correspondence between the four worlds. In their most

[22] "Qui quidem inter Philosophos a Physicis et Mathematicis ad divinorum contemplationem primus se contulit, primus de Dei maiestate, Daemonum ordine, animarum mutationibus sapientissime disputavit, primus merito Theologiae Author." Ibid., 2:498.

[23] "Itaque verae priscae Theologiae undique sibi consona secta, ex Theologis sex miro quodam ordine conflata, exordium duxit a Mercurio, a Platone penitus absoluta fuit." Ibid.

[24] To the misteria numerorum Kircher devoted an entire treatise: *Arithmologia sive de abditis numerorum mysteriis* (Rome: Varesi, 1665).

[25] "Nemo, dum nos de Arithmetica tractaturos percipit, vulgarem illum mercatorum calculum tradituros existimet, sed reconditiorem illam numerorum scientiam, qua per occultam quandam analogiam arcanior Theologiae pars concluditur; quae uti ex mente divina et suprema monade perenni emanatione scaturit, ita omnia quoque quatuor Mundorum supra explicatorum [i.e., the archetypal world, the angelic world, the sidereal world and the elemental world], omniumque in iis contentorum mysteria involvit." Kircher, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, 2:6. See also *Musurgia Universalis*, 2:441: "Loquimur autem hic de numero non mathematico, sed de numero symbolico et rationali, qui ex divina mente procedit, cuius mathematicus imago quaedam est et similitudo, sicut enim mens nostra se habet ad mentem divinam, ita numerus mentis nostrae ad numerum mentis divinae."

sublime form, they do this through music, considered by Kircher as a branch of mathematics.

To the subject of music, Kircher devoted a monumental work (1,152 pages in folio!), which, as the frontispiece makes clear, was intended as an encyclopedia.[26] The author's intent was to present a systematic exposition of the theoretical and practical foundations of music, including all material treating it as an acoustic and musical phenomenon.[27] The "universality" (*Universalis*) and the encyclopedic character of his work are based on a mathematical interpretation of the harmony of the universe. The mathematical approach to music as an expression of cosmic harmony is underscored by the engraving by Paul Schor for the frontispiece of the *Musurgia*. At the top, the symbol of the Trinity—in Kircher's cosmology, the archetypal world—sheds its light first on the angelic world, represented by nine angelic choirs who sing a canon for thirty-six voices by one Romano Micheli, and then on the sidereal world, symbolized by the planet Earth, dominated by Music, encircled by the Zodiac, and holding in her right hand the lyre of Apollo and in her left the flute of Marsia. Lastly, it lights the elemental world. At the bottom of the engraving, dancing satyrs and maenads are represented together with a shepherd testing for echoes from the mountain and, finally, Pegasus, the winged horse of the Muses. On the left, in the foreground, Pythagoras shows with his right hand his famous theorem and points with his left to some blacksmiths, whose hammer-strokes on the anvil helped him to discover the relationship between sound and weight. On the right, a female figure representing

[26] *Musurgia Universalis sive Ars Magna consoni et dissoni in X libros digesta. Qua Vniversa Sonorum doctrina, et Phylosophia, Musicaeque tam [sic!, read: tum] theoricae, quam practicae scientia, summa varietate traditur; admirandae Consoni, et Dissoni in mundo, adeoque Universa Natura vires effectusque, uti nova, ita peregrina variorum speciminum exhibitione ad singulares usus, tum in omnipoene facultate, tum potissimum in Philologia, Mathematica, Physica, Mechanica, Medecina, Politica, Metaphysica, Theologia aperiuntur et demonstrantur* (Rome: Typis Ludouici Grignani, 1650).

[27] On the meaning of music as an expression of cosmic harmony as numerical relation, as well as on the musical atmosphere in Rome at the time of Kircher, see Ulf Scharlau, "Athanasius Kircher und die Musik um 1650," in Fletcher, ed., *Athanasius Kircher*, 53–67. On the application of the combinatory art to music, see Carlo M. Chierotti, "Comporre senza conoscere la musica: Athanasius Kircher e la musica mirifica," N*uova Rivista Musicale Italiana* 3 (1994), http://chitarraedintorni.blogspot.com/2008/04/athanasius-kircher-e-la-musurgia.html (accessed May 2008).

one of the Muses, perhaps Polyhymnia, is surrounded by various musical instruments.[28]

Athanasius Kircher begins his work with twenty pages (pp. 47–67) devoted to a description of the music in the Temple of Solomon. He starts from the assumption that music had a primordial origin, and is not due to the merits of a particular people or culture.[29] After the Flood, the Egyptians took credit for preserving the art of music. Even the name Moses, from which, according to Kircher, the Latin *musica* derives, is testimony to the high esteem this art enjoyed among the Egyptians. At a later stage, the music was transmitted to the Greeks, the Romans, and to other peoples.[30] The Jews, as Kirchner's inquiry discovers, received the rules of music, in their most perfect form, from the divine inspiration granted to David and Solomon. The Temple, too, was built in keeping with musical proportions.[31]

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[28] The engraving can be found also in Joscelyn Godwin, *A Renaissance Man and the Quest for Lost Knowledge* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979), 69. For a further engraving, representing the musical harmony of the four worlds, see *Musurgia Universalis*, 2:450. On Kircher's cosmology, see also *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 328, 404–417; and Godwin, *Athanasius Kircher*, 17–36 (here 17–18).

[29] *Musurgia Universalis*, 1:44: "Musica igitur non a Graecis aut Aegyptiis aut Chaldaeis, sed a primis ante diluvium hominibus primam habuit suae inventionis originem; immo si omnes homines e mundo iam tollerentur praeter paucos pueros rerum ignaros, hosce tamen tum necessitate cogente tam [sic!] casu et experientia cum tempore in varias inventiones humano generi necessarias incidere posse nihil dubito; inventiones enim rerum homini insitae sunt, nec libris solum discuntur, sed et intellectu aliqua insigni necessitate cogente, vel casu aut experientia vel genii suggestione eruuntur; Musicam igitur iam a principio fuisse, praeterquam quod Sacrae Literae id luculenter testentur, ipsa etiam ratio dictat, ut dixi, certe 4.cap. num.21 Geneseos musicorum instrumentorum inventio Iubali aperte adscribitur." See also *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 120–121.

[30] Ibid.: "At vero post diluvium Aegyptii primi fuerunt perditae Musicae instauratores. Hi enim a Chamo et Mesraimo filio eius instructi Musicam in tantum illustrarunt, ut vel ab Aegyptio verbo Moys Musica etymon suam sumpserit, eo quod ad stagnantes Nili paludes, occasione arundinae, papyracaeque sobolis (ex qua litos suos efformabant) ibidem copiose repullulascentis inventa ac instaurata sit."

[31] Ibid.: "Nullum dubium est, qui Musica Hebraeorum tempore Davidis et Salomonis fuerit perfectissima, cum enim David a puero Musicum [sic! lege "Musicam"] ageret, eaque mirum in modum afficeretur, fieri certe non potuit, ut eam ad altiorem diginatis gradum elatus non omnibus modis promoverit; Salomon vero infusa imbutus scientia, uti aliarum omnium rerum, ita vel maxime musica a Deo instructum fuisse credi debet, quomodo enim Divinum illud aedificium iuxta harmonicarum proportionum regulas omnibus numeris elaboratum, sine maxima musicae scientia peritiaque fieri potuerit, non video; certe omnia templi vasa miro ordine distributa, tum maxime instrumenta musica summo artificio elaborata cum maxima varietate et sapientia condita fuisse, solus is nescire poterit, qui ordinem et dispositionem singularum rerum, in mirifica hac et divina fabrica occurentium, non intellexerit."

The relationship between the musical expertise of David and Solomon and the architectural perfection of the Temple is a well-known topic of Kircher's day and is described in great detail in the work of another Jesuit: Juan Bautista Villalpaldo (1552–1608).[32] Villalpaldo was a mathematician and architect, a student of Juan de Herrera, architect of the Escorial. He collaborated with Jerónimo Prado on a lengthy exegetical commentary on Ezekiel's vision of the temple (Ezekiel 40–42). The first volume, primarily the work of Prado, appeared in 1596. The two succeeding volumes, published in 1604, were written entirely by Villalpaldo, after Prado's death in 1595.[33] According to Villalpaldo's interpretation, the structure of Solomon's Temple, including the order of the inner rooms as well as the furnishings, as described in the vision of the prophet Ezekiel, all reflect the universal order of creation.[34] Villalpaldo was of the opinion that Ezekiel's description is fully consonant with Vitruvian principles of symmetry,[35] which, according to the Neoplatonic interpretation of Leon Battista Alberti, were based, in turn, on anthropomorphic proportions. The harmony of the macrocosm, reflected in the human body, can be expressed by musical proportions, according to Villalpaldo.[36] In this way, the Temple of Solomon, as interpreted from a mystical and esoteric perspective, is an architectural expression of the universal order that is embodied by

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[32] René C. Taylor, "Architecture and Magic: Considerations on the Idea of the Escorial," in *Essays in the History of Architecture Presented to Rudolph Wittkower*, ed. Douglas Fraser, Howard Hibbard, and Milton J. Lewine (London: Phaidon, 1967), 81–109; idem, "Hermeticism and Mystical Architecture in the Society of Jesus," in *Baroque Art: The Jesuit Contribution*, ed. Rudolf Wittkower and Irma B. Jaffe (New York: Fordham University Press, 1972), 63–69, idem, "El Padre Villalpando (1552–1608) y sus ideas estéticas," *Academia. Anales y boletín de la Real Academia de San Fernando* 4 (1951–1952): 411–473. For recent studies on Villalpando and his reconstruction of Solomon's Temple, see Juan A. Ramirez, ed. *Dios, Arquitecto. J. B. Villalpando y el templo de Salomón* (Madrid: Siruela, 1991).

[33] *Hieronymi Pradi et Ioannis Baptistae Villalpandi e Societate Iesu in Ezechielem Explanationes et apparatus Urbis, ac Templi Hierosolymitani. Commentariis et imaginibus illustratus. Opus tribus Tomis distinctum*, 3 vols. (Rome: typis Illefonsi Ciacconij: excudebat Carolus Vulliettus, 1596–1604).

[34] Villalpando, 2:17: "Cum igitur necessarium esse putemus, exemplum respondere exemplari, imaginemque similem esse ipsi rei, cuius est imago, in eam venimus sententiam, ut arbitremur, internis spiritus sui oculis aedificium quoddam conspexisse Prophetam, omnibus numeris absolutum atque perfectum, cuius singula membra incredibili artificio, ac proportione secum ipsa, et cum aedificio universo mirifice respondent."

[35] Cf. Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 3.1–2; and Pieere Gros, ed., *Vitruvio. De architectura*, 2 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 1:lvi.

[36] Villalpando, 2:448. Cf. Paul von Naredi-Rainer, *Salomos Tempel und das Abendland* (Cologne: DuMont, 1994), 172–182.

the human form, itself considered the first *fabrica* of the divine Architect.[37] The measures of the architectural elements of the Temple have cosmological significance: the four cubits that constitute the primary dimensions of the side chambers are considered in relationship with the four humors (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, black bile), and the four elements of the world.[38] If, from a metaphysical point of view, the Temple, as a divine construction, is a representation of creation, then, from an epistemological point of view, it becomes the locus and principle, the organizer of science.[39] Seen in this way, it becomes possible to explain Villalpaldo's numerous digressions on various, widely divergent scientific questions, which he includes in his encyclopedic description of the Temple: questions relating to astrology, numismatics, physics, history, philology, optics, and mineralogy. The Temple is considered a *templum sapientiae*, the architectural embodiment of an encyclopedia.

A work very similar to that of Villalpaldo was authored by a Jewish physician from Mantua, Abraham ben David Portaleone (1542–1612),[40] cited by Kircher in his *Musurgia Universalis* as "Rabbi Hannase or Hannose."[41] Scion of a famous family of physicians, Portaleone obtained special permission from the pope to study medicine and to take a doctorate from the University of Pavia, in 1563.[42] In 1605, Portaleone was struck by left-sided hemiplegia. He interpreted the illness as a divine punishment for his having neglected the study of Torah for the sake

[37] See, for example, chapter XXXI of the second volume: Ex humanae fabricae symmetria universa templi dispositio desumpta est.

[38] Villalpando, 2:473: "Non semel, sed saepius indicavimus mensuris his hominem ipsum referri. Et quidem constat primus atriorum ordo calamis quatuor; tot humoribus homo; totidem elementis mundus.…"

[39] Villalpando, 2:461: "Fuit huius aedifici sacri proprium, fuisse illud Dei Optimi Maximi sapientia conditum: quod, quamvis illi sit cum mundi fabrica commune, hoc tamen est proprium et in templi fabrica admirandum magis, quod in ea, tamquam in parva quadam, depictaque tabella, rerum omnium, quae sub vaso caeli ambitu continentur, arte mirabili Deus imaginem efformavit." And further Villalpando, 2:473: "Hoc enim maxime decuit Deum Optimum Maximumque, eundemque sapientissimum rerum omnium opificem et huius aedificii Architectum, in quo rerum omnium imago quaedam ac similitudo continetur.…"

[40] On Portaleone, see now the monograph of Gianfranco Miletto, *Glauben und Wissen im Zeitalter der Reformation: Der salomonische Tempel bei Abraham Ben David Portaleone* (1542–1612) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004).

[41] Kircher has mistakenly read the adjective *ha-nissa'* (= "honored") on the frontispiece as the author's name.

[42] His diploma has been published by Vittore Colorni, "Sull' ammissibilità degli ebrei alla laurea anteriormente al secolo XIX," *Rassegna mensile di Israel* 16 (1950), repr. in idem, *Judaica Minora. Saggi sulla storia dell' ebraismo italiano dall' antichità all' età moderna* (Milan: Giuffré, 1983), 473–489.

of medicine and philosophy.[43] The illness prompted him to resume his Jewish studies and to write a work entitled *Shilṭe ha-Gibborim* (Cuirasses of the Heroes), which was researched and compiled between 1605 and 1607. Portaleone explains his purpose in writing the work in the introduction, for which he uses the literary device of a letter addressed to his sons, David, Eliezer, and Judah: he wishes to offer testimony of his repentance and an atonement for his intellectual transgression; at same time, he intends to provide a work of cultural and religious education. In the author's intention, the *Shilṭe ha-Gibborim* should demonstrate that there is no opposition between science and true faith. If science is the search for truth by inquiring into reality, its origin is in God. For He is truth par excellence, the Being in which all things have their origin and purpose. Truth is contained in His word, as revealed to man in Scripture. The various sciences that human intelligence has produced are nothing but a development of that which is contained, in origin, in the biblical text, and it is there that they find their raison d'être. Thus, all branches of science are present, *in nuce*, in the Bible.

The Temple of Solomon, whose plan was of divine origin,[44] represents the plastic, visual realization of the concordance between science and the divine Word, the architectural transposition of the harmonic cohesion of creation's variety. It is for this reason that Portaleone inserts in his description of the Temple a number of "profane" scientific treatises—profane, we should add, to our understanding. Thus, for example, in describing the precious stones of the breastplate and the ephod of the high priest, Portaleone inserts a treatise on mineralogy (chapters 44–50), including advice to the reader on the purchase and sale of jewelry and precious stones (chapters 54–56); questions of purity provide him with the opportunity to deal with medical discussions on the subject; chapters 41–43, which are concerned with services of the priests and Levites as guards, become a treatise on military arts, in which Portaleone makes use of pseudo-philological speculation in order

[43] See Alessandro Guetta, "Avraham Portaleone, le scientifique repenti. Science et religion chez un savant juif entre le 16 ème et le17 ème siècle," in *Torah et science: perspectives historiques et théoriques. Études offertes à Charles Touati*, ed. Gad Freudentahl (Louvain: Peeters, 2001), 213–227.

[44] According to 1 Chronicles 28:11ff., Solomon built the Temple on a model that had been handed down to him by his father. Portaleone deals with this tradition in chapter 14. In chapter 4, he had already pointed out the special inspiration given to David.

to demonstrate the existence of ancient knowledge and use of firearms, including the harquebus and cannons.[45]

In chapters 4–13, Portaleone deals with the subject of music in the Temple. Proceeding from the assumption that the ancient Jews had the gift of perfect wisdom and, consequently, knowledge of all technical skills, which they later lost due to their faithlessness,[46] the author describes the music of the Temple in accordance with musical theories of the late Renaissance. By attributing the origin of such theories to the biblical era, Portaleone demonstrates, along the way, the superiority of Jewish civilization over Christian culture.

Portaleone identifies the musical instruments used in the temple service with those of his own time by means of a lexicographic interpretation, based on formal characteristics and on the qualities of the individual instruments. The *nevel*, for example, a stringed instrument often mentioned in the Bible and commonly translated as "harp," is so called because of its form, which is reminiscent of a "wineskin" (another meaning of *nevel* in Hebrew) or because of the sound it makes, which is so sweet that all other instruments seem contemptible (so also the meaning of the *pi'el* of the Hebrew verb *naval*). As these same qualities can also be found in the modern lute, the *nevel*, he argues, should be considered identical with the lute.[47] A similar method is used for the identification of another stringed instrument, the *'ugav*, whose name is to be related to *'ugah*, a special cake so named because of its visual similarity to the instrument, which can be identified as a *viola da gamba*.[48] The *magrefah* of the Talmudic tractate *Arakhin* is nothing other than the modern organ. In the *Musurgia Universalis*, Kircher provides a sketch of the *magrefah (secundum descriptionem R. Hannase)*.[49]

The large amount of space devoted to music in the *Shilṭe ha-Gibborim* testifies to the high value attached to it in Jewish culture of the sixteenth

[45] See Gianfranco Miletto, "Die Bibel als 'Kriegshandbuch' nach einer Interpretation von Abraham Portaleone," in *An der Schwelle zur Moderne. Juden in der Renaissance*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri and Annette Winkelmann (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 78–89.

[46] These ideas probably go back to Joseph Kaspi, *Adnei Kesef* (London: Naroditski, 1911–1912), 2:120 and were also accepted by Moses Isserles, *Torat ha-'Olah* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyyati, 1990–1991), part 2, chap. 38. On this, see Moshe Idel, "Conceptualizations of Music in Jewish Mysticism," in *Enchanting Powers. Music in the World's Religions*, ed. Laurence E. Sullivan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 159–187, here p. 162.

[47] Portaleone, *Shiltei ha-Gibborim* (Mantua: Elieser d'Italia, 1612), 7b.

[48] Ibid., 8a–b.

[49] *Musurgia Universalis*, 1:54.

and seventeenth centuries. During this period, music was an important point of contact for Jewish and Christian culture.[50] Particularly in Mantua, and thanks to the patronage of the Gonzagas, the contribution of Jewish musicians and theorists of music was remarkable.[51] The harpist Abraham, called Abramo dell'Arpa Ebreo, the composer Davide Civita, author of the *Primizie armoniche* (Venice, 1616), Allegro Porto, Isacchino Massarano, and, above all, Solomone Rossi,[52] were the among the outstanding musical personalities of the Mantuan Jewish community.

The significance and purpose of music were also the subject of a sermon by Judah Moscato (ca. 1530–ca. 1593), the Mantuan rabbi and teacher of Portaleone. In the first of fifty-two sermons published under the title *Nefuṣot Yehudah*, he proposes an interpretation of God, the cosmos, and man, based on musical proportions. All of creation was carried out according to musical proportions beginning with God himself. Harmony is the basis of creation and music is the tool capable of expressing it and making it perceptible to the human senses. The laws of music have universal value and can therefore, by the principle of unity, be extended to every aspect of existence and to every branch of knowledge. The Torah is itself music and unification with the Torah is absolute harmony. According to Moscato, the perfection of all music is present in God; that is, in Him, every law of music is contained. Since man was created in God's image, the same laws must, in consequence, also be present in him. As the whole creation was God's work, all things are regulated and organized according to the laws of music. Proof of the presence of the most perfect music in the Divine Being is provided by God's name itself (see below).

Moscato rejected the tradition according to which Pythagoras had discovered the laws of music by observing that a blacksmith's differently weighted strokes of the hammer against the anvil produced agreeably different sounds. Basing himself on Genesis 4:21 ("Jubal…was

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[50] See Massimo A. Torrefrance, "Sulle musiche degli ebrei in Italia," in *Storia d'Italia. Annali 11: Gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Corrado Vivanti, vol. 1 (Turin: Einaudi), 477–493.

[51] See Simonson, *History*, 669–677.

[52] Solomon Rossi was one of the most important musicians of this period. Composer of profane and religious musical texts, Rossi can be considered the father of modern Jewish music. The introduction of the monodic in instrumental performance goes back to him. His attempts to introduce some liturgical reforms, for example the choral recitation of the psalms with instrumental accompaniment, is well-documented in his *I canti di Salomone* (Venice, 1622–1623), with the permission of Rabbi Yehuda Leone Modena. On Rossi see Don Harrán, *Salamone Rossi: Jewish Musician in Late Renaissance Mantua* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe"), Moscato contests the originality of the Pythagorean discovery, although he admits the theoretical possibility of discovering the laws of music in the manner described by classical tradition. On the other hand, the half-brother of Jubal, Tubal-Cain, "was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron" (Genesis 4:22).

Recalling the commentary to the *Sefer Yeṣirah* by Judah Halevi, Moscato stresses that every body can be defined with help of mathematical proportions. In nature, the elements are in a wonderful relationship according to degrees of heaviness and lightness. Were this mutual harmonic relationship to be lost, even for only a moment, the world could not continue to exist. Moscato acknowledges that his assertions about the harmony of the relations between the four elements, the movement of the heavenly bodies, and the succession of seasons are no novelty. He does not expressly quote Boethius, but it is clear, nevertheless, that he is referring to the *De Institutione Musica* and to Boethius's concept of *musica mundana*.[53] Not only do the spheres revolve in perfect proportion and in keeping with musical harmonies, but even the angels sing and play a celestial music which a human being cannot perceive. The presence of the most perfect musical harmony in God can be inferred from his name.[54] Taking as his starting point a quotation from the Kabbalah (*Tikkune Zohar* 20),[55] Moscato develops a musical interpretation of the Tetragrammaton, seeing a correspondence between the numerical value of the letters and the musical harmonies: *Yod* is the number 10, the perfect number which includes every other number,[56] and in the diatonic scale it is the symbol of the octave or diapason, a perfect consonance from which every sound originates. In the *Yod*, the third, which

[53] According to the concept of *musica mundana*, the cosmos has a numerical structure, where the number is intended, as by Pythagoras in a metaphysical sense, as the expression and realization of a divine music in which opposites (i.e., identity/difference, equality/inequality) are in continuous relation, as part of an organic whole. Cf. Thomas Leinkauf, *Mundus combinatus. Studien zur Struktur der barocken Universalwissenschaft am Beispiel Athanasius Kircher SJ (1602–1680)* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), 208.

[54] The thesis was already proposed by Philo of Alexandria, see *De vita Mosis* 2 [3].115.

[55] The reference to *Tikkunei Zohar* 2 in the text of Moscato is a misprint; see Herzl Shmueli, *Higgajon bechinnor (Betrachtungen zum Leierspiel) des Jehudah Ben Joseph Arjeh Moscato Rabbi zu Mantua* (Tel Aviv: Neografika, 1953), 34, 71 n. 71.

[56] A Pythagorean belief, which was taken up by the Neopythagoreans and especially by Nikonakos of Gerasa.

is the "root" of the tenth, is included.[57] The *He*, whose numeric value is five, corresponds to the fifth, the *Vav* to the sixth. The repetition of the *He* in the Tetragrammaton is used here to refer to the fourth and to the correlation of the harmonies. The numeric value resulting from the addition of the two first letters is 15, which corresponds in musical intervals to the fourteenth, i.e., a double octave.

Moscato adds to the Platonic motif of the heavenly origin and numerical-musical structure of the human soul[58] the Kabbalistic motif[59] of the harmonic correspondence between the angelic choirs, the heavenly spheres, and the souls of creatures. A similar procedure, put to use from a Christian perspective, can be found in the *Musurgia Universalis*:

> Cum itaque prima et suprema monas trina sit, a trino archetypo fabrica emanare non debuit, nisi trina trino ordine et numero sonoro constituta; omnium enim perfectissima harmonia solis tribus vocibus constare debet, infima, media et suprema, quae unita dat I diapason, ex diapente et diatessaron compositum consonantiarum perfectissimum et primam harmoniam et pulchre in tribus hisce numeris cernitur 1,2,3, ubi 1 se habet per modum monadis simplicis et isophonae omnium consonantiarum originis, quae Deo Patri competit. 2 ad 1 relata per modum octavae sive diapason, Filio; 3 vero ad 2 relata diapente refert, spirituique competit virtuti connectenti, sicuti enim media vox diapente infimam et supremam in trium vocum harmoniam connectit, ita et Spiritus Patris et Filii, principii et finis in unam incomprehensibilem harmoniam nexus est.[60]

The triune structure of the Divine is explained according to principles of musical intervals. The numbers one, two, and three are representative of the three persons of the Trinity. Specifically: the "one" is the monad, simple and perfect, origin of all consonances, i.e., God the Father; the "two," the Son, is correlated to the "one" by the interval of the octave or diapason; the "three," the Holy Spirit, is correlated to the "two" by the interval of the fifth. Just as the fifth harmonizes with a superior tone and an inferior tone in harmonic sound, so the

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[57] In the diatonic scale, the tenth is the result of the addition of an octave and a third.

[58] See *Timaeus*, 35a ff.

[59] Quoted from chapter 7 of the *Mar'ot Elohim*, known also as *'Avodat ha-qodesch* (Mantua 1545; Jerusalem: Levin-Epstein, 1953–1954; Jerusalem: Shevile Orhot ha-Hayyim, 1991–1992) by Meir ibn Gabbai. On the relationship between Moscato and the Kabbalah, see Moshe Idel, "Judah Moscato: A Late Renaissance Jewish Preacher," in *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto*, ed. David Ruderman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 41–66; idem, "Conceptualization," 170.

[60] *Musurgia Universalis*, 2:456.

Spirit has an intermediary function, which brings the three aspects of the Divine Being back into harmonic unity.

Kircher does not mention Moscato in this context, but he would have known the latter's theories, at least through Portaleone or the Christian Hebraists. In his *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, he quotes the commentary of Moscato on the *Kusari* of Judah Halevi.[61] There is no evidence as to whether Kircher used Moscato's interpretation of the Tetragrammaton. One can only say that both shared a common tradition that went back to the Platonic-Pythagorean tradition of numbers and of the musical harmony between the soul and the world. These traditions had been handed down by Macrobius in his *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*[62] and by Boethius in the *De musica* and had, in this manner, influenced the theorists of the Cinquecento. The *Istitutioni Harmoniche* of Gioseffo Zarlino (1517–1590), published in Venice 1558 and often reprinted, are a source that was drawn on by both Kircher and Moscato.[63] The manner in which each elaborates on the tradition, by inserting Kabbalistic motifs, is similar; only the end result is, of course, different.

Apologetic intent is evident in both Moscato and Portaleone. They trace knowledge of the laws of music and the origins of Renaissance musical instruments to the biblical age, drawing attention in this way to the cultural superiority of Judaism, a moral deliverance from the daily discrimination suffered in Christian society. For Kircher the idealized reconstruction of ancient Hebrew culture, and of the Temple of Solomon, is a confirmation of the theory of the *prisca theologia* and *prisca sapientia*, which he defended. Kircher used Portaleone (and perhaps Moscato), in addition to "pagan" and Christian authors, as testimonies to his vision of history and science, of God and the cosmos, of which the Temple of Solomon is synthesis and symbol par excellence.

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[61] Vol. 2, first part, p. 85: "R. Iehuda Muscato commentator libri Cozri apud Morinum etc.…" Kircher quotes Moscato from the *Exercitationes Biblicae* of Jean Morin.

[62] On Macrobius's interpretation of the number as the essence of the soul and of the world, and as principle of the harmony of the heavenly spheres, see *Commentarii* 1.5–6; 2.1–2.

[63] Facsimile edition, New York: Broude, 1965. See also *Theorie des Tonsystems. Das erste und zweite Buch der Istitutioni harmoniche (1573)*, ed. Michael Fend (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1989).

CHAPTER SEVEN

CREATING GEOGRAPHICAL AND POLITICAL UTOPIAS: THE TEN LOST TRIBES AND THE EAST

For Jewish intellectuals in antiquity, the concept of "the East" had contradictory geographical and historical connotations, calling to mind both the land of the oldest tradition of wisdom and science, known since time immemorial, and the site of a bitter period of captivity. The former is connected with Abraham, who went forth from Ur of the Chaldees to journey to the land of Canaan; the latter refers to the first deportation of Israel to the land "beyond the river," before and after the destruction of the First Temple. Successive developments reveal quite astonishing aspects of the notion of the East. The concept of "Oriental wisdom," the quintessence of Chaldean religion and culture, was incorporated more and more into the understanding of a Jewish national heritage, gradually becoming the intellectual property of the Jewish people; the land "beyond the river" took on utopian dimensions as the land of "perfect Judaism." The geographical concept of the East became, increasingly, the transfiguration of a political and religious motif into a utopian myth that functioned not only as a Feuerbachian category of alienation, but also as a spur to the Jewish community to resist assimilation into the dominant cultures that surrounded it.

The nature of utopian thought is always both creative and explosive. Often it is a subversive enterprise, or at least it is perceived as such: the myth of the "Ten Lost Tribes," to which the idea of the Orient in Judaism is linked, was interpreted, first by the Romans and later by Christians, in the context of a political preoccupation with possible, or purported, Jewish military might. Down to the eighteenth century, Jewish (and Christian) "Orientalism" does not conform with Said's concept of it as academic alienation, although, as I illustrate in the following, the two notions do bear certain similarities.

For this reason, in seeking to define the concept of the East in Jewish tradition, modern scholarship cannot ignore the legend of the Ten Lost Tribes in its simultaneous function as both the utopian construction of an alienated minority and the means of that same minority's political deconstruction by the dominant culture, through its use as military

propaganda. Apologetic thought, messianic expectations, utopian imagination, and imaginative geography provide the cornerstones of an endless narrative linked to the idea of the Orient. Much has already been written on the subject. The present chapter aims to provide certain historical and literary insights related to the concept of "Oriental" Jews, both as a self-image and as a communicative perception. "Ontological" and "epistemological" premises are required to explain how the concept of the Orient has been passed down over generations, leading up to Said's deconstruction of its academic use as an expression of ancient and contemporary European colonialism.[1] My considerations proceed from a Jewish (and Christian) point of view and should be seen as an attempt to better elucidate the implications of speaking about geography, culture, and religion in actual practice.

Geography, as an ancient and medieval branch of knowledge, should not be confused with the modern science that succeeded it, a study of the earth's physical features, resources, political divisions, climate, population, and so forth. In writing about their journeys (most often fanciful and full of geographic imaginings) and in depicting customs and "geographical" data, ancient geographers reproduced a typical product of their "mental map" of history and peoples.[2] As defined by Downs (1996), mental mapping is "the process by which all humans organize and make sense of the environment around them. Cognitive, or mental, maps arise from the storage and memory of spatial information that is necessary to survive. They reflect the world as perceived, not necessarily as it is."[3] The perception one has of other peoples and lands often stems from one's own self-perception and identity. Only the analysis of the process, or the different processes, involved in identifying

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[1] Cf. Edward Said, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient*, 2nd paperback ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 2. Said does not explain what he means by using "ontological," while "epistemological" can be understood *de sensu commune* as a hermeneutical paradigm.

[2] See Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen, "Terra Incognita: the Subjective Geography of the Roman Empire," in *Studies in Ancient History and Numismatics presented to Rudi Thomsen*, ed. Aksel Damsgaard-Madsen et al. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1988), 148–161; Kai Brodersen, *Terra Cognita. Studien zur römischen Raumerfassung* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1995); Jan Willem Drijvers, "Ammianus Marcellinus on the Geography of the Pontus Euxinus," *Histos* 2 (1999), http://www.dur.ac.uk/Classics/histos/1998/drijvers.html (accessed April 1999).

[3] Mary E. Downs, "Spatial Conception in the Ancient Geographers and the Mapping of Hispania Baetica," *Classical Bulletin* 72 (1996): 37–49, here 43, quoted by A. C. Bernard, "Stumbling Through Gaul: Maps, Intelligence, and Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum*," *The Ancient History Bulletin* 11.4 (1997): 107–122, here 118.

one's own effective place in world history can help us understand the premises underlying the description and monopolization of geographical data, as reflected for example in the Roman conception of the Mediterranean as "our sea" (*mare nostrum*). In discussing Judaism and Christianity, religions bound up with the concept of the East and, at the same time, the very matrix of European culture, care is needed in explaining religious identities or identifications: such identities are often a cluster of perceptions where one's own tradition interacts with impulses flowing from the environment. Moreover, alien perceptions of our identity can influence our own perception of ourselves to the extent that, at times, we accept the definition of others as our own self-image. In this context, we must question Said's affirmation that "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self."[4] The process he describes is merely the common, "normal" process of justification of a politically dominant culture by emphasizing differences; in contrast, non-dominant cultures always stress the *originality* of their cultural traditions and customs, rather than the differences. Thus, in contemporary non-multicultural states, the perception of minorities on the part of members of the dominant culture oscillates between alienation from their own culture and deep admiration for the originality and historical role of the "other" cultures, an admiration which, in fact, is grounded in the way those minorities perceive themselves.

The history of the Lost Tribes illustrates how this process of alienation and attraction operates. The idea of a specifically Oriental wisdom first developed (as a response to the political superiority of the Greek army) when Greek culture began to pervade the East in the aftermath of Alexander's conquest. The idea of the East as the matrix of wisdom was then accepted by Greek and Roman historians as a map of "alien" wisdom. After the destruction of Jewish autonomy, or whatever was left of it, the belief in a (secret) Jewish military power stimulated a new Jewish self-understanding, giving rise to the idea of a reunification of East and West in a messianic age. This *parousia* of a Jewish king as the final judge of humanity can only be understood in terms of the premise of the "eternal" validity of Jewish law: the reunification of the Diaspora, the ingathering of the dispersed Jews, was considered to be not merely a product of divine mercy, but the product of a

[4] Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

military act to be accomplished by a "perfect" Jewish group coming from the East. Paradoxically, the dispersion of the Jews brought about by the Roman military defeat developed into the myth of a Jewish military power, which was (still) latent, enchained by its observance of Jewish law.

The superiority of Oriental wisdom, bound up with the idea of military supremacy, is the *materia prima* of medieval Jewish (and Christian) legends of a perfect Oriental Judaism. Using Said's terminology, ontological consciousness became an epistemological tool and habit. The Jewish people created utopian patterns both for expressing the political identity of a dispersed people living in a totally new cultural environment, and as a means of defending residence rights against ethnic claims. According to this scheme, geographical data are a mental category that aims to justify one's own right to exist. Oriental wisdom and Oriental military power are products of mental mapping, seen from a vantage point of self-understanding (ontology) and "external" perception (epistemology), as discussed below.

7.1 *Oriental Wisdom*

The idea of an "original" Oriental wisdom, which originated in Judaism but was transmitted and reinterpreted by the Christian church, is a milestone in the evolution of Christianity's own self-understanding. Still essentially unwritten is the cultural history of the relationship between Jewish and Christian thought as the basis of a common European culture. For too long, the sole accepted point of contact between the two religions/identities was the so-called "Old Testament." According to this view, based on the widespread notion of "light from the East" (*ex oriente lux*), the only status accorded to Judaism was that of the mother religion to the prevailing Christian culture. The metaphor of the rising sun, a self-evident empirical reality, does not refer primarily to the ancient notion of the transmission of ancestral wisdom to the so-called "Oriental" people, as many modern esoteric and Freemason circles maintain. Rather, it refers primarily to the initial admiration on the part of "Oriental" people for *Christian* truth, subsequently transformed into a conviction that the source of truth was to be found in "Oriental" Palestine, thus maintaining the "esoteric" character that the tradition had acquired when it was thought to have originated in Babylonia. I will focus on Palestine's sacred aura as a point of departure.

The peoples of the ancient Mediterranean and Middle East were fascinated by the literature, philosophy, and lifestyle of ancient Greece. Yet, not every group was brought to such a point of cultural and political subjugation that its people (and, in particular, the upper social classes) totally repudiated their own traditions. In Judaism, for instance, the resistance to Hellenism developed not only into the Maccabean military confrontation, but also into a creative reaction to the new cultural demands and impulses. There is no doubt that some "barbarians," as the Greeks called foreign peoples, attempted to resist the pervasive Greek influence on their culture.[5] The danger of being entirely assimilated, however, spurred the "barbarians" into productive thinking and an apologetic reworking of their traditions, stressing their illustrious origins and their antiquity.[6] Thus, the Hermetic tradition claimed that the Greeks had derived ("stolen") most of their own wisdom from the Egyptians, while in Judaism, Greek wisdom was widely believed to be based on Mosaic Law. From this point of view, it is obvious why Jewish thinkers in the centuries before and after the beginnings of the Common Era apologetically claimed that Greek philosophy and culture had in fact "stolen" their wisdom. In their view, Plato, for instance, was guilty of "plagiarism." Aristobulos, a philosopher of the Greek Diaspora, states: "There is no doubt that Plato followed our legislation."[7] In another fragment, taken from his lost work, he maintains: "In my opinion, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, who tried to answer these questions as well as possible, did follow in his (i.e., Moses') footsteps."[8] Aristobulos's assertion of the antiquity of Jewish law and customs has to be understood in the context of the cultural milieu of Greco-Roman Egypt, where there had been continuous Jewish settlement since at least

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[5] On the Greek "invention of the barbarian" see Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-definition through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendom Press, 1991); on Roman attitudes to "barbarians," see Ian H. Ferris, *Enemies of Rome: Barbarians through Roman Eyes* (Sutton: Stroud, 2000); in the context of the discussion about "Orientalism," see also Philip Hardie, "Fifth-Century Athenian and Augustan Images of the Barbarian Other," *Classics Ireland* 4 (1997): 46–56. Unfortunately, the author does not explain the reference to "Orientalism" in connection with the definition of Athenian "barbarians."

[6] On this aspect, see the classic study by Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); and Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[7] See also Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* 5.14–97.7, in *Fragmenta pseudepigraphorum, quae supersunt Graeca: una cum historicorum et auctorum Judaeorum Hellenistarum fragmentis*, ed. Albert-Marie Denis (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 228.

[8] Apud Eusebius, *Praeperatio evangelica* 13.12.2, in Denis, *Fragmenta*, 222–223.

the third century B.C.E. Over time, Jews had gained influence in the Ptolemaic kingdom and, later, even in the army. This ethnic group, their cultural life, and their literary production provoked a reaction, especially within the class of Egyptian priests, as for instance in the case of Manetho, who contested the antiquity of the Jews' origins.[9] At the same time, Hellenistic culture was very attractive to young Jews of the Egyptian Diaspora, so that the apologetic claim to antiquity was mobilized as a means of stemming conversions to the Greek and Egyptian religions.[10]

Jewish claims regarding the antiquity of their traditions should not be interpreted as a rejection of all Greco-Roman findings in science, politics, and philosophy: there is no evidence of such a sweeping repudiation on the part of Jewish thinkers. It is questionable whether the Greco-Roman "theft" of ancient Jewish wisdom, as alleged by Jewish sources, is intended to refer to all of philosophy, literature, and science, or is more likely meant as an acknowledgment of the "barbarian" origin of certain ideas and findings. Aristobulos, Aristeas, Artapanus, Philo of Alexandria, and Josephus spoke of Jewish superiority solely in reference to *certain* Greco-Roman findings and concepts. The tradition originated primarily in the discussion of the "first inventor" (*protos heuretes*), most probably as a claim of intellectual and technical superiority.[11] Yet, it was also the apologetic claim by an ethnic minority attempting to assert its identity in the eyes of their fellow Jews in the Greek Diaspora. Jewish literature in Ptolemaic Egypt was, above all, apologetic literature, with a clear tendency *ad intra*: the main issue was by no means Gentile

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[9] This is a well-known controversy; see, for example, Lucia Raspe, "Manetho on the Exodus. A Reappraisal," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 5 (1998): 124–155; Miriam Pucci Ben Zeev, "The Reliability of Josephus Flavius. The Case of Hecataeus' and Manetho's Accounts of Jews and Judaism. Fifteen Years of Contemporary Research (1974–1990)," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 24 (1993): 215–234; Erich S. Gruen, "The Use and Abuse of the Exodus Story," *Jewish History* 12 (1998): 93–122; and John J. Collins, "Reinventing Exodus. Exegesis and Legend in Hellenistic Egypt," in *For a Later Generation. The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity. Festschrift for George W. E. Nickelsburg*, ed. Randal A. Argall (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 52–62.

[10] This point is controversial in the scholarly literature; see Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). But see Martha Himmelfarb's review of Feldman in *Judaism* 43 (1994): 334.

[11] See Adolf Kleingünther, *Protos heuretes: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte einer Fragestellung* (Leipzig: Dieterich, 1933); Klaus Thraede, "Erfinder," *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 5 (1962): 1191–1278.

acknowledgment of Jewish intellectual and political achievements, but Jewish awareness of the value of their own traditions.

It can therefore be supposed that Alexandrian Judaism was in fact aware of the pervasive power of the literature and *Weltanschauung* of Greece, side by side with Jewish predominance in the philosophical arena. Philo of Alexandria, for example, a highly knowledgeable expert on Greek philosophy, does not question the origins of philosophy in Athens. Although he was aware of the traditional notion of the Greek "theft" of Jewish wisdom and achievements,[12] he mentions specifically only very few direct appropriations: he notes that Athenian legislators, for example, "copied" Exodus 23:1a from the Law of Moses (the principle: *solum esse bonum propter se amandum placendumque*).[13] Although he polemicizes in his work against Greek scholars who plagiarized certain principles of Mosaic doctrine, the accusation represents less a real claim of plagiarism on the part of Greek intellectuals and politicians than a somber observation on the non-reception of Jewish literature within the Gentile world, something that had already been noted by Pseudo-Aristeas.[14] According to both authors, Jewish wisdom, the Torah of Moses, had languished in the darkness of Gentile ignorance until the Greek Septuagint translation.[15] Philo hesitates concerning Socrates and his philosophy: he may have copied from Moses ("sive a Moyse edoctus") or, possibly, he was moved by the nature of things themselves ("sive ex rebus ipsis motus").[16] Harry A. Wolfson summarized Philo's thinking as postulating a twofold divine revelation: for the Greeks through philosophy, for the Jews through the Torah.[17]

Josephus, in his *Contra Apionem*, imagines for us a context in which a discussion on the "theft of wisdom" takes place. In his *Contra Apionem*, the adoptive son of the Flavii addresses the polemics of Apion and

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[12] See Philo, *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit*, ed. M. Petit (Paris: Belle Lettres, 1974), introduction.

[13] Philo, *De Specialis Legibus* 4.61; see my "Dalla tesi giudeo-ellenistica del 'plagio' dei Greci al concetto rabbinico del *verus Israel*: Disputa sull'appartenenza della *sofia*," *Revista Catalana de Teologia* 17 (1992): 93.

[14] See the list in Veltri, "Plagio," 93.

[15] *Letter of Aristeas* 312; see the edition of Raffaele Tramontano, ed., *La lettera di Aristea a Filocrate* (Naples: Ufficio succursale della Civiltà cattolica, 1931), 247.

[16] *Questiones in Genesim* 2.6, ed. Leopold Cohn and Paul Wendland, *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt* (Berlin: Reimer, 1896–1915); F. Petit, *Quaestiones in Genesim et in Exodum. Fragmenta Graeca* (Paris: Cerf, 1978).

[17] Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 138–143.

Apollonion Molon, who claimed that Judaism had made no discoveries in either technology or the history of thought.[18] In his defense of Jewish originality and superiority in philosophy, he quotes Clearchos of Soli, a pupil of Aristotle, saying that his master had called the Jews "philosophers" (*Contra Apionem* 1.179); other authors, such as Megasthenes, note the similarity in the speculations about nature by Greeks, Jews, and Indian Brahmans (*Contra Apionem* 1.215–216); Noumenios of Apamea even identifies Moses with Plato and, according to Eusebius, claims a similarity of institutions between the Greeks, the Brahmans, the Jews, and the Egyptians.[19] The lists of the testimonies *pro Judaeis* reveal a clear tendency: the Jewish and Christian authors stress the originality of Jewish thinking because it was not at all clear that Judaism (and, later, Christianity) could be called *philosophoi*. Regardless of one's assessment of the truth or credibility of the statements of non-Jewish authors on Jews and Judaism (personally, I tend to be skeptical, since we are dependent upon fragments whose context is inadequately known), Josephus, as well as Eusebius of Caesarea (the famous antiquarian and a collector of such fragments), provides evidence on an elementary point: speculation on the part of non-Jewish authors as to the similarity of the Jewish and Indian traditions was due primarily to the circumstance that both traditions were, in fact, virtually unknown to these authors.

All of these traditions in which the superiority of Jewish culture and Mosaic tradition was asserted had originated from within Alexandrian Judaism and were disseminated by Christian apologists. Within the rabbinic tradition, there are no traces of the theory of the theft of Jewish wisdom by "Occidental" intellectuals before the Middle Ages. No special theory of the superiority of the Jewish Torah over Greek philosophy is present in rabbinic documents from Palestine and Babylonia, and rabbinic Judaism initially shows no interest in philosophical

[18] *Contra Apionem* 2.135, 148, with the commentary of Lucio Troiani, *Commento storico al "Contro Apione" di Giuseppe* (Pisa: Giardini, 1977); see also Christine Gerber, *Ein Bild des Judentums für Nichtjuden von Flavius Josephus: Untersuchungen zu seiner Schrift Contra Apionem* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Louis H. Feldman and J. R. Levison, eds., *Josephus' Contra Apionem: Studies in its character and context with a Latin concordance to the portion missing in Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

[19] Besides the common edition of Josephus, all the texts discussed here can be found with a detailed commentary in the collection of M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1974–1980), 1:47–48 (on Cearchus); 1:45–46 (on Megasthenes); 2:206–216 (on Noumenios).

speculation whatsoever.[20] It should be borne in mind, however, that apology in connection with Jewish traditions is more a feature of the Greek Diaspora than of Palestinian and Babylonian Judaism.

It is only natural that Christian propagandists would collect all available fragments by pre-Christian writers containing assertions of the validity of Jewish tradition as compared with Greek philosophy. The need for a justification of Christian identity could only be satisfied by adopting the premise that *all* wisdom had been given to pre-Christian Judaism and then transmitted *in toto* to Christianity. The idea of the ontological character of the possession of wisdom developed only after the advent of Christianity: Christian writers stressed that *all* wisdom belonged to them, as *verus Israel*.[21] The story of the transmission of wisdom had a specific missionary task, namely to convince both "pagans" and Jews of the (politically effective) superiority of Christianity.[22] The genealogical representation of science and philosophy as first a Jewish and, subsequently, as a definitively Christian heritage was aimed at converting the non-Christian world to the new religion, one which was ignored by the Jews but acknowledged by the sages of the East.

The notion of the transmission of "Oriental wisdom" is portrayed in the New Testament in the form of the three "Magi" from the East who journeyed to Bethlehem, having first said to Herod: "we have seen his star in the East" (*uidimus enim stellam eius in oriente*).[23] The conception of Oriental wisdom is based, of course, on the second chapter of Genesis

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[20] The scholarly literature dealing with the alleged philosophic preoccupations of the rabbis provides no evidence that the main philosophical themes (ontology, metaphysics, etc.) had stirred the interest of the *yeshivot*, *pace* Daniel Krochmalnik; see his "Der 'Philosoph' in Talmud und Midrasch," *Trumah* 5 (1996): 137–178; see also Hans-Jürgen Becker, "'Epikuree' in Talmud Yerushalmi," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, ed. Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr, 1998), 397–421.

[21] On this question, see Veltri, "Dalla tesi giudeo-ellenistica," 85–104; and idem, "On the Influence of 'Greek Wisdom': Theoretical and Empirical Sciences in Rabbinic Judaism," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 5 (1998): 300–317.

[22] On the methods of Christian propaganda, see Doron Mendels. *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity: An Essay on Eusebius's Ecclesial History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

[23] Antonio Charbel, "Matteo 2,1–12: I magi nella cornice del regno nabateo," *Studia Patristica* 32 (1985): 81–88; Konradin Ferrari-D'Occhieppo, "The Star of the Magi and Babylonian Astronomy," in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan*, ed. Jerry Vardaman and Edwin M. Yamauchi (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 41–53, Steve Willis, "Matthew's Birth Stories. Prophecy and the Magi," *Expository Times* 105 (1993): 43–45.

(2:8) where God "planted a Garden in Eden, in the East,"[24] which contained the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. The story of the wise men of the East is a purely midrashic, hermeneutic link between Paradise before sin (whence the earthly punishment/banishment) and the Nativity of Jesus, which represents the new source of knowledge and the renewed Tree of Life. This primordial wisdom (traceable to a time before primal sin) was thus given to the new Christian religion.

While rabbinic Judaism shows no interest in speculation on the origins of wisdom in Judaism, medieval Jewish authors return to the subject, mainly to affirm their own superiority over Muslim (and Christian) culture. The idea of a genealogy of Jewish wisdom was the driving force in an apologetic current that harked back to the Oriental origins of wisdom. In Jewish literature and philosophy, this conception first appears during the tenth–eleventh centuries, when Judaism was faced with finding a way to justify the introduction of "pagan" wisdom (e.g., the Greek arts and empirical sciences mediated by Muslim scholars) into the Jewish educational system without compromising the idea of revelation. Theories of the origin of a typically Jewish (i.e., neither European nor Christian) wisdom developed in this context. Because of the sins of Israel, ancient wisdom had been lost, so that Judaism had to relearn it from Gentile sources. This is the explanation put forward by Moses ben Maimon in his *Moreh ha-Nevukhim* (1.71) and by Shem Tov ibn Falaquera in his *Sefer ha-Maʿalot* and *Iggeret ha-Wikuaḥ*.[25] Belief in a Jewish provenance for the transmission of philosophy and science was kept alive in Iberian Judaism.[26] After the 1492 expulsion, it helped build an edifice of Jewish apologetics, as can be seen in reading Leone Ebreo, Azariah de' Rossi, and Rabbi Löw of Prague.[27]

It is obvious that both theories (the theft of "original" Jewish wisdom, and the wisdom of the Magi from the East) strengthened the notion that wisdom had originated in the East, but had then been transmitted

[24] On this, see also the contribution of Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "From the Due East to True North: Orientalism and Orientation," in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey J. Cohen (New York, St. Martin's, Press, 2000): 19–34.

[25] For a more detailed discussion, see my "Die humanistische Wurzeln der 'jüdischen' Philosophie. Zur Konzeption einer konfessionellen Ontologie und Genealogie des Wissens," in *Die philosophische Aktualität der jüdischen Tradition*, ed. Werner Stegmaier (Frankfurt a. M: Suhrkamp, 2000), 249–278; and chapter 1, above.

[26] Eleazar Gutwirth, "The 'Stranger's Wisdom': Translation and Otherness in Fifteenth-Century Iberia," *Portuguese Studies* 13 (1997): 130–142.

[27] See chapters 3, 4, and 5, above.

to Christianity. For Christian Kabbalists as well, from the fifteenth century on, acceptance of the Jewish mystical tradition was based on a firm belief in the antiquity of a doctrine that could be traced back to Abraham: according to the ancient "Book of Creation" (*Sefer Yeṣirah*), Abraham was not original in his mystical and numerical speculations, but had learned this wisdom from his teachers, the Chaldeans, when he was in the land of Ur. Christian interest in the Kabbalah cannot be explained as a revaluation of Jewish traditions per se. On the contrary, the study of Jewish mystical texts was possible only on the assumption that the Kabbalah was to be considered a secret revelation handed down in pre-Christian times for future Christian use.[28] According to this view, Judaism remains the religion of the "Old Testament" because, according to Christian dogma, the stream of revelation ceases with the death of the last apostle.

The perception of Judaism as the petrified religion of the Old Testament was still alive in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even for great German scholars and poets such as Goethe, contemporary Judaism was a pale image of the ancient glory of the "Chosen People."[29] In the nineteenth century, however, even the idea of this "ancient glory" lost its attractiveness and Greek (i.e., "Aryan") culture was given the unambiguous status of representing the highest level of world culture, a culture purely of the intellect (*Geisteskultur*). The notion of "Oriental wisdom" also lost its link to the Torah (now seen as a post-prophetic tradition), and assumed an increasingly more exotic character, linked principally with the Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition, and the Jewish-Christian appropriation of Kabbalistic traditions.

The genealogy of philology in the diverse branches of scholarship (Latin, Greek, Arabic, etc.) developed, of course, out of the *critica sacra*, the science of the Bible, but later lost all connection with the Bible. This process can be seen in the attitude of the "father" of modern philology, Friedrich August Wolf, who began his reflections on critical editions by proposing a comparison between the Masoretic *critica textus* and the *critica*

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[28] The danger inherent in approaching and evaluating Jewish traditions outside that of the Bible was the main issue in the controversy over Johannes Reuchlin. Pico della Mirandola clearly affirms the nature of his preoccupation with the Kabbalah: he can find the Christian truth there as well; see Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, ed. August Buck (Hamburg: Meiner, 1990), 63.

[29] On Goethe's attitude to Judaism, see my "Jews and Judaism in Goethe's Esthetical and Reactionary World: A Typological Study," *Revue des Études Juives* 162 (2003): 123–144.

of the scholars of the Alexandrian library. He then lost interest in this question, however, and postulated the inferiority of "Oriental peoples," such as the Jews, as compared with the Greeks and Romans.[30]

Following the abandonment of the biblical text, the next step was the abrogation of Judaism, by which its role not only in scholarship, but also in the transmission of Oriental wisdom, was totally omitted. An article that originally appeared in *Theosophy* 28, published in 1939, presents the remarkable claim that the "Orient" is associated with ancient cultures as far east as Japan; Judaism, however, is not included. Even the story of the transmission of ancestral wisdom to European culture, which mentions Pico della Mirandola, Reuchlin, and Agrippa of Nettesheim, makes no reference to the mediating role played by Judaism. In the current discourse on Orientalism, the concept of the "Orient" is linked almost exclusively with Arabic culture, literature, and way of life.

It should be added that the origin of the concept of the "Far East" is also linked with the genesis of "Oriental studies." The history of the *Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft*, established in Leipzig in 1845, shows that the concept of the *Morgenland* (Orient) was commonly defined as extending as far as China and Japan, so that even today, Japanology and Sinology are included among the focus areas of the society.

The question of the definition of the "East" is still as open today as it was in the Middle Ages when the legend of the Ten Lost Tribes and Prester John first flourished. The map of the territory delineated by these legends covered the lands of the East (Middle and Far East), including Africa, as will be discussed below.

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[30] "Die orientalischen Völker weichen gänzlich von den vorzüglichsten Völckern des Alterthums ab. Die Hebräer haben sich nie so ausgebildet, daß man sie für eine gelehrte Nation halten könnte, und daher sind sie zu verschieden von den Griechen und Römern. Es versteht sich also, daß wir Werke solcher Völker, wie die Hebraer waren, ausschliessen müssen." Friedrich A. Wolf, *Encyclopädie der Philologie. Nach dessen Vorlesungen im Winterhalbjahre von 1798–1799*, ed. S. M. Stockmann (Leipzig: Die Expedition des europäischen Aufsehers, 1831), 9; mentioned by Anthony Grafton, "Juden und Griechen bei F. A. Wolf," in *Friedrich August Wolf. Studien, Dokumente, Bibliographie*, ed. Reinhard Markner and Giuseppe Veltri (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999), 28. On the entire broader question, see my "Atene e Gerusalemme: Il contrasto tra ermeneutica e filologica critica nell'opera di Friedrich August Wolf," *Laurentianum* 42 (2001): 53–65.

7.2 *Oriental Military Power and Ethnic Diversity*

The Orientalist discourse is a product not only of Gentile thinking about the Middle East, but also of the Jews' perception of themselves as being an "Oriental" people. Any account of the Jews as an "Oriental culture" in European history and territory must begin with an examination of the interconnections and instances of "cross-pollination" that characterized the evolution of a common narrative over two millennia, a story that certainly originated in "Oriental" Palestine but that was perpetuated throughout the countries of Europe.[31] In Europe, the tradition and the transmission of the concept "Oriental space" (meaning somewhere in the East) offers a clue not only to the interpretation of real geography, the huge and unknown territory beyond the horizon, but also to the map of utopian thought. The land beyond the line where the earth and sky appear to meet is the realm of the mystical origin of alien knowledge, a space open to imaginative forces that may or may not be connected to the present. It is here that the story of the Lost Tribes of Israel is localized.

There is no gap in the written Torah. Every chapter and verse, every crown on the letters, carries a deep meaning that must be interpreted. Every written sign is like a seed sown in the field of knowledge: it will yield fruit, each in its time, and according to its kind. The concept of the Orient, linked by tradition with the saga of the Lost Tribes of Israel, includes by no means only a geographic space: it also refers to a mental space, where figures of imaginative power play out a story that cannot be realized in the present. On the other hand, it is also not the projection of an "oneiric horizon," but a consequence of the workings of a purely hermeneutic imagination, of an inner need to find a logical and coherent explanation for all things.[32] Ancient exegesis can be defined as the hermeneutic concretization of, and vital reaction to, a diffuse *timor vacui*.

The characterization of the Orient as a geographical and spatial source of identity began in Judaism between the eighth and the sixth

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[31] See Lenn E. Goodman, *Jewish and Islamic Philosophy. Crosspollinations in the Classic Age* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

[32] So Ariel Toaff, *Mostri Giudei. L'immaginario ebraico dal Medioevo alla prima età moderna* (Bologna: Mulino, 1996), passim, based on the interpretation of Jacques Le Goff, "L'occidente medievale e l'Oceano Indiano: un orizzonte onirico," in *Mediterraneo e oceano Indiano. Atti del VI Colloquio Internazionale di storia marittima*, ed. Manlio Cortelazzo (Florence: Olschki, 1970), 243–263.

centuries B.C.E., when most of the population of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah was deported "beyond the river" to Mesopotamia. In 2 Kings 17:6 and 18:11, we are told that the "king of Assyria deported the Israelites to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan." According to later tradition, only two tribes, those of Judah and Benjamin, were repatriated to Jerusalem and, under Persian protection, reconstructed the temple, the city, and the political entity of Israel. What happened to the other ten tribes? To this question, the historical books of the Bible provide no answer. Nevertheless, the Prophets often express a hope that "the Lord shall set his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant of His people which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush . . . and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth" (Isaiah 11:11–12).[33] The Prophets project the restoration of the unified primeval entity into the messianic age. Not all of the rabbis, however, were convinced that the Ten Tribes really existed. While Rabbi Eliezer describes them as "seeing light in the future time," his proverbial opponent, Rabbi Akiva, does not anticipate a return of the Ten Tribes, even in the messianic age ("they are gone and will not return").

The destiny of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel engaged the imagination of apocalyptic, Talmudic, and midrashic writers.[34] According to the *Midrash Rabbah* on Genesis (73:6), "the Ten Tribes wandered into exile on the other side of the river Sambatyon, but the tribes of Judah

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[33] Abraham Neubauer, "Where are the Ten Tribes?," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 1 (1889): 17–18.

[34] A huge body of literature has grown up around the topic. See, for example, Abraham Neubauer, "'Inyane 'aseret ha-shevaṭim," *Koves 'al-yad* 4 (1888): 9–74; idem, "Where are the Ten Tribes?," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 1 (1889): 14–28, 95–114, 185–201, 408–423; Allen Godbey, *The Lost Tribes, a Myth. Suggestion towards Rewriting Hebrew History* (New York: KTAV, 1930); Israel Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1896; repr., Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1993), passim; Edward Ullendorf and Charles F. Beckingam, *The Hebrew Letters of Prester John* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Richard H. Popkin, "The Lost Tribes, the Caraites and the English Millenarians," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37 (1986): 213–227; Anna Foa, "Il popolo nascosto. Il mito delle tribù perdute d'Israele tra messianismo ebraico ed apocalissi cristiane," in *Itinerari ebraico-cristiani. Società, cultura, mito* (Fasano: Schena, 1987), 129–160; Menachem Waldman, *Beyond the Rivers of Ethiopia. The Jews of Ethiopia and the Jewish Life* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defence Publishing House, 1989): 17–91; Elena Loewenthal, "La storia del fiume Sambation," in *Biblische und judaistische Studien. Festschrift für Paolo Sacchi*, ed. Angelo Vivian (Frankfurt a. M.: Olms, 1990), 651–663; Toaff, *Mostri Giudei*, passim; Tudor Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: The History of a Myth* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003).

and Benjamin are scattered throughout all lands." Two elements of this midrash are significant: (1) there is a legendary river called the Sambatyon (also known as Sonbatyon, or Sabbatyon, or Shabbatyon); (2) the tribes are located beyond this legendary river. In rabbinic imaginings, the waters of this river flow on weekdays, but rest on the Sabbath (Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 10:3). The Latin writer Pliny seems to confirm this tradition but locates the Ten Tribes in Judea.[35] According to Josephus, however, the Sambatyon is dry during the week, but flows on the Sabbath.[36] For him, the Ten Tribes must dwell in Syria.[37] As we will see, the river Sambatyon comes to take on an increasingly utopian significance, comparable to the rivers in Gan Eden, where the "perfect humans" dwelled. This element is stressed in the apocalyptic Fourth Book of Ezra (13:41–42): the Ten Lost Tribes decided to leave the land of idolatry and to go "to a land more distant where man has not yet settled. There they would observe the laws which they did not observe in their land."[38]

While Rabbi Akiva rejected a connection between the ten tribes of Israel and the destiny of the Jews (he was an ardent supporter of the second-century Palestinian Jewish warrior Bar Kokhba, whom he considered to be the Messiah), other Jewish intellectuals contributed to the creation of the utopian myth. "Perfect Judaism," as a polar opposite to contemporary forms of the religion, could be found only beyond the river Sambatyon, and its sabbatical rest proved that the Sabbath was a "natural" law:[39] if even a river observes the Sabbath, then the Sabbath must be an expression of the natural course of things. We should recall here that the Sabbath was a source of controversy between Romans and Jews. The Stoic philosopher Seneca, for example, charged the Jews with idleness because "by introducing one day of rest in every seven, they lose in idleness (*perdant vacando*) almost a seventh of their life."[40] It could be argued that the whole legend of the Lost Tribes of Israel is, in fact, an attempt to explain Judaic law as a *lex naturalis*, a natural law in the ancient sense of the term: a law to which natural phenomena are

[35] *Historia Naturalis* 31.24.
[36] *Bellum Judaicum* 7:98–99.
[37] *Bellum Judaicum* 7:96–97.
[38] Neubauer, "Tribes," 16.
[39] Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin*, fol. 65b.
[40] *De Superstitione*, according to Augustine, as quoted by Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 86.

subject. This explanation of Jewish law and religious practice convinced at least Pliny the Elder, who did not follow the various Roman critics who censured Judaism because of the Sabbath rest. The attitudes of Jewish and Christian writers to Jewish law are also the central feature in discussions of the legend of the Lost Tribes in the Middle Ages and the early modern period.

Almost everything in medieval and early modern literary works had its origins in the imaginative power of hermeneutics, at least as far as the literature of medieval Jewry is concerned. Everything else was created by the Bible itself, through a process of exegesis. The amazing story of "perfect Judaism" was one of a Judaism that existed beyond the plane of historical events, beyond a daily life that was often quite bitter, indeed beyond reality itself.

In the ninth century of the Christian era, the myth of the Ten Lost Tribes appears in the highly original diary of the Jewish traveler Eldad ha-Dani, the text of which is extant in various versions.[41] In the Middle Ages and the early modern period, Eldad's report met with a remarkable reception in European literature and was translated into several languages (Arabic, Latin, Yiddish, Ladino).[42] In it, he attempts to localize the Lost Tribes, situating them in the land of Cush (i.e., Ethiopia) and describing their activities in utopian terms. First, they see impressive successes in subjugating every nation that dares to wage war against them: "They make war every year with seven kingdoms and seven languages . . . who are on the other side of the river Cush."[43] The goal, of course, is to obtain wealth: "These tribes possess much gold, silver, and precious stones, as well as sheep, oxen, camels, and asses." The recipe for military success is their Spartan ethic: "they are very brave, and when going to war they are wont to say: 'It is not good for the valiant to flee. The young man dies and does not flee, for his heart is strong in God. My strength and my confidence lie in my weapon; my hearth will rejoice in the sharpness of my sword and in showing my delight in my horses. How many times hast thou made prisoners the women of Cush?'" The centripetal force and focus of their life is, of course, the perfect observance of Jewish law, also granted by the river

[41] Neubauer, "Tribes," 99ff.

[42] On the manuscripts and the ancient translations, see Avraham Epstein, *Kitve Rabbi Avraham Epstein*, ed. Avraham M. Habermann, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Mossad Rab Quk, 1950), 357–362; and Loewenthal, *Eldad*, 65–68.

[43] English translations in this paragraph follow Neubauer, "Tribes," 100ff.

Sambatyon, which is "full of sand and stones, but without water . . . this river of stones and sand rolls during the six working days and rests on the Sabbath day. As soon as the Sabbath begins, fire surrounds the river, and the flames remain till the next evening, when the Sabbath ends."[44] That the river has stones is no surprise, given the hermeneutic value of the stones on which the Torah of Moses was engraved, while fire is the symbol of the presence of God in the Book of Exodus. The dual significance of the Sambatyon, as both a concrete, "natural" observance of the Sabbath and as an unreachable river beyond the imaginable, incarnates the dual nature of the Torah as a "natural" commandment to the Jewish people—it is in the Jews' "nature" to be chosen—and, simultaneously, as an unreachable and thus utopian symbol of a primordial reality (Eden).[45]

In his "Itinerary," most likely written in the twelfth century, the Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela claims to have discovered the presence of the Ten Tribes in Persia and in Yemen. He describes the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh as inhabitants of Teman (Yemen):

> They built there strong cities, and are in warfare with many kingdoms, and they cannot easily be reached because of their situation, which requires a march of eighteen days through uninhabited deserts, and thus renders them difficult of access. Khaibar [the city of the Jews] is also a large city with 50,000 Jews in it, of whom many are learned. They are valiant and engaged in wars with the inhabitants of Shinear, with those of the northern country, and with those of Yemen who live near them; the latter province borders India.[46]

Ovadya of Bertinoro, a traveler during the second half of the fifteenth century, mentions the legend in his letters, most likely relying on Eldad ha-Dani's account.[47] He distinguishes between a Hebrew community on the near shore of the river and numerous Jewish people *beyond* it. The enclosed community is holy and pure like the angels, and the inhabitants are descendants of Moses (and not in fact of the Ten Lost

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[44] Ibid.

[45] See also Loewenthal, *Eldad*, 15–16.

[46] English translation in Neubauer, "Tribes," 192.

[47] See Menahem E. Artom and Abraham David, eds. *From Italy to Jerusalem. The Letters of Rabbi Obadiah of Bertinoro from the Land of Israel. A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes* (Ramat Gan: Department of Land of Israel Studies, 1997), 86 (*Iggeret b'*, 46–61).

Tribes).[48] The community on the near side of the river is less connected to the tradition of the legend of the Ten Lost Tribes, calling perhaps to mind, instead, the ascetic community mentioned by Philo Alexandrinus, the so-called Therapeutae. The river Sambatyon, resting only on the Sabbath, acts as an obstacle to prevent access to the mythical place. Its role of protecting the community is likely taken from Christian sources, such as those mentioned by Eldad ha-Dani in connection with the Priest-King John, the legendary king of Ethiopia.[49] Prester John's "Letter" is known in a number of languages and, like the legend of the Ten Lost Tribes, became well known throughout Europe after its first appearance, in 1165.[50] In this "Letter" (Constantinople edition), Priest John describes the Ten Tribes as follows:[51]

> Know that from the stone-sea flows a river, which comes from Paradise, passing between us and the great country of the mighty Daniel, King of the Jews. This river flows all the weekdays, but remains quiet on the Sabbath day. When full, this river carries a great quantity of precious stones; consequently, no one can pass it except on the Sabbath. But we

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[48] On Ovadya's traditions, see Toaff, *Mostri Giudei*, 40–42; on his credulity, see Giulio Busi, "Realtà e finzione negli itinerarii ebraici del Medioevo," in idem, ed., *Viaggiatori Ebrei. Atti del Congresso dell'AISG*, Studi e testi 9 (Bologna: AISG, 1992), 14–15. I am not convinced by Busi's thesis that Ovadya's credulity with reference to the Ten Tribes is due to the fact that his humanistic rationalization process was not yet fully developed ("questa 'razionalizzazione' della cultura rappresent[a] un processo non ancora compiuto"). Whatever the reason for Obadya's credulity, terminology such as "rationalistic ways of viewing culture" is inappropriate in reference to the humanistic period.

[49] Cf. Toaff, *Mostri* (1996), 40–41. On this entire topic, see Ulrich Knefelkamp, *Die Suche nach dem Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes. Dargestellt anhand von Reiseberichten und anderen ethnographischen Quellen des 12–17. Jahrhunderts* (Gelsenkirchen: Staatsbibliothek, 1986); Giuseppe Tardiola, ed., *Le meraviglie dell'India: (Le meraviglie dell'Oriente, lettera di Alesandro ad Aristotele, lettera del Prete Gianni)*, Biblioteca dell'Archivio/Archivio Guido Izzi 6 (Rome: Archivio Guido Izzi, 1991); Lev N. Gumilev, *La busqueda de un reino imaginario. La leyenda del Preste Juan* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1994); Charles F. Beckingham and Bernard Hamilton, eds., *Priester John, the Mongols, and the Ten Lost Tribes* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996); Wilhelm Baum, *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes. Rom, Byzanz und die Christen des Orients im Mittelalter* (Klagenfurt: Kitab, 1999). See especially David J. Wasserstein, "Eldad ha-Dani and Prester John," in Beckingham and Hamilton, eds., *Priester John*, 213–236; on the broader question, see Beckingham and Hamilton, *Priester John*, and Baum, *Verwandlungen*. Baum does not deal with the difficult subject of the relationship of the legend of Priest John to Eldad ha-Dani's text; see here 95 ("ein gewisser Eldad ha-Dani"), 130, and 152.

[50] See "Chronica," *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores*, vol. 20, 2nd ed. (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1912), 366–367.

[51] The Latin version, published by Tardiola, *Meraviglie*, §41, p. 171, is very terse: "Ultra fluvium vero lapidum sunt X tribus Iudaeorum, qui quamvis fingant sibi reges, servi tamen nostri sunt et tributarii excellentiae nostrae."

> watch the Jews, for if they should pass they would cause great mischief to the whole world, to the Christians, the Ismaelites, as well as to all the nations and tongues under the Heaven, for no nation could resist them.… They are, indeed, so numerous that if they once cross over, they could fight the whole world.[52]

This description is quite striking, for it reveals how greatly the Christians actually feared the Jews. The river plays a special role because it testifies not only to evidence of Jewish law being applied to forces of nature, but also to the protection it provides to Christians, Arabs, and other peoples against the power of the Jewish army. Because the Jews can cross it only on the Sabbath and the Sabbath is the day of rest, non-Jews can live without worry. Ironically, Jewish law here ends up protecting Christian lives.[53]

Our third stop on this journey into the hermeneutic imagination brings us to the Netherlands. There, in 1567, the Jesuit Johannes Federicus Lumnius published his *De extremo Dei iudicio et indorum vocatione*, dealing with the conversion of the indigenous population of America and the Last Judgment.[54] His thesis is apocalyptic: after the conversion of the entire world, the fulfillment of the world (i.e., its consummation: *consummatio saeculi*) takes place. By identifying the American Indians with the Lost Tribes of Israel, the author refers directly to the New Testament prophecy of the conversion of Jews at the end of time. In this context, he mentions a prophecy attributed to the Jews of Constantinople, according to which Jews will assemble from all four corners of the earth, at which point the Messiah will manifest himself.[55]

In his *Hope of Israel*, the Amsterdam rabbi Manasseh ben Israel relates the story of the Portuguese Marrano Antonio Montezinos, alias

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[52] English translation in Neubauer, "Tribes," 194.

[53] For a different use of the story of the Ten Lost Tribes with reference to Jewish and Christian military power, see David Ha-Re'uveni, *Sippur*; and Martin Jacobs, "David ha-Re'uveni—ein 'zionistisches Experiment' im Kontext der europäischen Expansion des 16. Jahrhunderts?," in *An der Schwelle zur Moderne. Juden in der Renaissance*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri and Annette Winkelmann (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 191–206.

[54] See Foa, "Popolo," 148ff.

[55] Johannes Federicus Lumnius, *De extremo Dei iudicio et indorum vocatione libri II* (Antuerpiae: Tilenius, 1567), 176–177: "Postremo vero, qui constantinopoli sunt Iudaei…inter diversas, quas habent prophetias, unam esse dicunt, quae ostendit, quod a quattuor mundi partibus, dum Messia ipsorum se manifestare coeperit, populi colligerentur, quos forte Ioannes in Apocal. Gog et Magog appellat…," quoted by Foa, "Popolo," 149 n. 47.

Aaron Levi, describing how Montezinos encountered a secret group of people in America (probably in Quito), "beyond the great river," who, Montezinos believed, were to be identified with the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. The aboriginal population of the new continent was thus descended from the Jews.[56] The "secret" people is, in fact, an indirect reference to the Marranos themselves. By linking the Marranos with the legendary story of the Ten Lost Tribes, the secret Portuguese Jews understood their destiny as heralding the imminent arrival of the Messiah. A few years after the publication of Manasseh's book, the pseudo-Messiah Shabbetai Zvi nourished this hope with a fascinating, if illusory, realization of Marrano spiritual fantasies.

Intriguingly, Manasseh ben Israel's views that the Native Americans were the descendants of the Lost Tribes gave added impetus, at the time, to the missionary John Eliot's efforts in the Puritan Massachusetts colony to convert the ("Hebraic") Indians to Puritan Christianity, since he hoped their conversion would hasten the appearance of "Christ's temporal Kingdom here on earth."[57] Eliot, known as the "Apostle to the Indians," believed their turning to the Puritan God would be directly linked to the "advent of the millennium," since the conversion of the Jews to Christianity, including the Lost Tribes, was one of the prerequisites for Christ's second coming.[58] Daniel Gookin, a missionary associate of Eliot and the first "superintendent of Indians" in the Massachusetts colony, was convinced that the native people were descended from the Ten Lost Tribes "and that God hath, by some means or other, not yet discovered, brought them into America."[59] That conviction later blossomed into a spate of works in the United States, between 1800 and 1850, expounding on this notion of the Hebraic origins of the Amerindians. Notable among these works was Elias Boudinot's *Star in the West* (1816), in which he argued that the converted Indians would provide a sign of Christ's second coming, an emblem or omen to the

[56] On the historical myths of the American Jews, see Jonathan Sarna, "The Mythical Jewish Columbus and the History of America's Jews," in *Religion in the Age of Exploration: The Case of Spain and New Spain*, ed. Bryan Le Beau (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 1992), 81–95.

[57] Eliot, quoted in Charles M. Segal and David C. Stineback, *Puritans, Indians and Manifest Destiny* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), 143.

[58] Ibid., 141.

[59] Quoted in ibid., 143.

Indians and their Hebrew brethren, "a rising Star in the West… which star may in the issue turn out to be the *Star of Jacob*, and may become a guide to the long suffering and despised descendants of that eminent patriarch, to find the once humble babe of Bethlehem."[60]

It was Joseph Smith who, in the 1820s and early 1830s, turned this belief in the Israelite descent of the Indians into a central tenet of the new Church of Christ of Latter-Day Saints, inscribed in the *Book of Mormon*. In Smith's "revelation," America had experienced a thousand years of Hebraic culture (600 B.C.E. to 400 C.E.) among the Nephites and Lamanites (a remnant of the House of Israel), to whom the resurrected Christ had also appeared in epiphany. Yet, they later destroyed themselves in internecine warfare and forgot their Hebrew (and Christian) heritage.[61] The Mormon belief that their church represents the building of a New Zion (in Utah) by a new Chosen People echoes the American millenarian notion of the Star of Jacob in the West. The *Book of Mormon* teaches that the Jews will be converted through their church to believe that "Jesus is the Christ," hastening his second coming.[62] The Mormons considered the Indians their lost brothers and endeavored "to restore them to the light they had long lost."[63]

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[60] Boudinot, quoted in Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 361. According to Slotkin, the most popular and influential of these "Ten Tribes" books during the Second Great Awakening in early-nineteenth-century America was Ethan Smith's *Views of the Hebrews: Exhibiting the Destruction of Jerusalem; the Certain Restoration of Judah and Israel; the Present State of Judah and Israel; and an Address of the Prophet Isaiah Relative to their Restoration* (Poultney, VT: Smith and Shute, 1823), largely a rehash of Boudinot.

[61] For an insightful analysis of Mormonism, including its possible connection with the Kabbalah, see Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), esp. 77–128.

[62] "And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them. And I will show unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you… and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel" (*Book of Mormon*; 3 Nephi 16:11–12).

[63] Slotkin, *Regeneration*, 362f.: "Although Smith's statement of the ten tribes theme was the most elaborate, complex, and detailed—and, in the long run, the most convincing to a considerable American community—its values were shared by many Americans of the Romantic period. Eccentricities of doctrine, not belief in the Hebraic origins of the Indians, made the Mormons the object of persecution and exile."

7.3 *Conclusion*

I have focused here on two elements of the idea of the "Orient," as it is encountered in Judaism and reflected in Christian tradition. The first characterization of the East is apologetic, bound up with the concept of an Oriental wisdom that was more ancient than Greek philosophy, or at least contemporary with it. The second element begins as a glorification of the perfection of Judaism (the Ten Lost Tribes), then comes to hold out a messianic promise: a military power beyond the river to the East, waiting expectantly for its moment.

The idea of an Oriental wisdom, that is, one not directly connected with Occidental Greek philosophy and science, goes back to the Jewish community of Alexandria as an apologetic reaction to the Hellenistic power pervading both the private and public spheres. I use the term "reaction" here because I am convinced that the doctrine of Jewish superiority in certain sectors of life became necessary strictly as a means of defense, for stemming the loss to the community of young Jews attracted by Hellenistic life and thought. Perhaps because assimilation to the dominant culture was not a real threat to rabbinic authorities in the rabbinic period, we have no evidence of special emphasis being placed on the superiority of the Torah over philosophy in that period (indeed, rabbinic Judaism totally ignored philosophy). The idea of the superiority of the Hebrew tradition re-emerges in the Middle Ages, due to a revived interest in philosophy and a preoccupation with the Kabbalah. My conviction is that the Jewish (and later Christian) love for ancient traditions and the Hebrew language underlies the modern concepts of "Oriental studies"—even if modern scholars, beginning with Friedrich August Wolf, avoid speaking of a "Hebraist" origin to philology. Said claims that academic "Oriental" studies had their beginnings in the nineteenth century. This is in keeping with the common view that still tries to separate modern philological studies (in Occidental and Oriental disciplines) from their roots in the Bible and the Kabbalah. This can be viewed as an unfortunate remainder of the pseudo-Enlightenment.

The legend of the Orient is also a product of the dream of *military* power, a utopian imagining typical of minorities. The imagination of the Jews in the Middle Ages and in early modern times was a creative one, aimed at filling every aspect of human life with a world of connections and identifications. The legends and fantasies that populated

the imagination of every group in the societies of that era did not represent escapes from an oppressive reality, but were rather a projection, and a reflection, of paradigmatic identities. The body of literature we have dealt with here is concerned with the marvels of the Orient and, especially, of "the land beyond the river." Certain traditions, taken no doubt from so-called "Alexander romances," depict fantastic worlds, military power, economic success, and pious religious attitudes.[64] Symbolizing this life are the living waters of the river Sambatyon. In the land beyond the river, to the east of the land of Israel, dwell the "perfect" people of Israel, the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.

I would like to emphasize a few points already mentioned regarding the meaning of this tradition. The legend of the Ten Lost Tribes has, of course, much to do with the geographical dispersion of Judaism in antiquity, specifically in late antiquity, and then in the Middle Ages and the early modern period. This dispersion is historically very important for the spread and transmission of the legend itself. The less contact there was between the communities of the dispersed Jews, the greater was the popularity of the Lost Tribes legend. Significantly, it plays no role in the Greek period, but becomes increasingly prominent after the destruction of the Second Temple, reaching its peak in the Middle Ages when it becomes central to Jewish fabular literature. The material reason for this rise in the popularity of the legend is the poor or nonexistent communication between the different Jewish groups and communities, from the Sephardim on the Iberian Peninsula to those in unknown and mysterious Tibet.[65] This feature of the legend is also common to the story of the Priest-King John: unknown climes are the stuff of legends. Pliny the Elder, Strabo, and other pseudo-geographers of antiquity similarly invented foreign customs and laws to explain the superiority of the Roman Empire. The primary and most characteristic feature of the legend is, on the one hand, negative and apologetic and, on the other, politically positive.

I would like to comment briefly on this false *aporia*. The creation of an island beyond geographical confines where a "perfect" Judaism dwells could be used to explain why the Jewish people were not politically

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[64] See Wout Jac van Bekkum, ed., *A Hebrew Alexander Romance according to Ms London, Jews' College, no. 145* (Leuven: Styx Publications, 1992), 1–34.

[65] But see Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*, 233: "These fabulous reports [i.e., of the military prowess of the Ten Tribes] would not have found such ready credence in Christian Europe had the Jews there been notorious cowards."

autonomous. Autonomy, according to biblical and post-biblical Jewish political thought, is a question of consonance with and dependence on God. The more Israel searches for political connectedness with foreign kingdoms and foreign gods, the more the Jewish people are punished with the loss of autonomy. Political autonomy and military power are only possible if Israel observes the commandments. On the other hand, a legendary perfect and successful Judaism is a powerful political argument against Greco-Roman and, later, Christian criticism of Jewish customs: in other words, according to the natural course of life, when Jews observe the law, they are economically and militarily successful (a conviction which originated as early as the period of Maccabean rule). The development of the utopian character of the legend of the Lost Tribes shows its true apologetic nature: a utopia is not the projection of wishes, but the product of intellectual and political commitment to an ideal that *per definitionem* can never be attained. It is a map without a territory[66] or, better, without a "place" (u-topia), and therefore without history. In this sense, the idea of the East was not purely imaginative, but rather a political argument based on utopian thought. The spread of the legend in Amsterdam of the sixteenth and seventeenth century also originated in the political adaptation of utopian ideas: the everyday life of Jews in Europe was haunted by suffering and fear. Only the idea of a future salvation of Judaism by the hand of a secret and powerful people could render their life bearable. The hermeneutic journey of the Lost Tribes of Israel from the East, from Persia, Ethiopia, and Yemen to the American continent reveals how relative the system of geographical identity is, but not its utopian value.[67] For Utopia is a map without a territory.

If we compare Said's theory of Orientalism as colonialism, to Hellenistic or later Christian culture as imperialism, we discover an amazing parallel: Hellenistic (followed by Christian) culture tried to explain everything by means of the paradigms of reason (logos), and in this way to influence all Mediterranean societies. In contact with the Judeo-Christian system of thought, Hellenistic culture merged all knowledge in a new *compositum*. Some minorities attempted to respond to, and to stop, this pervasive fusion of myth creation, making their own

[66] Allusion to Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory. Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

[67] In the highly literal Mormon notion of *Heilsgeschichte* transposed to the New Zion of North America, the system of geographical identity is of course not relative.

claims about their identity. Scholars of Judaism term this "apology." Apology, however, has two faces—it is a *Janus bifrons*: on the one side, it reflects the natural need to assert one's own identity or identities; on the other, it implies the rejection—partial or total—of the contribution of a history shared with others in defining one's own self and culture. Every culture is subject to the pull of these two forces.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CEREMONIAL LAW: HISTORY OF A PHILOSOPHICAL-POLITICAL CONCEPT

From the beginning of the sixteenth century, and continuing until at least the first half of the eighteenth century, Christian scholarship produced a relatively large number of tractates on the rituals, rites, ceremonies, and customs of the Jews.[1] Interest in Jewish practices, both in the liturgy and in everyday life, was, of course, not entirely new. Novel, however, was the relatively high number, and accurate quality, of such publications. As early as late antiquity, and throughout the Middle Ages, Jewish customs had been the focus of much curiosity. As evidence, we need think only of Tacitus's polemical notes on Jewish customs and traditions and the numerous tractates against Judaism written by church fathers and Christian scholars in the Middle Ages. With some notable exceptions, however, general knowledge of Jewish texts, language, and traditions was both limited and faulty, being based mostly on secondhand sources—either polemical reports by converts to Christianity or by other Jewish informants, such as those referred to by Saint Jerome. The reading of actual rabbinic texts, or personal visits to the synagogue, were neither possible nor desired, given both the difficulties of language and the prohibitions of watchful church authorities.

The emergence of Jewish mystical texts and increasing recognition of Jewish expertise in biblical grammar and exegesis gradually gave rise to a new attitude among Christian scholars, which came to expression

[1] There is much literature on this topic. See, for example, the following recent volumes: Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson, eds., *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Giuseppe Veltri and Gerold Necker, eds., *Gottes Sprache in dem philologischen Werkstatt: Hebraistik vom 15. bis 19. Jahrhundert* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Dean Phillip Bell and Stephen G. Burnett, eds., *Jews, Judaism and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Brill: Leiden, 2006), especially the contributions of Maria Diemling, Yaacov Deutsch, and Elisheva Carlebach. A very useful bibliographical report on the topic in recent years is Maria Diemling, "Jewish-Christian Relations in Early Modern Germany," *EAJS-Newsletter* 17 (2005): 34–47.

in the humanist and Renaissance periods. Humanist schools, such as those initiated by Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin, openly professed an appreciation of Jewish mystical traditions and literature. Conformity with Christianity was established by explaining that ancient (or purportedly ancient) Jewish mystical methods, texts, and traditions were in reality *Christian* in origin or, at the very least, in intention. The result was that a number of scholars—either followers of the Kabbalistic discourse or opponents to this new intellectual fashion—wrote a large number of books, booklets, tractates, or chapters on Jewish grammar, traditions, and texts. The representation of Jewish mystical traditions contained in these works is often of good quality, often being based on direct knowledge of sources authored by converted Jews or on the active cooperation of Jewish scholars. Rabbinic prohibitions against teaching Hebrew to Gentiles did not inhibit Jews from helping Christian Hebraists who wished to concern themselves with the Kabbalah.

Somewhat subsequent to this increasing tendency toward a Christian monopolization of Jewish mystical traditions, there also arose a heightened "curiosity" about Jewish customs and beliefs. Christian literature in this area, written mostly in vernacular languages, developed mainly in Protestant regions, particularly in countries where German was spoken. The focus of my interest here is to look into the reasons for this large output of commentaries on Jewish rites and customs. More precisely: What was it that made Jewish laws, Sabbath practices, circumcision, purity laws, temple cults, and so forth seem so important and of such popular interest as to justify the writing of entire tractates, or entire chapters in more general books, to describe and discuss them?

Before entering into a more detailed discussion of this new genre, I would like first to examine the main explanations proposed in the available scholarship on the growth of interest in Jewish rites and ceremonies and its reflection in the literature of the period. In explanation of this profusion of writing on Jewish traditions and customs, some scholars speak of an ethnographical interest among Christians in non-Christian ideas, customs, and beliefs. Although this thesis may in part be true, I would like to show here that the reduction of Jewish legal thought to a compendium of rituals and ceremonies was not primarily intended as a means through which to create a kind of ethnology of the Jews. It was the result, rather, of a *political* decision aimed at the repudiation of any authoritative value in Jewish law. The publications are not a (polemical) peephole on life in the ghetto and the Jewish community. They are an exposition of Jewish "acts" and "beliefs" as anachronistic

religious practices. It was not a presentation of the Jews, but a listing of their disgraceful customs and prayers, fully out of conformity with the "common religion," that was seen as defining the only acceptable forms of religious behavior.

8.1 *"Jewish Rites and Ceremonies": A New Genre*

The first example of an "ethnography" of the Jews is a booklet by a converted Jew of Moravia, Johannes Pfefferkorn, entitled: *Ich heyß ain buchlein der iuden peicht*,[2] in which he describes the rituals and ceremonies proper to two Jewish holidays, Rosh ha-Shanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). Perhaps in the same year, another converted Jew, Victor von Carben, published a description of Jewish holy days, customs, and ceremonies entitled: *Hierinne wirt gelesen, wie Her Victor von Carben, Welicher eyn Rabi der Iude gewest ist zu Christlichem glawb komen.*[3] Both Pfefferkorn and von Carben wrote in the intention of converting Jews "from their wickedness" (Pfefferkorn: "von yrer böshait"). Both present a nearly accurate account of Jewish rituals, as Yaacov Deutsch

[2] *Ich heyß ain büchlein der iuden peicht. In allen orten vindt man mich leicht. Vil newer meren seind mir wol bekannt* (Cologne: Johannes Landen, 1508); Latin: *Libellus de judaica confessione sive sabbato afflictionis* (Nurnberge: Jo. Weyssenburger, 1508); see Hans-Martin Kirn, *Das Bild vom Juden im Deutschland des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts dargestellt an den Schriften Johannes Pfefferkorns* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1989); Yaacov Deutsch, "Von der Juden Ceremonien," in Bell and Burnett, eds., *Jews, Judaism*, 338–340.

[3] Ortuin Gratius or De Graes seems to have written (together with Victor von Carben?), as early as 1504, an anti-Jewish tractate, *De vita et moribus Iudaeorum* (quoted in his history of the Jews by Graetz, as well as by others). In the Reuchlin-Pfefferkorn dispute, Ortuin played a fairly significant role. In 1509, De Graes translated Victor von Carben's *Opus Aureum ac Novurn in quo Omnes Judæorum Errores Manifestantur*, in which he dealt with the life and customs of the Jews. On the works of von Carben see Wolfgang Schmitz, *Die Überliefgerung deutscher Texte im Kölner Buchdruck des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, Habilitationsschrift (Köln: 1990), http://kups.ub.uni-koeln.de/volltexte/2004/1234/pdf/schmitz.pdf (accessed July 2006), passim; see further Hava Fraenkel-Goldschmidt, "On the Periphery of Jewish Society: Jewish Converts to Christianity in Germany During the Reformation" (in Hebrew), in *Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry*, ed. Menahem Ben Sasson, et al. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989), 623–654; Maria Diemling, "'Christliche Ethnographien' über Juden und Judentum in der Frühen Neuzeit" (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 1999). The Berlin library owns a book listed under the call number Um 2059/100, *Ricoldi, Ordinis praedicatorum, Contra sectam Mahumeticam non indignus scitu libellus. Cuiusdam diu captivi Turcorum provinciae septemcastrensis, de vita & moribus eorundem alius non minus necessarius libellus. Adjunctus est insuper Libellus de vita & moribus Judaeorum* (Paris: Stephanus, 1511). In the first edition, dated 1509, there is no mention of the *Libellus*, which is probably to be attributed to Ortuin.

argues,[4] the purpose, of course, being to expose the "ludicrousness" and "absurdity" of Jewish rituals and, above all, the anti-Christian nature of certain prayers and ceremonies.

Somewhat friendlier in aim is the work of François Tissard,[5] author of the first Hebrew grammar, and of the first work in Greek characters to appear in France. Tissard was a student of Abraham Farissol, who taught him Hebrew over a period of several years.[6] He appended the tractate *De Iudaeorum ritibus compendium* to his Hebrew grammar (1508), with the intent of furnishing the French public with information about Jewish rites and costumes hitherto unknown, because Jews did not commonly reveal them to strangers:[7] "I strongly desired to witness their rites, to hear their singing and to comprehend their mysteries."[8] In his view, it was only through an understanding of the Jews' literature and rituals, and not by compulsion, that it would be possible to convert them to Christianity.

After the Lutheran reformation, Jewish rituals and ceremonies made a new and more successful beginning as a literary genre. The first comprehensive treatise on Jewish customs and rites, including the first translation of a Hebrew prayer book into a European language, was composed by the converted Jew Anthonius Margaritha. The work was entitled *Der gantz Jüdisch glaub*[9] (The Entire Jewish Faith, 1530),[10] and it

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[4] Yaacov Deutsch, "Von der Juden Ceremonien," 338–342.

[5] François Tissard (ca. 1460–1508), *Dialogus: Prothymopatris kai Phronimos . . . De Judaeorum ritibus compendium. Tabula elementorum Hebraicorum. Documenta ut debeant illa elementa proferri ac legi. Ut Hebraei numeros signant. Oratio dominica Hebraicis characteribus impressa. Genealogia beatae Mariae: una cum aliis plusculis eisdem characteribus impressioni mandata. Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum Latine, Graece et Hebraice. Grammatica Hebraica succincte tradita. Tabula elementorum Graecorum cum diphtongis et pronunciandi regulis et pluribus Graecis orationibus et Hyppocratis iusiurando. Abbrevationes Graece. Ut Graeci numeros signant amplissima descriptio. Operoso huic opusculo extremam imposuit manum Egidius Gourmontius integerrimus ac fidelissimus primus duce Francisco Tissardo Graecarum et Hebraearum litterarum* (Parrhisiis impressor, 1508).

[6] On the humanist Tissard and his attitude to Judaism, see David B. Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew: The Life and Thought of Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1981): 98–106, 215–217.

[7] Fol. 1b–2b.

[8] Fol. 17b; English translation by Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew*, 100–101.

[9] Peter von der Osten-Sacken, *Martin Luther und die Juden: Neu untersucht anhand von Anton Margarithas "Der gantz Jüdisch glaub" (1530/31)* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002); Maria Diemling, "Anthonius Margaritha on 'Whole Jewish Faith': A Sixteenth-Century Convert from Judaism and his Depiction of the Jewish Religion," in Bell and Burnett, eds., *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation* (see n. 1, above), 303–333.

[10] Antonius Margarithus, *Der ganz Jüdisch Glaub mit sampt ainer gründtlichen und warhafften anzaygunge aller Satzungen, Ceremonien, Gebetten, haymliche und offentliche Gebreuch* (Augsburg: Heinrich Steyner, 1530).

had a marked influence on generations of Christian scholars. As such, it is central to any research on "Jewish rites." In the first part of the book, Margaritha deals with Jewish rituals and customs; the second part contains the translated daily prayers. Despite the existence of the earlier works by François Tissard, Johannes Pfefferkorn, and Victor von Carben, "it was *Der gantz Jüdisch glaub*, which became the first example of a new literary genre,"[11] as Maria Diemling has pointed out. The purpose of the book was to deauthorize the rabbinic tradition, presenting it as nonbiblical, or even in contradiction with the Bible. As Steven Burnett put it, the "goal was not to satisfy the curiosity of Christians, but to expose Judaism as an unbiblical religion that posed a danger to Christian faith."[12] Martin Luther found Margaritha's book "so great a solace that he had it read to him for a time regularly at his table; he compared the several rites and ceremonies therein described with the idolatrous worship of the Papists,"[13] as Louis I. Newman noted as early as 1925.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, a number of further works on the subject appeared: the *Tractatus de imposturis et ceremoniis Iudaeorum nostri temporis*, by Conrad Huser, alias Lombardus Marcus,[14] was published in 1575. Some years later, Rudolf Wirth, alias Rudolf Hospinian, issued two works on Jewish festivals and ceremonies: *De Festis Judaeorum et Ethnicorum, hoc est de origine, progressu, ceremoniis et ritibus festorum dierum Christianorum*[15] and *De origine progressu ceremoniis et ritibus festorum dierum Judaeorum, Graecorum, Romanorum et Turcarum*.[16] In 1603, Johannes Buxtorf published his well-known *Juden-Schül*, which went through a number of printings, under the title *Synagoga Judaica*, in Latin, Dutch, and English translation,[17] quickly becoming the single most popular

[11] Diemling, "Margaritha" (cited above, n. 10), 308.

[12] Stephen G. Burnett, "Distorted Mirrors: Antonius Margaritha, Johann Buxtorf and Christian Ethnographies of the Jews," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25 (1994): 275–287, here 276.

[13] Louis I. Newman, *Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements* (Columbia University Press, 1925), 627.

[14] *Tractatus de imposturis et ceremoniis Iudaeorum nostri temporis, antea quidem ab authore Germanice editus: nunc vero in gratiam Reipublicae Christianae Latine redditus a Conrado Husero Tigurino* (Basileae: Per Petrum Pernam, 1575); Herzog August Library, Wolfenbüttel A: 177.4 Theol. (6); see Gaby Knoch-Mund, *Disputationsliteratur als Instrument antijüdischer Polemik. Leben und Werk des Marcus Lombardus, eines Grenzgängers zwischen Judentum und Christentum im Zeitalter des deutschen Humanismus* (Tübingen: Basel, 1997).

[15] 2 vols., Tiguri, 1592/93.

[16] 3 vols., Zürich, 1593.

[17] German editions: Basel, 1603; Hanau, 1643, 1680; Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1728, 1729, 1737, 1738. Latin editions: Hanau, 1604, 1614, 1622, 1641, 1661; Basel, 1680,

book on Judaism available, at least in Protestant countries. The seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries saw additional contributions. Among these are the works of two Jewish authors: Simone Luzzatto's *Discorso*[18] and Leone da Modena's *Riti*.[19] Works by Christians include Johannes Andrea Quenstedt's *Sepultura veterum sive tractatus de antiquis ritibus* (1660),[20] Georgius Sigimundus Strebel's *De antiquis Judaeorum Ritibus* (1664),[21] John Spencer's *De legibus Hebraeorum* (1685),[22] and other writings by less well-known students and scholars of Judaism at German and other universities elsewhere in Europe.

8.2 *Explanatory Theories: "Ethnography"*

Between the beginning of the Protestant Reformation and the end of the political seclusion of the Jews in the ghetto, Christian literary production relating to Jewish rituals and ceremonies was undeniably vast, its expansion extending to nearly all countries in Northern Europe. Modern scholars face a difficult task in finding a plausible explication for this interest and in elucidating why the phenomenon first appears in this period. Nevertheless, in coming to terms with this literary and phenomenon, care must be taken not to impose modern religious, literary, and political categories, unsuited to the period under examination, by adopting the methods of modern ethnography.

1712; repr. Of the 1680 Latin edition: Hildesheim: Olms, 1989. Dutch editions: Amsterdam, 1694; Leiden, 1702; Rotterdam, 1731. English editions: London 1663, 1742. Source: Alan D. Corré, http://www.uwm.edu/~corre/buxdorf/myintro.html (accessed July 2006).

[18] See below.

[19] See below.

[20] *Sepultura veterum sive Tractatus de antiquis ritibus sepulchralibus graecorum, romanorum, judaeorum & christianorum, . . ./studio & opera Johannis Andreae Quenstedt* (Wittebergae: Sumptib. Haered. D. Tobiae Mevii & Elerdi Schumacheri, typis haered. Melchioris Oelschlegelii, 1660).

[21] *Decas selecta positionum philologicarum de antiquis antiquis Judaeorum ritibus et moribus, unde quamplurimis ssae. locis lux aliqua affunditur August Pfeiffer* [Resp.:] Georgius Sigismundus Strebel August Pfeiffer; Georg Sigismund Strebel (Wittenberg: Henckel, 1664).

[22] *De legibus Hebraeorum ritualibus et earum rationibus. Libri Tres (Cambridge: Richard Chiswel, 1685); De legibus hebraeorum ritualibus earumque rationibus libri quatuor. Praemittitur Christ. Matth. Pfaffii, Dissertatio praeliminaris qua de vita Spenceri, de libri pretio & erroribus quoque disseritur. Autoresque, qui contra Spencerum scripsere, enarrantur* (Den Haag: Arnold Leers, 1686); see Jonathan M. Elukin, "Maimonides and the Rise and Fall of the Sabians: Explaining Mosaic Laws and the Limits of Scholarship," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002): 619–637.

The current explanations suggesting an "ethnographical" interest, as proposed by Ronnie Po-chia Hsia,[23] and "polemical ethnography," as proposed by Yaacov Deutsch,[24] may possibly shed some light on popular interest in foreign rites and symbols. In my opinion, however, they are not sufficient for explaining the theological, philosophical, and political foundations of that interest. I would even go so far as to argue that the theory of a "Christian ethnology" of non-Christian peoples is not applicable here at all. The central aspect of the phenomenon was not a concern with expressions of human diversity as represented by ethnic divisions and cultural and social cults and beliefs. This is a purely modern conception. Rather, at issue was the *legal* status of non-Christian peoples who came under Christian rule, either in the past or in the present. Judaism was a case unto itself because, although it was a separate ethnic group under Christian rule, it had deep connections with Christian origins and theology. In elucidating this point, it will be useful to look briefly into Christian attitudes toward "Gentiles" in the humanist period.

The Christian reaction to "Gentile" customs and beliefs initially took the form of apologies in defense of Christianity. At the core of this reaction was a concern with understanding the legal status of the "Gentiles" in Christian society. Christian interest in this issue can be observed in works dealing with the customs and beliefs of Turks and Native Americans, or Indians. Aloysius de Crieva (Ludovicus Cervarius Tubero), a Ragusian historiographer writing at the turn of the sixteenth century (1459–1527) described Turkish customs and religious beliefs,[25] dwelling on their atrocities against prisoners. Bartholomaeus Georgijevic published a book on Turkish customs in 1544.[26] Bartolome de las Casas and Francisco de Vitoria are well known for their early reports

[23] Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, "Christian Ethnographies of Jews in Early Modern Germany," in *The Expulsion of the Jews: 1492 and After*, ed. Raymond B. Waddington and Arthur H. Williamson (New York: Garland, 1994), 223–235.

[24] Yaacov Deutsch, "Representations of Jews in Sixteenth-Century Germany," in Bell and Burnett, eds., *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation* (cited above, n. 1), 347–356.

[25] Ludovicus Cervarius Tubero, *De Turcarum origine, moribus et rebus gestis* (Florentiae: apud Antonium Patauinium, 1590).

[26] *De Turcarum moribus epitome*, Bartholomaeo Georgieviz Peregrino autore (Lyon, J. Tornaesius, 1555).

on the "Indians" of the New World[27] and for their development of a new concept of natural law as international law.[28]

As noted by Victor Segesvary,[29] the Catholic Church was concerned with the danger of a return to paganism, as some contemporaneous scholars recognized in other religions and peoples a reflection of the *theologia* or *philosophia naturalis* that could serve as the basis for a Christian dialogue with non-Christian systems. For Raymond of Sabunde (d. 1436),[30] familiar by virtue of Montaigne's "Apology,"[31] natural theology cannot be reduced to a religious text and thus can serve as the basis of all things, understandable to all. In Raymond's thesis we find enunciated for the first time the notion of a common substratum existing between all peoples and religions, as a common premise and basis for all religion. His philosophy of nature, however, should not obscure the fact that the place of natural theology is, of course, fixed, in his view, within the bounds of (Christian) revelation.

Contrary to the irenic view of recent scholarship in this area, I remain highly skeptical toward attempts to discover an enlightened attitude toward other religions among Christian scholars of the late medieval and humanist periods. The celebrated conception of Nicholas of Cusa, according to which there is one religion in a multiplicity of rites,[32] cannot obscure the fact that he saw every good, pious, and beautiful aspect of the Koran as having its origins in the light of the Gospel.[33] Only the

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[27] Modern edition: Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias, edición preparada por la Fundación 'Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas', de los Dominicos de Andalucía* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1994); Franciscus de Victoria, *De Indis recenter inventis et de jure belli Hispanorum in barbaros. Relectiones: Vorlesungen über die kürzlich entdeckten Inder und das Recht der Spanier zum Kriege gegen die Barbaren 1539*, ed. Walter Schätzel, introd. Paul Hadrossek (Tübingen: Mohr, 1952).

[28] On this very important aspect see James Brown Scott, *The Spanish Origin of International Law. Francisco de Vitoria and his Law of Nations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934).

[29] *L'Islam et la reforme: Étude sur l'attitude des reformateurs Zurichois envers l'Islam 1510–1550* (La Haye: Mikes International, 2005), 35ff.

[30] Raymundus de Sabunde, *Theologia naturalis, sive liber creaturarum* (Strassburg: Martin Flach, 21 Jan. 1496); online at http://diglib.hab.de/wdb.php?dir=inkunabeln/e-207–a-2f-helmst-1 (accessed February 12, 2008). See Jose Luis Sanchez Nogales, *Camino del hombre a Dios: la teología natural de R. Sibiuda* (Granada: Facultad de Teología, 1995).

[31] There are many modern editions; see, e.g., *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*, ed. Paul Mathias (Paris: Flammarion, 1999).

[32] "Una religio in rituum varietate," *De conjecturis* 1.13, written between 1440 and 1444; see Walter A. Euler, "Una religio in rituum varietate. Der Beitrag des Nikolaus von Kues zur Theologie der Religionen," *Jahrbuch für Religionswissenschaft und Theologie der Religionen* 3 (1995): 67–82.

[33] Nicholas of Cusa, *Cribatio alchorani* 1.6: "…sid quid pulchri, veri et clari in Achorani repetitur, necesse est, quod sit radius lucidissimi evangelii."

Christian religion can be seen as the basis or substratum of all humanity, which other religions fail to acknowledge, whether intentionally or unintentionally. The variety of rites is nothing but an expression of their relative ignorance of the divine plan for humanity.

Some decades later, the conquistadores took up the motif of the "ignorance" of the "Indians," their ostensible lack of all concept and practice of morality, in order to justify the war against them by the biblical precepts against idolatry and immorality. The Spanish royal chronicler Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo (1478–1557) wrote the following "observations" in the first part of his *Historia general y natural de las Indias* (1535) on the Amerindians:

> (They are) naturally lazy and vicious, melancholic, cowardly, and in general a lying, shiftless people. Their marriages are not a sacrament but a sacrilege. They are idolatrous, libidinous and commit sodomy. Their chief desire is to eat, drink, worship heathen idols, and commit bestial obscenities. What could one expect from a people whose skulls are so thick and hard that the Spaniards had to take care in fighting not to strike on the head lest their swords be blunted?[34]

The focus of this text is not, as widely maintained in modern scholarship, the racist attitude that it clearly exudes. Its point, rather, is the classification of Amerindian "customs" as belonging within the catalogue of sins against "natural law" iterated in the Bible. Commenting this text, Thomas F. Gosse states: "In Spain a debate continued throughout the sixteenth century on the question of whether the Indians in the New World were really men, or whether they were beasts or perhaps beings intermediate between beasts and men. As in the case of the Jews, we find arguments that the Indians were an accursed people."[35]

Without entering into the details of a very complicated question, I would partially disagree. Oviedo's main purpose is to justify a colonial war by indirectly invoking the Bible, where, for example, in 1 Kings

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[34] Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, *Historia general y natural de las Indias, Islas y Tierra Firme del Mar Oceano*, ed. José Amador de los Rios, 4 vols. (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1851–1855), part I: Lib. 2, cap. 6; Lib. 4, cap. 2; Spanish text, http://www.ems.kcl.ac.uk/content/etext/e026.html#d0e161 (accessed February 2, 2008), quoted from Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), 11; see also Olive Patricia Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage, and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas* (Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 1997), 31–32 and passim.

[35] Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, new ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12.

14:24, the destruction of the Canaanites is justified by recalling and exaggerating their obscene practices and idolatry. The negative qualities of the Amerindians are nothing but the inversion of natural law, as understood both by Christians and Jews, including, among other crimes, perverse sexual practices, idolatry, lying, and other "sins against nature."[36] In Oviedo's vision and description, the Amerindians are the subject of an ethical and ethnological *Wunderkammer*. It is, indeed, not purely accidental that museums are a product of this period.[37] Each "cabinet of curiosity" was a product of the (creative) imagination, a Christian fiction, aimed at depicting non-Christian peoples and their environments as scenes of fantasy, inhabited by monsters and animal rarities. As beautiful as these curious spectacles may seem, however, they are capable of brutality, indecent behavior, nudity,[38] and cannibalism.[39] The invention of the "noble savage" by such thinkers as Montaigne is also a reverse reaction to this phenomenon.[40]

Opposed to forcing the Amerindians into submission was the Spanish Dominican mentioned above, Francisco de Vitoria. In his *De Indis et Iure belli* (1539/1540, published in 1557), de Vitoria states expressly that even the "Indians' sins against natural law" provide neither an absolute nor a legal no reason for compelling them:

> Christian princes cannot, even by the authorization of the Pope, restrain the Indians from sins against the law of nature or punish them because of those sins. My first proof is that the writers in question build on a false hypothesis, namely, that the Pope has jurisdiction over the Indian aborigines, as said above. My second proof is as follows: They mean to justify such coercion either universally for sins against the law of nature, such as theft, fornication, and adultery, or particularly for sins against nature, such as those which St. Thomas deals with (*Secunda Secundae*, qu. 154, arts. 11, 12), the phrase "sin against nature" being employed not only of what is contrary to the law of nature, but also of what is against the

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[36] Thomas, *Secunda Secundae*, qu. 154, arts. 11, 12.

[37] See Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); but see also William Curtis Sturtevant, "Does Anthropology Need Museums?," *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington* 82 (1969): 619–650.

[38] See Rachel Doggett et al., *New World of Wonders: European Images of the Americas 1492–1700* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 38–42 and passim.

[39] See also Christian Feest, "Mexico and South America in the European Wunderkammer," in *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 237–244.

[40] See Doggett, *New World*, 52 and 91 and corresponding figures.

> natural order and is called uncleanness in II Corinthians, ch. 12, according to the commentators, such as intercourse with boys and with animals or intercourse of woman with woman, whereon see Romans, ch. 1.
>
> Now, if they limit themselves to the second meaning, they are open to the argument that homicide is just as grave a sin, and even a graver sin, and, therefore, it is clear that, if it is lawful in the case of the sins of the kind named, therefore it is lawful also in the case of homicide. Similarly, blasphemy is a sin as grave and so the same is clear; therefore. If, however, they are to be understood in the first sense, that is, as speaking of all sin against the law of nature, the argument against them is that the coercion in question is not lawful for fornication; therefore not for the other sins which are contrary to the law of nature.[41]

According to de Vitoria there does exist a natural law, the law of reason, which must also be followed by the Amerindians. The subject of his discussion, however, does not relate to the conception and content of "natural" law, but to the jurisdiction and legal authority, both papal and royal, for enforcing that law. The legal argument against the subjugation of the Amerindians and the subsequent punishment for their "sins" is that the pope, as guarantor and supreme authority of the Christian faith, does not have any political jurisdiction over the "Indians." Moreover, war against the Amerindians with the intent of subjugating and converting them is not permitted by Christian law.

And what about Judaism and the Jews living under Christian rule? On this question, of fundamental importance to the present study, de Vitoria displays a distinctly liberal attitude: although the Jews, like the Saracens, are enemies of Christianity, they are not compelled to embrace Christian faith.[42] In terms of their legal standing, they are to be dealt with like Christians: criminal acts of theft or robbery against them are to be treated no less as theft or robbery than when such acts are committed against Christians.

> Unbelief does not destroy either natural law or human law; but ownership and dominion are based either on natural or on human law; therefore they

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[41] De Vitoria, *De Indis*, part 2, 10:16; English translation by John Pawley Bate quoted as appendix to Scott, *The Spanish Origin*, 324.

[42] See De Vitoria, *De Indis*, part 1, 24 and, above all, part 2, 10: "Sixth proposition: Although the Christian faith may have been announced to the Indians with adequate demonstration and they have refused to receive it, yet this is not a reason which justifies making war on them and depriving them of their property. This conclusion is definitely stated by St. Thomas (*Secunda Secundae, qu. 10, art. 8*), where he says that unbelievers who have never received the faith, like Gentiles and Jews, are in no wise to be compelled to do so." In ibid., 322.

> are not destroyed by want of faith. In fine, this is as obvious an error as the foregoing. Hence it is manifest that it is not justifiable to take anything that they possess from either Saracens or Jews or other unbelievers as such, that is, because they are unbelievers; but the act would be theft or robbery no less than if it were done to Christians.[43]

De Vitoria's enlightened position on Judaism (and Islam) did not, of course and unfortunately, reflect the mainstream of thought, neither in Dominican academies nor in Protestant theology, as we try to illustrate in the following. Jewish communities in the Christian world had a special status. Their position depended on the goodwill of the sovereign power. Their laws were considered "rites and ceremonies" that had been revealed to Moses at a specific time, and which corresponded to their particular situation at that time, but which had been rendered void, in the intervening period, by the God of the New Testament.

8.3 *The Triune Conception of (Ancient) Law*

Origin of a Discussion

In the Christian vision of humanity, at least as perceived by the more enlightened scholars, a place could be found for the toleration of non-Christian, "pagan" religions and customs. The status of Judaism, and of Jewish laws, as a legal institution, posed a more serious problem, because Judaism, in the Christian view, could not be categorized as a *natural* religion. Its place in the conception of humanity *more Christiano* was not clear. Judaism was seen as something anachronistic, no longer a valid and vital religion, but an antiquated faith. The discussion of the rites of the Jews is thus nothing but a confirmation of their place in human history as an outdated, antiquated, and yet lingering presence.

The source of this conception was, throughout the Middle Ages and up until the Enlightenment, the Thomist vision of the law of the Old Testament. The sources Aquinas drew on were, on the one hand, the Vulgate translation of Deuteronomy 6:1 (*haec sunt praecepta et caerimoniae atque iudicia*),[44] which translates *mishpaṭim* as *iudicia, miṣwot* as *praecepta*,

[43] De Vitoria, *De Indis*, part 2, 7; English translation by John Pawley Bate quoted as appendix to Scott, *The Spanish Origin*, 301.

[44] See also Deuteronomy 7:11, 11:1; 1 Esdras 8:7; and 1 Kings 2:3, where all three terms occur.

and *ḥuqqim* as *caerimoniae.* On the other hand, there was a long tradition for the categorization, cataloguing, canonization, and Christian interpretation of "Old" Testament law in the Latin West, dating back at least as far as Augustine. In the scholastic period there was a revival of the discussion in the so-called dialogue-literature, as for example the *Dialogus inter Philosophum, Iudaeum et Christianum* of Peter Abelard or the *Sefer ha-Kuzari* of Judah Halevi.[45]

According to Thomas Aquinas "we must distinguish three kinds of precept in the Old Law; viz., *moral* precepts, which are dictated by the natural law; *ceremonial* precepts, which are determinations of the Divine worship; and *judicial* precepts, which are determinations of the justice to be maintained among men."[46] The first precepts, *moralia*, are of universal value, because they belong to the law of nature, while the cultic system of Israel (*caeremonalia*) and the civil code of the nation (*judicialia*) were additions to the expressions of natural law found in the Old Law and summarized in the Decalogue.[47] The moral precepts derive their binding force from reason. Both ceremonial and judicial precepts, on the other hand, derive their binding force "not from reason alone, but by virtue of their institution." The distinction is very important because it introduces the category of the "institution," which gives both philosophical and political expression to Thomas's unconcealed goal of demonstrating the historical contingency of Jewish judicial and ceremonial law. The *judicialia* and the *caeremonalia* are considered as having unquestionably been handed down in a particular historical context. By making this distinction, Thomas of Aquinas makes it clear that judicial and ceremonial laws point forward to the coming of Christ, who brought them to fulfillment,[48] while natural law is a product of reason.

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[45] Leo Strauss, "The Law of Reason in the Kuzari," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 3 (1943): 47–96.

[46] *Summa Theologica*, 1a2ae. 99, 4. Translated by Stephen B. Casselli, "The Threefold Division of the Law in the Thought of Aquinas," *Westminster Theological Journal* 61 (1999): 175–207, here 185. The whole article can be downloaded at http://www.medievalchurch.org.uk/article_aquinas_casselli.html (accessed July 2006).

[47] Ibid., p. 185.

[48] Thomas *Summa Quaestio* 47, 2; 48: "Quia in morte Christi lex vetus consummata est, potest intelligi quod patiendo omnia veteris legis præcepta implevit: moralia quidam, quæ in præceptis caritatis fandantur, implevit in quantum passus est et ex dilectione patris et eliam ex dilectione proximi, cæremonialia vero praecepta legis, quæ ad sacrificia et oblationes præcipue ordinantur, implevit Christus sua passione, in quantum omnia antiqua sacrificia fuerunt figuræ illius veri sacriticii, quod Christus obtulit moriendo pro nobis.… Præcepta vero judicialia legis, quæ præcipue ordinantur ad satisfaciendam injuriam passis, implevit Christus sua passione, permittens se ligno

Aquinas displays little originality in his vision of the "Old Law" (*vetus lex*), for which he is indebted to the church fathers, including among others Jerome, Augustine, and Albert the Great,[49] to the more recent works of the Franciscan John de La Rochelle,[50] and to the Latin version of Aristotle's *Politics*, first translated in 1262 by William of Moerbeke. Thomas is also arguing against *Moreh Nevukhim*,[51] in which Maimonides maintains the rationality of revelation without Christ. Thomas responds by emphasizing the pedagogical role of the Torah for the Jewish people, both individually and as a whole, before the advent of Christ.

A first reaction to Aquinas's categorization of the law is found a century later in the well-known *Sefer ha-Iqqarim* (Book of the Principles),[52] by the Spanish philosopher Joseph Albo. First published in 1485, it was one of the first works of Jewish philosophy to reach the printing press. Albo was involved in the so-called Dispute of Tortosa, the main topic of which was the validity of Jewish law. In chapter 25 of part 3, he quotes the opinion of a Christian scholar on this question.[53] The sages had argued that the Law was comprised of three elements: (1) the *ceremonials*[54] as commandments relating to divine worship (i.e., relations between man and God); (2) the *judiciales* as rules and principles relating to business transactions between man and his fellow man (i.e., relations between man and man); and finally (3) the *morales* as precepts relating to the relationship of the individual to himself (i.e., virtuous living, humility, etc.). The "Christian scholar" had attacked, in particular, the ceremonials, that is, Jewish divine worship, because it "commands

affigi pro pomo quod de ligno homo rapuerat contra dei mandatum." See the online edition of *Corpus Thomisticum*, http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/index.html (accessed October 2007).

[49] On the whole question see Aloysius Obiwulu, *Tractatus de Legibus in 13th Century Scholasticism. A Critical Study of Law in Summa Frati Alexandri, Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003).

[50] See Beryl Smalley, "William of Auvergne, John de la Rochelle, and Thomas Aquinas on the Old Law," in *St. Thomas Aquinas Commemorative Studies*, ed. Armand Mauer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1974), vol. 2, 11–71.

[51] See John Y. B. Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 41.

[52] Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha-Iqqarim* 3.25; see Sina Rauschenbach, *Josef Albo. Jüdische Philosophie und christliche Kontroverstheologie in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 142–156.

[53] My English summary is linguistically based on the translation of Isaac Husik, ed., *Sefer ha-Ikkarim. Book of Principles by Joseph Albo*, 4 vols., 4th edition (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946), 3:217–245 (part 3, chapters 25–26).

[54] All three technical terms are in Latin in Hebrew transliteration.

the slaughter of animals, the burning of flesh and fat, the sprinkling of blood, all of which are unclean forms of worship."[55]

Albo follows the line taken by Maimonides, whom he quotes expressly, claiming that the Temple ceremonies are nothing other than stimuli for prayer and divine love. The sacrifices of the Temple service are exclusively symbolic in nature, intended to protect Israel from idolatry. Contrary to the common Christian opinion, Albo argues that the Torah (the *Old* Testament in Christian parlance) is perfect (*Sefer ha-Iqqarim* 3.25),[56] as expressly stated in Psalm 19:8: *Torat Yhwh temimah*. Hieronymus had erroneously translated *temimah* as *inmaculata* (immaculate), giving rise to the suspicion that the Torah was unclean. This interpretation, claims Albo, is totally unfounded, as *temimah* is nothing but a synonym for the adjective *shelemah*.[57]

Although Albo's stand was known,[58] there is little or no mention of it in later commentaries on Thomas's division of the law.[59] In subsequent treatments of the subject, such as that of Francisco de Vitoria, mentioned above, the *caeremonalia* and *judicialia* are deemed no longer valid:

> … all the commands of the Old Law which are not matters of natural law have ceased, and especially "judicial" commands, for "ceremonial" ones have certainly ceased. But with regard to judicial commands, everyone admits that they have all ceased, and for this reason a blasphemer is not now killed. It is very true that those same judicial commands could be reinstituted, so that a robber be condemned to sevenfold restitution. But in that case it would not be a command of the Old Law, but rather human law, which would prescribe this. Therefore, the fact that it is now lawful to kill a murderer is not because of an exception to the law, because that

[55] Translated by Husik, see above.

[56] On the subject of law and Torah in Albo, see Rauschenbach, *Josef Albo*; Dror Ehrlich, "A Reassessment of Natural Law in Rabbi Joseph Albo's 'Book of Principles,'" *Hebraic Political Studies* 1 (2006): 413–439.

[57] In proof he quotes Numbers 19:2 and *Sifre Numeri* 123.

[58] See Michela Andreatta et al., ed., *Il trattato sui dogmi ebraici (Sefer ha-Iqqarim) di Yosef Albo. Il codice miniato dell'Accademia dei Concordi di Rovigo* (Treviso: Antilia, 2003), esp. pp. 9–64 (general introduction and translation of chapters 25–26 of part 3) and 65–78 (by Giuliano Tamani on the manuscript and print tradition of the book).

[59] Chapter 25 of part 3 of *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* was separately translated into Latin in 1566 by the Benedictine Gilbert Genebrard, *R. Iosephi, R. Davidis Kimhi, et alius cuiusdam Hebraei anonymi argumenta, quibus nonnulos fidei Christianae articulos oppugnant* (Parisiis: Martinus Iuvenis, 1566); on this translation with polemical commentary see Rauschenbach, *Josef Albo*, 178–198.

> exception has ceased and in the same way that command about killing has ceased, since all judicial commands have ceased.[60]

The discussion continues in the seventeenth century. In his *Colloqium*, the lawyer, historian, and philosopher Jean Bodin divides divine law into three branches: *lex divina, lex ritualis*, and the *lex politica*.[61] Divine law is of two kinds: relating to the cult (the first four commandments of the Decalogue) and to social behavior (the other six commandments); the *politica* are the laws that order common, everyday life (judicial laws, civil code), on which the Hebrew republic was founded; the *lex ritualis* is concerned with ceremonies, sacrifices, etc. For Bodin as well, the *lex politica* is not temporary, but a foundation of Christianity.

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[60] "Secundo dico de adultera, quod in Hispania solum permittitur occidi, non tamen in aliis provinciis ut Aragonae, Italia, Gallia. Sed bene faciunt Hispani, utuntur enim jure communi, quia leges videntur illud permittere. Et ad argumentum Scoti quo probat illud esse revocatum in lege nova, miror quidem de illo. Ideo dico quod omnia praecepta veteris legis quae non sunt de jure naturali, cessaverunt, et praecipue judicialia, quia caeremonialia etiam cessaverunt. Sed de judicialibus omnes fatentur cessare omnia, et ideo blasphemus modo non occiditur. Bene verum est /279/ quod possent eadem illa praecepta judicialia iterum institui, ut quod latro condemnetur ad septenas; sed tunc non esset praeceptum veteris legis, sed lex humana quae hoc praeciperet. Ergo quod liceat occidere nunc homicidam, non est propter illam exceptionem legis, quia illa exceptio cessavit; et ita illud praeceptum de occidendo cessavit, quia omnia judicialia cessaverunt. Sed tamen quia rex et imperator potest illa civilia jura nunc imponere et tenebunt, hinc est quod si licet occidere homicidam, non est quia sit exceptio in veterl, lege, sed quia nunc est lex imperatoris quae praecipit hoc." Commentary on *Summa Theologiae Iia-Iiae Q. 64* in John P. Doyle, *Francisco de Vitoria* (Marquette University Press, 1997), 143.

[61] "SALOMO: Nihil in majestate Bibliorum antiquius aut sacratius est lege divina, cujus divisio triplex est. Nam praeter historiarum libros praecipua est lex moralis, secunda ritualis, tertia politica. Moralis iterum duplex: altera pars ad Dei cultum, altera ad hominum inter ipsos mutua officia spectat. Dei cultus quatuor decalogi capitibus primis continetur, caetera sex capita ad tuendam hominum inter se fidem ac societatem pertinent. Politica vero diffusius eadem complectitur, quae secunda tabula brevissime continet, scilicet leges judiciales, connubiales, praetorias, quibus Hebraeorum respublica fundata est et constituta, sine quibus licet et viro bono in desertissima solitudine et ubique terrarum salutem adipisci. Ritus vero et sacrificia a Deo instituta, ut Israëlitae, qui ab Aegyptiis et finitimis populis sacra daemonibus et animalium statuis facere didicerant, ab iis deinceps abstinerent, quod fieri non potuisset ob inveteratum daemonibus sacrificandi morem, nisi eadem sacra Deo facere juberentur." Joannes Bodinus, *Colloquium heptaplomeres de rerum sublimium arcanis abditis e codicibus manuscriptis bibliothecae academicae gissensis cum varia lectione aliorum apographorum nunc primum typis describendum*, ed. Ludwig Noack (Schwerin, Paris, London: F. G. Baerensprung, 1857), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17859/17859–h/17859–h.htm. See also http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bodin/.

The Protestant Turning Point; or, Advertising for a Theory

A first question that arises out of what has been said thus far is how to explain the profusion of "ethnographical" tractates on the Jews in Protestant countries, while the theoretical foundation of such literature derives from Catholic theology. A second question, which students of Jewish history must put to themselves, is how to explain the profusion of legal codifications (including collections of customs, prayers, etc.) in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Judaism. A direct, reciprocal connection between these two phenomena cannot safely be assumed without first demonstrating that Jewish authorities and scholarship were acquainted with the Thomist threefold formula and that Christianity was aware of the existence of Jewish canonizations of the (biblical and rabbinic) law.

Based on the works of Elisheva Carlebach[62] and Yaacov Deutsch[63] on the profusion of Jewish books concerning Jewish law and customs, I would like to suggest that the controversy over the value of Jewish (biblical) ritual law was already the central issue in the Jewish-Christian debate in fifteenth-century Spain and that consideration of the canonization of the laws and custom was initially a Sephardic interest, which was then exported also to Ashkenaz.[64]

The fact that Margaritha entitles his book *The whole Jewish faith*, although he deals only with Jewish customs, ceremonials, and prayers, should not be overlooked. On the other hand, the debate over the threefold division of Old Testament laws was the central point in the dispute between Protestants and Catholics. In his commentary on Galatians 2:16, a central text in Lutheran theology, Luther, the former monk, states:[65]

> For the sake of argument let us suppose that you could fulfill the Law in the spirit of the first commandment of God: "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart." It would do you no good. A person simply is not justified by the works of the Law.

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[62] See Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany 1500–1750* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

[63] See above, n. 1.

[64] In the present context, I cannot give this point the detailed treatment it deserves.

[65] All texts are quoted are from *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians (1535) by Martin Luther*, trans. Theodore Graebner (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1949), http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/gal/web/gal2–14.html.

> *The works of the Law, according to Paul, include the whole Law, judicial, ceremonial, moral*. Now, if the performance of the moral law cannot justify, how can circumcision justify, when circumcision is part of the ceremonial law? The demands of the Law may be fulfilled before and after justification. There were many excellent men among the pagans of old, men who never heard of justification. They lived moral lives. But that fact did not justify them. Peter, Paul, all Christians, live up to the Law. But that fact does not justify them. "For I know nothing by myself," says Paul, "yet am I not hereby justified." (I Cor. 4:4.)
>
> The nefarious opinion of the papists, which attributes the merit of grace and the remission of sins to works, must here be emphatically rejected.

Also, on Galatians 4:3, Luther comments:

> In calling the Law the elements of the world Paul refers to the whole Law, principally to the ceremonial law which dealt with external matters, as meat, drink, dress, places, times, feasts, cleansings, sacrifices, etc. These are mundane matters which cannot save the sinner. Ceremonial laws are like the statutes of governments dealing with purely civil matters, as commerce, inheritance, etc. As for the pope's church laws forbidding marriage and meats, Paul calls them elsewhere the doctrines of devils. You would not call such laws elements of heaven.

While Jews and Catholics follow ritual (ceremonial) laws, they do not have any foundation in revealed biblical law, which Christ has fulfilled. This aspect is also stressed in a sermon, delivered in Leipzig, August 12, 1545, where Luther explained Matthew 21:12–13.[66] Jesus went into the Temple, and cast out all who sold and bought there, overthrowing the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves, "and said to them, 'It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it a den of assassins'" (in Luther's version). The Wittenberg reformer interprets the scene not as a criticism of the Jewish people, who gained money by profiting from the presence and importance of the Temple, but rather of the priestly class, with their cults and ceremonies. "Den of assassins" refers first and foremost to the bloody offerings of the Jewish priests, characterized as "proper liturgy" (*ordentlicher Gottesdienst*). That was the proper divine service which Luther recognized as valid, even though it was later abolished by Christ. The brunt of his comments is aimed not at the Jews, of course, but at the Catholic Church, whose offerings in the Holy Mass

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[66] *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Krirtische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 51 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1914), 22–41. I thank Dr. Beyse, University of Halle, for the reference to Luther's text.

represent the "murder" of the son of God. These offerings should be seen as representing the traditional service to God, whereas Christ himself, according to Luther, speaks, like Jeremiah, only of prayer. In this context, Luther applies to "old" Jews and the "old" tradition of the Catholics the same reproach: that of *Seelenmörder* (murderers of souls). He portrays the Pope, the friars, and the monks as behaving like the priests of the old Temple, selling their services (the ceremonial cults) and murdering the souls of the poor.[67]

Jewish Answers in Sixteenth-Century Venice

If the *caeremonialia* are an aspect of biblical law that has been suppressed, abrogated by Christ and therefore no longer valid, we may ask why the Venetian rabbis Simone Luzzatto and Leone Modena chose such a paradigmatic term to describe Jewish life and customs. In the introduction to his *Riti*,[68] Leone Modena speaks of the underlying purpose that motivated his tractate: to provide a response to the deficiencies of Johannes Buxtorf's *Synagoga judaica*. The work is clearly apologetic, aimed at correcting the vision of Christian scholars. The division of his book into five chapters, in imitation of the Torah, is a patent reference to the biblical roots of Judaism. I do not know whether he was aware that Christian opinions on *riti* no longer questioned their biblical foundations, but focused rather on their validity following the "Redemption" of Christ.

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[67] "…das da sollte ein Bethaus sein (wie Christus aus Jesaja lvi. sagt), machen sie zu einem schendlichen kauffhaus, ja zur Modgruben der Seelen" (p. 31); "…Aber sie trieben allein auffs opffer on die lere und anruffen, Darüber ward das Haus zu nichts anderes denn zu einer Mordergruben. Denn damit verderbten sie die armen seelen…" (p. 33); "…dann sie nichts sind denn Seelenmörder (weil sie nichts recht leren, wie man gleuben und beten sol)…" (p. 36).

[68] Leon Modena, *Historia de riti Hebraici. Vita, & osseruanza de gl'Hebrei di questi tempi*, 2nd ed. (Venetia: Benedetto Miloco, 1678); *Les Juifs présentés aux chrétiens. Cérémonies et coutumes qui s'observent aujourd'hui parmi le Juifs par Léon de Modena traduit par Richard Simon suivi de Comparaison des cérémonies des Juifs et la discipline de l'Église par Richard Simon*, ed. Jacques Le Bruns and Guy G. Stroumsa (Paris: Les belles Lettres 1998); Cecil Roth, "Leone de Modena and the Christian Hebraists of his Age," in *Jewish Studies in Memory of Israel Abrahams* (New York: Press of the Jewish Institute of Religion, 1927), 384–401; idem, "Léon de Modène, ses Riti ebraici et le Saint Office de Venise," *Revue des Études Juives* 7 (1929): 83–88; Mark R. Cohen, "Leone das Modena's Riti: A Seventeenth Century Plea for Social Toleration of Jews," in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 429–473.

A more effective use of the Christian terminology is to be found, however, in Simone Luzzatto's *Discorso*[69] on the state of the Jews of Venice and on Jewish rites and dogmas.[70] Luzzatto's intent is also apologetic. He attempts to respond to all arguments raised against the Jews both in the past and in the present. I believe, however, that the there is a fine line that separates the two rabbis of Venice. Luzzatto attempts to shift the accent of his arguments to an issue that was a quite recent development of the Protestant-Catholic controversy: the argument that the biblical ceremonies had lost their validity with the death of Jesus. I think it is worthwhile to look into this point in some detail, if for no other reason than Luzatto's contribution to this debate has thus far not received the attention it deserves in this context.[71]

Luzzatto does not semantically distinguish between rites, cults, and ceremonies. In referring to the prohibition against celibacy, for example, he uses the term "rite."[72] In his usage, the process of salting meat for bleeding (and thus for preservation) is also a "rite."[73] "Rite" refers also to the practices that provide an element of separation between Christian and Jews, fulfilled in the divergence of languages, the dietary laws, and

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[69] *Discorso circa il stato de gl'Hebrei et in particolare dimoranti nell'inclita Città di Venetia* (Venezia: Calleoni, 1638). The English translation is from a forthcoming translation of the *Discorso* by Ariella Lang, Giuseppe Veltri, Benjamin Ravid, and Robert Bonfil.

[70] See chapter 9, below, pp. 219–220, for the discussion between Modena and Luzzatto on the "copyright" of the first Jewish book on the rites in common language.

[71] For the literature on the subject see Daniel Krochmalnik, "Mendelssohns Begriff 'Zeremonialgesetz' und der europäische Antizeremonialismus. Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung," in *Recht und Sprache in der deutschen Aufklärung*, ed. Ulrich Kronauer and Jörn Garber (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), 128–160; idem, "Das Zeremoniell als Zeichensprache. Moses Mendelssohns Apologie des Judentums im Rahmen der aufklärerischen Semitiok," in *Fremde Vernunft. Zeichen und Interpretation*, ed. Joseph Simon and Werner Stegmaier (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1998); see further B. J. Weil, "Über die Personification in der hebräischen Poesie und das Ceremonialgesetz in der hebräischen Religion," *Sulamith* 3/1 (1810): 162–182; Anonimous, "Die jüdischen Zeremonialgesetze," *Jeschurun* [old series] 2 (1854–1855): 70–76; W. Gunther Plaut, ed., *The Rise of Reform Judaism* (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1963), passim.

[72] *Discorso* 18v: "Nela scola del disaggio sotto la rigorosa disciplina di esso bisogno, sono eruditi, ed instruiti li ebrei più che ogn'altra nazione, essendo privi di beni stabili, senz'essercizio delle arti mecaniche, lontani da proffitti del foro, e d'altri impieghi urbani, carichi di famiglia essendoli anco per loro riti proibito il celibato. . . ."

[73] *Discorso* 30r: ". . . e si potrebbe ancor addurre certe minuzie, com'il consumo del sale, che credo esser il quadruplo di quello adoperano li cristiani per il rito ch'osservano nell'insalare la carne per l'estrazzione del sangue a loro proibito, che non occorre farne raconto."

the prohibition of mixed marriages.[74] "Cult," accordingly, is used as a synonym for ceremonies.[75]

In his explanation of the nature of the Jewish religion, Luzzatto reveals himself to be acquainted with current Christian discussion of Jewish law. He draws a distinction between divine law "and the ceremonial precepts included in it."[76] The Thomist, triune division of the law is here clearly explained and adapted to the Jewish conception of the Law. The first and most fundamental level of the Law is composed of the particular ceremonies and cults—that which is commonly termed "religion." The second level on which the Law operates is in promoting the social and amicable communion of human beings; the third level is that of natural morality, by which all humanity is bound together:[77]

> The commonness of religion is the greatest bond and most tenacious knot that keeps humanity closely united, and even that pagan said "since life is upheld by religion."[78] And the most learned and eloquent Jew Philo

[74] *Discorso* 40v–41r: "In quanto alla prima instanza se li risponde, che non può succedere scandalo, e mal esempio per esser così poco comunicanti insieme gl'ebrei con cristiani, e tanto differenti de riti, ed anco per la varietà delle lingue, che li loro libri sono composti; vi s'aggiunge la proibitione, cosi all'uni come all'altri del convivere insieme, ed in particolare l'osservanza de gl'ebrei circa il gustare molti cibi, che non li sono leciti conforme a loro riti, come anco li comercii carnali, che oltre al divieto delle loro leggi, da editti del Principe parimente interdetti, e li transgressori severissimamente castigati; v'è ancora, che la impotenza, e soggezzione de gl'ebrei cagiona, che da qualunque fuori della loro religione si trova, sono scansati, e sfugiti, e di rado alla loro credenza si convertono." See also *Discorso* 49v.

[75] *Discorso* 43r–43v and *Discorso* 64r.

[76] *Discorso* 48v–49r. "E quegli Hebrei dimoranti sotto il Dominio di Asuero re di Persia essendoli permesso per editto regale la vendetta nella vita de nemici, e svaligio della lor robba, eseguirono l'una, e si astenero dall'altro, li quali esempii devono essere cosi osservabili *da chi professa la Legge ebraica, come il mantenimento de preceti cerimoniali in essa contenuti*, che pure con tanta scrupulosità da ognuno di loro sono eseguiti. . . ." Italics mine.

[77] *Discorso* 51v–52r: "La comunicanza della religione è il maggior vinculo, e più tenace nodo che conserva ristretta la società umana, ed insin quel etnico disse, *vita humana Religione constat*, e Filone ebreo dottissimo, ed eloquentissimo lasciò scritto, *nam unius Dei cultus est amoris mutuaeque benivolmentiae vinculum insolubile*, non resta per ciò che appresso gl'Hebrei si tiene, che quelli si trovano fuori dell'osservanza de loro riti, ed assenso de loro credenze particolari, non siano però reputati affatto disciolti, e slegatti da qualunque legame de umanità, e reciproca amista: stimando essi che vi siano diversi gradi di connessione fra gli uomini, come ancora in un'istessa natione l'oblighi di carità sono fra loro subordi|nati, l'amor di se stesso ottiene il primo loco, dopo v'è la congiunzione del sangue, poi l'amistà fra cittadini, e per ciò credono che gli esteri, ed alieni della loro religione partecipano con loro della comune umanità, che insieme li congiunge, osservando però li precetti della naturale moralità, ed avendo alcuna cognizione d'una causa superiore."

[78] Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 14.119.

> wrote: "For the most effectual love-charm, the chain which binds indissolubly the goodwill which makes us one, is to honor the one God."[79] It does not mean, therefore, that the Jews consider that those who are outside the observance of their rites and agreement to their particular beliefs are therefore thought to be completely freed and released from any ties of humanity and reciprocal amity. They believe that there are different degrees of connections among men, as even in the same nation the obligations of compassion are subordinated [52r] among them, the love of self obtaining the first place, followed by the union of blood, then the amity between citizens. Therefore, they believe that the foreigners and those different from their religion participate with them in the common humanity, by which they are joined together in observing, however, the precepts of natural morality and having some cognition of a superior cause.[80]

This corresponds to the logic of the "particular," according to which Judaism does proselytize, as evidenced in the case of the Jews of Babylonia (Jeremiah 10:11–12)[81] and the inhabitants of Nineveh, who "did not convert to the Hebrew religion, but ceased from their thieving extortions and fraud, remaining gentiles as before."[82] In explanation of the absence of proselytism in Judaism, Luzzatto has no other argument than that of absolute divine will, which is also the source and reason of the creation and revelation.[83]

Laws, ceremonies, and rites were given by divine will to the Jewish people without any obligation of universality. Hence, Luzzatto does not pretend to qualify Judaism as a universal religion, but only to legitimate its existence by demonstrating that its rites are "not dissonant from the universal." His intent is to qualify Judaism as a confession, which is the reason for his highly intriguing comparison of Jewish rites and dogma with the Roman Catholic credo:

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[79] Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 1.52.

[80] A first translation of this difficult passage was made by Benjamin Ravid (manuscript). I have changed some elements of his original wording. I thank Professor Ravid for putting at my disposal his English translation. If not expressly noted, the translations from Luzzatto's "Discourse" are taken from a cooperative project by Benjamin Ravid, Robert Bonfil, and myself. A first working translation has been made by Dr. Ariella Lang and Benjamin Ravid. We hope to publish the work soon.

[81] *Discorso* 52r.

[82] *Discorso* 53r.

[83] *Discorso* 55r: "…ciò stà involto nelli profondi secreti della divinità, siccome non si può conprendere n'anco qual sia stato la cagione che gia pochi mille anni solamente ebbe principio il mondo e che tanto ritardasse Iddio diffondere la sua benignità alle future creature, com'anco non si può arrivar a sapere perché creò tal numero d'uomini, e tale d'angioli."

> It is a certain thing that in some matters the Hebrew nation inclines to the Roman more than to its own beliefs.[84] The Jews maintain that in many places the Sacred Scriptures are not intelligible without the light of tradition, placing great value and foundation on it, as I have already demonstrated. They still believe that the value of meritorious deeds is great to God, and they practice them quite a lot, accompanying them however with faith. They affirm free will, and they consider it to be a principle article of their beliefs; they likewise affirm that the merits of others can assist the imperfect, and the living pray for the souls of the dead. They say that the justification of the penitent is real and not reputed and absolutory as Calvin held. And even though the word purgatory is not frequent among their authors, they divide the fate of the separated soul into three parts: beatitude, finite temporal punishment, and eternal ones that God absolves the guilt, but for which He still exacts punishment; their prayers are in the Hebrew language, not in the vernacular. All these things are discussed and examined in the treatise on dogmas and rites.[85]

Luzzatto's comparison of Jewish and Christian dogmas and rites must be interpreted as a *captatio benevolentiae*: he defines Judaism as a world parallel to that of Roman Christianity. It goes without saying that any perceived proximity to the conceptions of the Protestant confession(s), even if only theoretical, could easily have been his undoing. Practically, as rabbi of Venice, his tendency was conservative, denying, for example, all legitimacy to Karaite Judaism, which was seen as a prototype of Protestantism.[86]

In his "Discourse," Luzzatto does not explicitly mention any argument for or against the assertions of Christian theology concerning

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[84] I suppose that here Luzzatto is speaking of the Jews in Protestant countries.

[85] Translation by Benjamin Ravid of *Discorso* 90v–91r: "…certa cosa è che la nazione ebrea in alcuni articoli inclina alla romana più che alla loro opinione; tengono gli ebrei la scrittura sacra in molti lochi non esser intelligibile senza il lume delle tradizioni, facendo gran stima e fondamento sopra esse, come ho già dimostrato; credono ancora che grande sia il valore dell'opere meritorie appresso Iddio, ed in esse grandemente si essercitano, accompagnandoli però con la fede; asseriscono il libero arbitrio, e lo stimano essere articolo principale delle loro credenze; affermano parimente, che li meriti altrui possino coadiuuare alli imperfetti, e li vivi pre|gano per l'anime de morti, dicono la giustificazione del penitente esser reale, e non putativa, ed assolutoria, come ha tenuto Calvino, e se bene non hanno il nome di purgatorio frequente nelli loro auttori tripartiscono gli avvenimenti delle anime separate alla beatitudine, alle pene temporali finite, ed alle eterne, tenendo ch'Iddio assolva la colpa, ma tuttavia esige la pena; le loro orazioni si fanno in lingua ebraica, non in volgare; le qual cose nel trattato delli dogmi, e riti sono discussi, e ventilati."

[86] See Valerio Marchetti, "The Lutheran Discovery of Karaite Hermeneutics," in *Una manna buona per Mantova. Man tov le-Man Tovah. Studi in onore di Vittore Colorni per il suo 92° compleanno*, ed. Mauro Perani (Florence: Olshki, 2004), 433–459.

the fulfillment of divine law; he claims only that Jewish customs are no different from those generally observed, as he states in the preface: "I proposed to compose a concise but truthful account of this nation's principal rites and most commonly shared opinions, which are not dissonant or discrepant from the universal ones."[87] In his conception of political thought, the rites are a particular element of Jewish identity, based mostly on the oral law. They are a constant over time:

> To these learned men (the Rabbis), all the Hebrews in every place and time have given punctual assent in that which relates to the fulfillment of rites and precepts, and especially ceremonials which are considerable and evident observances and do not change with the times.[88]

The logic of such a proposition is clearly to be deciphered as an indirect refutation of Christian claims of eternal absoluteness: what God had transmitted to Jews as law cannot be temporary; it is an eternal commitment to his people, a task to be fulfilled—an interpretation which John Toland, reader of Luzzatto, clearly acknowledged. The rabbi of Venice turns the tables, so to speak.

8.4 *Roots of a Modern Discussion*

The conception of Judaism as a religion based on ceremonies and rites is of Christian origin. There is no trace in the literature of ancient or early medieval Judaism of a division between natural, judicial, and ritual law. This partitioning is solely the result of Christian attempts to create a theoretical and practical basis for accepting the novelty of the new revelation, grounding its importance in the fulfillment and perfection of the Law, while stigmatizing the Old Testament as anachronistic, obsolete, and thus imperfect. As part of this process, Christianity's initial dependence on Jewish tradition, while theoretically and logically coherent, must be invalidated. This, in turn, can only be achieved by declaring the rites of the Torah—among them the observance of the Sabbath and circumcision—to be antiquated, obsolete, and nonbinding. The entire development, of course, reflects a Pauline vision of Christianity, which later also influenced Judaism's understanding of its own traditions. According to Luzzatto (and later also Moses Mendels-

[87] *Discorso* 4r.
[88] *Discorso* 77v.

sohn),[89] natural and political law follow a paradigm common to both Christians and Jews, while ceremonies are a distinctive element of the Jewish religion.

The reaction of Spinoza, in the fifth chapter of the *Philosophical-TheologicalTreatise*, is well known:[90] the Jewish ceremonies are of historical and material value because they represent the temporal prosperity of the kingdom. The Temple cult has only political meaning, since its purpose was to preserve the state. The role played by Moses is to be understood in the same perspective:

> His sole care was to teach moral doctrines, and distinguish them from the laws of the state; for the Pharisees, in their ignorance, thought that the observance of the state law and the Mosaic law was the sum total of morality; whereas such laws merely had reference to the public welfare, and aimed not so much at instructing the Jews as at keeping them under constraint.[91]

The destruction of the (Second) Temple entails—in Spinoza's view—also the abolition of the rites. The Pharisees, of course, continued to practice these rites even after the destruction of the kingdom, more "with a view of opposing the Christians than of pleasing God." Spinoza seems here to follow the Protestant interpretation of Jewish rites, quoting Paul's letter to the Galatians (5:22–23): "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, against which there is no law." The Pharisees embody the separation between religious practice and a moral way of life, identifying themselves with ceremonial law,[92] as Rabbi Eugen Gärtner stated, in 1922:

> They let it appear as if the Pharisees had alienated the religious practice, as if they considered the area of religious demands, *which we call ceremonial laws*,[93] the only important thing, and the commandments of an ethical way of life were regarded as useless.[94]

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[89] See Daniel Krochmalnik, "Mendelssohns Begriff 'Zeremonialgesetz,'" 128–160.

[90] See my article "La dimensione politico-filosofica dei 'Caeremonialia Hebraeorum': Barukh Spinoza e Simone Luzzatto," *Materia Iudaica* 2008 (in press).

[91] English translation: *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), http://www.yesselman.com/ttpelws1.htm.

[92] On the subsequent question, which I cannot deal with here, see the literature below, fn. 94.

[93] My italics.

[94] "Sie [die Christen] lassen es so erscheinen, als ob sich den Pharisäern die religiöse Übung ganz veräußerlicht habe, als ob ihnen der Bereich religiöser Forderungen, den

The process that began with Thomas Aquinas ends here, with a Jewish identity derived from the Christian definition of Jewish law, coupled with a criticism of the image of the Pharisees as presented in Christian scholarship. The main points of this dispute have remained topical, to the present day, in all religious and confessional discussions of the foundations of Jewish precepts, rites, and customs, even as the political and philosophical significance of such debate fades into the background.

wir Zeremonialgesetz nennen, alles und die Gebote eines ethischen Lebenswandels wenig oder nichts gegolten hätten." Eugen Gärtner, "Das Feindbild schlechthin: die Pharisäer," in *Die Lehre des Judentums nach den Quellen* (Leipzig: Gustav Engel Verlag, 1922), vol. 3; quoted from *Ha-Galil*, http://juden.judentum.org/judenmission/baeck-1.htm (accessed October 2006).

CHAPTER NINE

THE CITY AND THE GHETTO: SIMONE LUZZATTO AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF JEWISH POLITICAL THOUGHT

Political thought is by nature paradoxical, consisting always of an admixture of idealism and realism. Almost no political project, political statement, or philosophical appreciation of politics is thinkable without reference to an ideal state, an ideal ruler, or some idealized vision of the past that can be prospected for utopian remedies to existing political ills—from the loss of freedom to the fragmentation of states and the decline of cities, or even empires. As a rule, a philosopher usually attempts to transcend the particular, the accidental situation, leaving the details of reality aside in favor of generalizations. Reality becomes conceptualized in the form of a philosophical proposition. Nevertheless, political thought always starts out from contingent historical situations. A critical examination of the history of philosophy shows us that as an absolute prerequisite to the discovery, creation, and formulation of political theories, every philosopher, statesman, and intellectual must build on his own historical experience of a real political system, out of which he constructs a new existence (utopia). There is no lack of examples: Plato's republic can be understood only within the context of the Greek polis; Machiavelli's idea of the prince is a direct response to Cesare Borgia's political experience; the significance of Hobbes's theory of the state cannot be appreciated without taking into account the political, social, and military changes that shook seventeenth-century Europe. Turning now to Jewish thinkers of the humanistic period, I would mention in this context Isaac Abravanel, whose theory of the republic is a negative reflection of his unsuccessful experience with monarchy: his idealization of Venice is comprehensible only as a political celebration of a "tolerant" state.[1] Thus, political thought manifests itself, paradoxically,

[1] On Abravanel's political theory, see Isaac Baer, "Don Isaac Abravanel and his Relation to Problems of History and Politics" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 8 (1937): 241–259; Leo Strauss, "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching," in idem, *Isaac Abravanel. Six Lectures* (Cambridge: Trend and Loewe, 1937), 93–129; Benzion

as universal theory originating in a contingent historical situation that simultaneously provides the key to explaining that theory.

The definition of Jewish political thought, and the elements that constitute its essential features, is a question that has received a good deal of scholarly attention over the past decade. This is due in part to the publication of the valuable collection of essays, *The Jewish Political Tradition*, edited by Michael Walzer, Menachem Lorberbaum, and Noam J. Zoar,[2] which attempts to do justice to a chapter in Jewish philosophy whose importance was long underestimated. Taking a wider view of political thought, which goes beyond the question of state sovereignty, the editors embrace a vision of society that sees the political in all facets of social organization—a vision that reflects wide-ranging Jewish discussion of and commentary on the Bible. The presence of a political tradition in Judaism is revealed, according to the editors,[3] in comments on the organization of community life; on political choices concerning the distribution of power and influence; on the development and enforcement of a set of laws; on the imposition of taxes for purposes of security, welfare, religion, and education; on relations, of one sort or another, with non-Jewish authorities; and on attempts to limit the use of power by both Jews and non-Jews. In addition to these issues related to the practical regulation of Jewish life, the Jews were concerned also with theoretical questions ("ideas and arguments"), as expressed both in recollections of the biblical past (foundation) and in hopes of a messianic future (utopia). The editors of the collection acknowledge that this tradition is not political in its outward form, "but

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Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman and Philosopher* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1953); Ephraim E. Urbach, "Die Staatsauffassung des Don Isaak Abrabanel," *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 81 (1937): 257–270; Herbert Finkelscherer, *Quellen und Motive der Staats- und Gesellschaftsauffassung des Don Isaak Abravanel* (Breslau: Munz, 1937); Salomon Levi, "La cité humaine d'après Isaac Abrabanel" (PhD diss., University of Strasbourg, 1970); Aviezer Ravitzky, "On Kings and Statutes in Jewish Thought in the Middle ages: From R. Nissin to R. Isaac Abravanel," in *Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry. Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson*, ed. Menahem Ben-Sasson (Jerusalem: The Historical Society of Israel, 1989): 469–491; Abraham Melamed, "Jethro's Advice in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish and Christian Political Thought," *Jewish Political Studies* 2 (1990): 3–41; idem, "Isaac Abravanel and Aristotle's 'Politics'. A Drama of Errors," *Jewish Political Studies* 5 (1993): 55–75; Reuven Kimelman, "Abravanel and the Jewish Republican Ethos," in *Commandment and Community: New Essays in Jewish Legal and Political Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank (Albany: State of New York Press, 1995): 195–216.

[2] 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000–2003); see Julie E. Cooper, "Is There a Jewish Political Tradition?," *Tikkun* (July/August 2001), http://www.tikkun.org.

[3] 1:xxi.

political in substance."[4] And what is this substance? The answer is: commentary—fragments of thought in biblical, Talmudic and, rarely, philosophical writings. Admitting that "this interpretative tradition never took on the firm shape of doctrine or theory," the editors see in it themes, concerns, tendencies, and internal tensions that formed the objects of study.

An initial reading of the texts collected leaves the impression that this is a first attempt to present in an organized manner the traces of political thought (or tradition) in Jewish literature. The editors start out from the assumption that the Jews of the Diaspora can be considered as a political entity whose political attitudes can be anthologized. The unifying factor, in their view, is the intertextuality of the authors, their common reference to the same "authoritative texts and events on which these texts are focused":[5] the exodus from Egypt, the revelation and covenant at Sinai, the capture of the land, the establishment of the monarchy, the conquests and the revolts, the wars and civil wars. In addition to making common reference to shared texts and traditions, the writers also "refer endlessly to one another."

At the same time, the editors point out, not all that Jews produced in the field of political thought is relevant for a reconstruction of the Jewish political tradition. The theoretical justification for such selectivity is to avoid the necessity of dealing with authors who, while notoriously Jewish in their origins, are not considered representative of the Jewish tradition; they are "out of the referential system." Spinoza is an exception to these exceptions, because his reference sources are those of the tradition.[6] Similarly Ahad Ha-am (Asher Ginsberg) and Micha Josef Berdichevsky "still know the tradition and worked within it."[7] Nevertheless, other authors—among them disciples of those included—are left out of the canon of Jewish political thought. Their exclusion is justified, in the editors' view, by the fact that these authors are "largely ignorant" of the tradition and "entirely disengaged" from it.[8]

Jewish political thought is thus a product of Jewish philosophy, contained within a definition of Jewishness as knowledge of Jewish

[4] Ibid., xxii.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., xxiii: "Spinoza writes always with the tradition in mind: the Hebrew Bible is his first text; the greatest of medieval Jewish philosophers, Moses Maimonides, is his crucial reference."
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., xxiii.

tradition and engagement with it. If this definition is correct, however, it is surprising to see Spinoza counted as a Jewish philosopher, given his conscious disengagement from the tradition. Further, the use or abuse of Jewish tradition cannot be taken as a decisive criterion, since some Christian scholars also adopted the biblical and postbiblical Jewish tradition. Were we to take knowledge of and engagement with Jewish tradition as the determinant criteria for Jewish political thought, we would also have to accept the discussions of the *respublica Hebraeorum* by Jean Bodin, Corneille Bertram, Petrus Cunaeus, and Carolus Sigonius as belonging to the Jewish political tradition,[9] for they, too, rely on the biblical tradition, engage in its defense, and see in it a paradigm for modern political thought. The obvious reason for excluding them is that they are not Jews, while Spinoza, although excommunicated, remains a part of the Jewish tradition; at least he continued to be thought of in that way. On the other hand, the Christian authors concerned with the "Republic of the Jews" were seeking to establish a biblical foundation for modern political thought. For them, the Jewish tradition is only a starting point, not the center of speculation. The further development of this tendency leads to a progressive disassociation of Christian political thought from Jewish traditions, a process that Valerio Marchetti calls the "degiudaizzazione" of European though, which culminated at the end of the seventeenth century.[10]

In defining Jewish political thought and tradition, I would thus suggest adding two further distinguishing characteristics: Jewish community as the focus of political commitment, and a consciousness that one is writing on political thought as a Jew. Unless we consider Judaism as referring to a coherent society, we can found there neither the existence of the Diaspora as a political entity living under non-Jewish dominion, nor that of a Jewish state under its own sovereignty. Decisive for the

[9] On Bodin, Bertram, and Sygonius see Guido Bartolucci, *La repubblica ebraica di Carlo Sigonio. Modelli politici dell'età moderna* (Florence: Olschki, 2007), with bibliography; on Cunaeus see the introduction by Lea Campos Boralevi in *Petrus Cunaeus, De republica Hebraeorum (The commonwealth of the Hebrews)*, a reprint of the editions of Leyden 1647 and London 1653 (Florence: Centro Ed. Toscano, 1996).

[10] See his articles: "Sulla degiudaizzazione della politica. In margine alla relazione di Horst Dreitzel," in *Aristotelismo e ragion di stato*, ed. Enzo A. Baldini (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1995), 349–358; idem, "An Pythagoras proselytus factus sit," in *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* 2 (1996): 111–131; idem, "'Aristoteles utrum fuerit Iudaeus'. Sulla degiudaizzazione della filosofia europea in età moderna," in *Anima e paura. Studi in onore di Michele Ranchetti*, ed. Bruna Bocchini Camaiani (Macerata: Quodlibet, 1998), 249–266.

qualification of thought as "Jewish" is the author's awareness of writing *Jewish* political philosophy or thought. This consciousness is of a dual nature, inherently contradictory: on the one hand, Jewish tradition is considered a model, or paradigm, of general political thought, while on the other, a means is sought for integrating Jewish tradition into already existent political systems. Seen in this way, we can speak of Jewish political tradition not only in reference to Zionist movements and ongoing discussions of Jewish sovereignty, but also in the context of theories concerning the political status of Jews living in the Diaspora, that is, in a non-Jewish environment.

It is the latter of these questions that will concern us in the following. In 1638, a small octavo book of not more than ninety-two pages was published "appresso Gioanne Calleoni,"[11] under the title *Discourse on the State of the Jews of Venice and in particular the inhabitants of the illustrious city of Venice*.[12] It was dedicated to the doge of Venice and his counselors, who are termed "lovers of the Truth." The author of the book was a certain Simone (Simḥa) Luzzatto, a native of Venice, where he lived and died, serving as rabbi for over fifty years during the course of the seventeenth century.

Luzzatto's political thesis is simple and, at the same time, temerarious, if not revolutionary: Venice can put an end to its political decline, he argues, by offering the Jews a monopoly on overseas commercial activity. This recommends itself because the Jews are "well suited for trade," much more so than others (such as "foreigners," for example).

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[11] The *Discorso* was published in 1638 by Giovanni Calleoni, a Venetian typographer who printed in 1632 the *Ha-shirim asher li-shlomo* of Salomone Rossi (ed. Pietro and Lorenzo Bragadini) and in 1627 the *Tesoro de preceptos* of Isaac Athias. In the same year that Luzzatto's book appeared, the publisher also printed the *Historia De Riti Hebraici* by Leon Modena da Venetia. Two years later he printed the *Raccolta delle voci rabiniche non hebraiche ne caldee* by the same author. For the translation into Latin, see Joannes Christophorus Wolfius (Johann Christoph Wolf), *Jo. Christophori Wolfi Bibliotheca Hebraea, sive notitia tam auctor Hebr. cujuscunq. aetatis, tum scriptor. quae vel Hebraice primum exarata vel ab diis conversa sunt ad nostram aetat emendata* (Hamburg, Leipzig: Liebezelt, Felginer, 1715–1733), vol. 3 (1733), 1151; vol. 4 (1733), 1115–1135; vol. 3 (1727), s.v. "Levi fil. Gerschem vel Gerson." Jacque Basnage translated parts of chapter ("consideration") 18 into French in his *L'histoire et la religion des juifs depuis Jésus-Christ jusqu'à présent* (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1707; 2nd ed., La Haye: Henri Scheurleer, 1716), vol. 5, 2119–2122; in the second edition (1716), vol. 15, 1061–1064; chapter 13 was translated into Hebrew in 1834 by Isaac Reggio in his *Iggerot Yashar*, 2 vols. (Wien: von Schmid, 1834–1836), 64–70. On the whole question, see Benjamin C. I. Ravid, *Economics and Toleration in Seventeenth Century Venice. The Background and Context of the Discorso of Simone Luzzatto* (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1978), 7–9 and n. 1.

[12] *Discorso circa il stato de gl'Hebrei et in particolare dimoranti nell'inclita Città di Venetia.*

The rabbi opens his argument by recalling that trade and usury are the only occupations permitted to Jews. Within the confines of their historical situation, the Venetian Jews became particularly adept at trade with partners from the Orient. This talent could be put to the use of the Venetian government for maintaining—or, more accurately, recovering—its political importance as an intermediary between East and West. Luzzatto was the first to define the role of the Jews on the basis of their economic and social functions, disregarding the classic categorization of Judaism's (privileged?) religious status in world history.

With some noteworthy exceptions, there has been no notice paid to Luzzatto's political theories in twentieth-century Italian scholarship, as can be seen by checking the well-known *Enciclopedia Treccani*. This same lacuna is, unfortunately, also found in the scholarship specializing on Jewish studies, as can be seen by referring to the new and highly praised edition of the two-volume *Gli Ebrei in Italia* (Annali 11). Simone Luzzatto is there mentioned only once, in an article on bankers.[13] Modern scholarship on political theory has also failed to discover any particular importance in Luzzatto's work; the above-mentioned collection of essays edited by Walzer, Lorberbaum, and Zoar contains neither references to nor excerpts from Luzzatto's *Discorso* nor from his principle work, the *Socrate*. This is particularly unfortunate given the direct pertinence of the *Socrate*, the specific purpose of which was an evaluation of reason and knowledge in reference, and in contrast, to authority.

The silence of scholarship seems even more remarkable if we consider that Luzzatto was, for a time, a standard of reference for Jewish political thought, beginning with Manasseh ben Israel and Baruch Spinoza. His *Discorso* was familiar both to the deist John Toland and to Moses Mendelssohn. The book was the subject of a (very late!) review by Johann Friedrich Herder in his *Adrastea* (1801–1803), and was misused by Werner Sombart in his anti-Semitic diatribe.[14] After 1945, Luzzatto's works were among the very few books from Italian Judaism to have been translated into Hebrew (1950) in the State of Israel—a fact that might well server as a historical commentary on his judgment concerning the Jewish people: "Nonetheless, if someone still

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[13] Ariel Toaff, "'Banchieri' christiani e 'prestatori' ebrei?," in *Gli ebrei in Italia*, vol. 1, *Dall'alto Medioevo all'età dei ghetti*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), 286 and n. 33.

[14] On the impact of Luzzatto's book in European, Israeli, and American scholarship, see below.

wishes to investigate which customs they share universally, one could say that they are a nation with an unusual and tired spirit, incapable in their present state of all political government, busy with their particular interests, quite—if not completely—unaware."[15]

The purpose of the following pages is not, however, to provide an apologia for a seventeenth-century apology for Jews as citizens—albeit with restrictions—of a very famous and vibrant city. Rather, I would like to describe and explore, in its cultural and historical coordinates, a little book that has had a surprising fortune in the worlds of both Jewish and non-Jewish political thought.

9.1 *"On the State of the Jews of Venice"*

Although the *Discorso* appears at first glance to be little more than a modest and uncomplicated tractate, true to its ostensible purpose of introducing the Jews and Judaism (of Venice) to the Venetian "lovers of the truth"—as the title of the introduction refers to them— concealed within it are a multiplicity of topics, themes, and concise observations, which, taken together, make it a highly complex composition presumably intended to respond to diverse circumstances. The *Discorso* consists of eighteen "considerations" introduced by a "dedication," a "preface to the entire work," and "an introduction to this treatise." The presence of two introductions could be seen as the remnant of the author's original plan to publish a more extensive essay. Of such a plan there is, however, no other trace, neither in the book itself, nor in Luzzatto's other extant publications. I would suggest that they reflect rather the

[15] *Discorso*, 37b–38r: "Tuttavia s'alcuno ancora desidera indagare quali siano li loro costumi in uniuersale potrebbe dire esser nazione d'animo molto invilito, e fiacco, incapace nel stato presente d'ogni governo politico, occupati ne loro interessi particolari, poco overo niente providi del lor universale." On this text see Alessandro Guetta, "Le mythe du politique chez le Juifs dans l'Italie des Cités," in *Politik und Religion*, ed. Christoph Miething (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999), 119–131. In his *De Pace fidei* XIII Nicholas of Cusa wrote: "Haec tamen Iudaeorum resistentia non impediet concordiam. Pauci enim sunt et turbare universum mundum armis non poterunt"; *De Pace Fidei*, ed. Raymundus Kilibansky and Hildebrandus Bascour (Hamburg: Meiner, 1959), 39; English translation: "However, this resistance of the Jews will not impede harmony, for [the Jews] are few in number and will not be able to trouble the whole world by force of arms," in *Nicholas of Cusa's De Pace Fidei and Cribatio Alkorani: Translation and Analysis*, ed. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1994), http://cla.umn.edu/sites/jhopkins/DePace12–2000.pdf (accessed August 2007).

structure of *Discorso* as it has come down to us. It is made up of two parts, the first concentrating more on the particular situation of the Jews of Venice (chapters 1–10), the second focused on the more substantial question of the status of the Jews in Europe and in the world at that time. Chapter 11 begins, indeed, with the topic dealt with in the preface to the work as a whole, namely, the difficulty in defining the customs of the Jews universally, and "how their delinquencies can be easily impeded." The second introduction is concerned primarily with the subject dealt with in the first part of the book, that of the condition of the Jews in Venice and their "usefulness."

The *Discorso* opens with a dedication (3r–v) to the doge of Venice (Francesco Erizzo, reigned 1631–1646) and his council, who are deemed "lovers of truth," recalling the political vision found in Polybius, which speaks of rulers as princes not only because of their noble origins, but also as an expression of their virtue. The dedication contains some important statements:

1) The "Jewish nation"[16] can be compared to an artistic object. This first sentence serves as both a *captatio benevolentiae* and as a (bitter) prediction that Luzzatto's "discourse" cannot hope for a more favorable destiny than that of the Jewish people in their history.
2) The Jewish nation is itinerant and scattered ("vaga e dispersa"), deprived of any protector. It is Luzzatto's hope that this same destiny will not be shared by the little book offered to the public. This characterization of Jewish destiny should not obscure the fact that he will actually be portraying the positive nature of Jewish existence. Indeed, he compares the Jew of the Venetian Diaspora to the infant Moses, "the famous legislator," who was rescued from the waters, as it were, by the enemy, the Pharaoh's own daughter. Luzzatto is here employing a known topos of Jewish historiography, with a positive twist: the ruling political power can, at times, be helpful in raising the Jews up from their current (slavish) status.
3) The purpose of his book is to ensure that the Jewish nation may be "tolerated," or at least "excused." The plain meaning is obvious: Luzzatto wishes that his people should be exonerated of all guilt attached to their being Jews.

[16] The word "nation" in Luzzatto should be interpreted as "gens" or "genus" ("ethnical and cultural entity" or "progeny"), here usually translated as "people."

4) Luzzatto's hope is that the Jews may become a positive, integrated element within Venetian society.

In the *Preface to the work as a whole* (5r–6v), Luzzatto explains how he intends to show that the Jewish people deserve to be "tolerated, or at least excused." To this end he provides a brief overview, touching on the subject and the origins of his tractate, his commitment as an author, and the readers he wants to address, and concluding with a *peroratio* on Judaism as a fragment of past beauty. Luzzatto's own description of the tractate leaves the impression that it is nothing but a compendium of the rites and opinions of the Jews.[17] In fact, however, his main point will focused on the practical attitude of the Jews in their day-to-day life, and in their commercial and social dealings.

Very intriguing is the comparison of Jewish history and Jewish tradition with the sculpture of Phidias and Lysippus in its Renaissance reception: in the preface, Luzzatto describes the Jewish people as a "relic of the Ancient Jewish People." They are portrayed as a "worn-down fragment of an aged statue." Seen as a surviving fragment from the work of an artist comparable to the most famous sculptors of Greece, the Jews become an object that could be of great value in the eyes of an interested antiquarian (*curioso antiquario*).[18] The Jews, he points out, are an ancient people. Although they have been "deformed" by their troubles and "disfigured" through the long years of their captivity, they received the rules that govern their society and the institutions by which they live from the divine Creator, as is generally recognized. It is not by chance that Luzzatto draws the comparison to Phidias and Lysippus: when Istanbul was plundered during the Fourth Crusade in 1204, the Venetians seized four gold-plated bronze horses, thought to be the work of the sculptor Lysippus, and carried them away. They were placed on top of the facade of the Church of San Marco, and the *Quadriga* came to be seen as the symbol of Venetian power.[19] This power was

[17] 5r: "…mi son proposto nell'animo di formare compendioso, ma verace racconto dei suoi ritti principali, ed opinioni più comuni dall'universale non dissonanti, e discrepanti." This assertion proves that the *Discorso* is not an "appendix to the tractate on opinions and dogmas of the Jews," as the subtitle of the book reads.

[18] See also Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, Proemio B: "Considerando io quanto onore s'attribuisca alle antichità, e come molte volte (lasciando andare molt'altri esempi) un frammento d'una antica statua sia stato comperato gran prezzo per averlo appresso di sé."

[19] See on this P. Fortini Brown, *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice* (New York, 1997); and http://www.cif.rochester.edu/~megan/nonfiction/tangible.html

now in danger of being geographically fragmented and economically smashed by the growing might of the Ottoman Empire.

Luzzatto prefaces his treatise with an *introduction* (7r–8r), ostensibly intended to provide a theoretical outline of the political and economic aspects of his subject, a reflection also of his vision of the customs and ways of life followed by the Jews of the Diaspora. In this introduction to the "whole" tractate he deals, in fact, with only *one* issue: the status of the Jews of Venice and their economic situation, which is, in turn, the topic to which the entire first part of the *Discorso* is devoted. Luzzatto clearly states his central thesis right from the outset: the ancient people of the Jews, present today in the illustrious city of Venice, is, in its constitution and in its way of life, a "fragment" of God's original creation.[20] Nobody, he claims, can contest the proposition that Venetian Jews are a "reward" (*emolumento*) to the city of Venice and that they constitute an integral part of the common populace (*Discorso* 7v).

Luzzatto once again avails himself of the fragment metaphor, this time in a variant form: the Jewish community of Venice is as a Democritan atom in the Milky Way of the Venetian *res publica* (*Discorso* 7r). Although the rabbi has serious doubts as to the cosmological value of Democritus's philosophy, he seems to accept its usefulness as a source of metaphor:

> And if this opinion was rightly condemned, what occurred to those men was more a result of the casual coupling of small bodies, which those philosophers proposed, rather than a result of the absurdity of the construction. (*Discorso* 7r)[21]

The purpose of his treatise is not to celebrate the antiquity of the Jews, but rather to present some of the advantages they bring to the state. He considers the Jewish people as an integral part of city of Venice or, better, of the entire world. The function of the Jews, he claims, is similar to that of the atoms of Democritus that populate the "lower

[20] *Discorso* 6v: "because the common consensus among men agrees that there was a time when this People took their form of government and social institutions from the Highest Artist."

[21] Luzzatto seems here to refer to a criticism of atomistic theory, which was introduced into European intellectual circles by Gassendi (1592–1655). Luzzatto himself was a follower of skeptical theory. On Gassendi and skepticism see Richard Popkin, *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). All English translations from Luzzatto's book have been taken from a forthcoming publication edited by Ariella Lang, Giuseppe Veltri, Benjamin Ravid, and Robert Bonfil.

world," which, in turn, feeds with its vapor the sun, the moon, and the other stars—a Stoic idea. In this sense, every kingdom on the earth is comparable to the galaxy.[22]

The metaphors he uses to describe the composition of society serve to draw attention to two specific points: that every element of a society, and in particular that of Venice, should be fully integrated, as a prerequisite to their contribution to the welfare of the whole. That is also the logic of the human body, as Luzzatto expressly indicates, citing indirectly the fable of Menenius Agrippa:[23]

> So too when our stomach suffers from lack of food, it lives on suitable humors with great pain and distress of other limbs.[24] But when the opposite occurs, and there is an abundance of nourishment, there is respite from the plundering, and this relief spreads to other parts of the body. Similarly, the preponderance of duties and passage taxes not only frees the populace from the burden of taxes and contributions—which they would be obliged to pay in emergencies and for the needs of the Prince—but also itself profits from this abundance of public money to no little advantage. (7v)

In the seventeenth century, the metaphor of the stomach becomes more specific; thus, in 1612 Francis Bacon writes in his *On Empire* (11):

> For their merchants, they are vena porta; and if they flourish not, a kingdom may have good limbs, but will have empty veins, and nourish little. Taxes and imposts upon them, do seldom good to the king's revenue; for that that wins in the hundred, he leeseth in the shire; the particular rates being increased, but the total bulk of trading, rather decreased.[25]

Luzzatto substantially agrees with Bacon. Taxes on imports and exports are lethal for an economy because they lead to a decrease in trade volume. In the end, the state treasury will end up with little more than

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[22] See Francis Bacon, *Essays*, XIX: "Of Empire": "Princes are like to heavenly bodies, which cause good or evil times; and which have much veneration, but no rest. All precepts concerning kings, are in effect comprehended in those two remembrances: *memento quod es homo*; and *memento quod es Deus*, or *vice Dei*; the one bridleth their power, and the other their will." On the classical origin of the idea, see A. I. Ellis, "Some Notes," *The Classical Review* 23 (1909): 246–247.

[23] Livio, *Ad urbe condita*, 2.32.

[24] Galen thought that blood was produced in the liver from the food transported there from the stomach by the portal vein. On the state of medicine at this time, based largely on beliefs taken from Galen, see Rudolph E. Siegel, *Galen's System of Physiology and Medicine: An Analysis of his Doctrines and Observations on Bloodflow, Respiration, Humors and Internal Diseases* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

[25] ftp://sunsite.unc.edu/pub/docs/books/gutenberg/etext96/ebacn10.txt.

usual. In addition, there is a moral aspect that should also be taken into consideration: the state should avoid imitating the ancient Romans who "ultimately imposed taxes on human excrement . . . and even disgraceful and obscene operations such as these helped enrich the treasury." In contrast to this moral depravity on the part of the ruling power, the republic of Venice "has the custom of imposing taxes only on the industry of men, and not on their lives; to punish their vices, and not to profit from them." We have here, then, the principal ingredients of Luzzatto's political theory: (1) the Jews of Venice are an integral part of the republic; (2) their function in commerce is vital, and can be of true benefit only if the taxes imposed remain limited, since taxes on imports and exports have a lethal effect on the general economy; and (3) the republic of Venice is founded on morality and not on profit.

Having looked more closely at the themes introduced in the prefatory considerations, I would like now to sketch the outlines of the chapters that follow without going into great detail, reserving a comprehensive study of the *Discorso* for subsequent publications. *Chapter 1* deals with the benefits of trade for the city of Venice and the industriousness of the Jews. His treatise, Luzzatto explains, is a response to the accusation that the Jews had usurped their role in commerce. In *chapter 2*, three points are examined: Venice in the history of commerce, including its expansion and its retreat from active trading; the areas of commercial influence surrendered to foreigners; and, lastly, the causes of Venice's retreat from active commerce. In *chapter 3*, Luzzatto deals with the causes of stagnation in the increase of economic wealth,[26] a natural process comparable to the development of the human body. For cities, the "natural" process of stagnation begins first when the city has reached sufficient wealth, in terms of both population and of economy prosperity. Luzzatto introduces here a discussion of commerce handled by so-called foreigners (i.e., non-Venetians). The "foreigners," he argues, insinuate themselves into the economic functions of the inhabitants, thereby increasing their own wealth. Foreigners not only do not increase the wealth of a city, they also diminish it, because the money they handle returns with them to their places of origin. There are two possible reactions to such "foreign" interference in and control of economic trade. The first is to place a ban on their merchandise, which can be either a total ban on all trading activities by foreigners,

[26] 12v–18r.

or a partial ban, touching only certain goods; or, it can take the form of an increase in duties. The second alternative is to incorporate the "foreigners" into the city by making them citizens. The first option was chosen by Britain under Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth. This same path was not open to Italy, however, both due to the fragmentation of rule over Italian territory and to the absence of sufficient ships to replace those of the foreigners—in whose absence trade would then have ceased entirely. At the same time, Luzzatto argues, the integration of foreigners into Venetian society is, for a variety of reasons, problematic. On the one hand, there is the natural, instinctive attachment of the foreigner to his home country and the social position he holds there. On the other hand, there is also the scarcity of land in and around Venice to be considered. Finally, it will be necessary to contend with the desire of the integrated foreigners to gain extraordinary honors and titles, and to make themselves illustrious. The only remaining solution for the revival of commerce and trade is, accordingly, to commission the Jews to conduct international trade, for the Jews have no homeland and do not aspire to dignities, titles, and honors. For the Jews as well, the city-state of Venice is the best place to live, in all the world. In Luzzatto's own words:

> And likewise, there is no doubt that among all the states and places of the world, the Jewish people are pleased by the most gentle government of the Most Serene Republic, because its government is stable and not variable on account of the mutability of the thoughts of one sole ruler and the instigation of counsellors, and also because the Republic by its instinct is a special lover of peace with its neighbors, the [Jewish] people knowing well that in time of war they are the first to be exposed to the extortions of allied soldiers, the pillage of the enemy, and the impositions and the levies of the rules.[27]

In the following two chapters, Luzzatto expands on his arguments for the presence and activity of the Jews as a preferable alternative to the "foreigners": because of their expertise in trading (*chapter 4*), and their lack of a homeland and their "promptness in obeying" (*chapter 5*).

Chapter 6 opens with some general considerations of sociological interest. It presents the theory that the mercantile profession should be distinct from all others, in order to guarantee social peace and harmony,

[27] English translation by Ravid, *Economics*, 62; see there also Ravid's comment on the text, 63–64 n. 60.

and to prevent disobedience and seditious conspiracies (social and economic pragmatism). Further, limits should be placed on the accumulation of capital, in order to avoid social imbalances (*chapter 7*):

> to ensure that the wealth and riches of the city be divided with just, geometrical proportion that conforms to the rules of justice, and that they be divided among its citizens in such a way that even when some members of the city attract the greater part of the profits, the others do not remain spent and poor.

In his discussion of the "fluidity" of cash, Luzzatto employs terminology that calls to mind the economic theories of Antonio Serra,[28] who some years earlier had recommended the accumulation of cash, rather than of buildings and land, as a means of ensuring the solidity of state finances.

Chapter 8 is the core of the first part of the *Discorso.* Luzzatto enumerates in it the "profits" that the Jewish people bring, both in commerce and in the payment of taxes, without calling on the state to intervene in their community. As a specific example he mentions the defense of the community, which is incumbent upon the Jews themselves. On the matter of the "profits" brought in by the Jews, *chapter 9* is of particular importance: here Luzzatto deals with the issues of usury and the charging of interest in relation to the advantages and profits the Jewish people bring to Venice. Luzzatto concludes the first part of the treatise with the claim, in *chapter 10*, that the protection accorded to the Jews by the government does honor to that government:

> From these observations one can still conclude that the honorable Venetian Prince exercises more than a little protection towards the Jewish Nation. This protection provides him with a profit that results from the entrance fees mentioned earlier, which only help his treasury grow—even if the increase of wealth can occur only to private citizens. This protection is further honorable because it brings glory, the private property of Princes and great Monarchs, to him.[29]

A short remark is in order here concerning the concept of usury, on which there is a convergence of opinion between the Baron Verulam, Francis Bacon, and the rabbi of Venice. Bacon is, admittedly, opposed

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[28] Antonio Serra, *Breve trattato delle cause che possono far abbondare li regni d'oro e d'argento dove non sono miniere* (Naples: Lazzaro Scorriggio, 1613; repr. ed. Leonardo Granata, Mendicino-Cosenza: Santelli, 1998).

[29] *Discorso*, 35v.

to usury—whereby the term usury in Luzzatto *and* Bacon refers not to the practice of lending money at exorbitant rates of interest but simply the lending of money at interest, regardless of the rate[30]—but he is also aware of the advantages of such activity. In his essay on usury, he enumerates the advantages and disadvantages of lending at interest, and draws attention to, among other things, the dangers of capitalization:

> The fourth [disadvantage of usury is], that it bringeth the treasure of a realm, or state, into a few hands. For the usurer being at certainties, and others at uncertainties, at the end of the game, most of the money will be in the box; and ever a state flourisheth, when wealth is more equally spread.[31]

Luzzatto, too, refers to the ideal of greater equality in the distribution of wealth, always desired but never achieved. He states:

> But the desire to rigorously reduce one's possessions forcibly in order to moderate proportions, was an undertaking that was desired until now, but never practiced to a great extent with regard to the equality of moveable wealth and cash. And if it was attempted occasionally with regard to real estate, the result was an unhappy one.

Bacon takes a very pragmatic stand: whoever thinks it possible for money to be lent without profit enters *ipso dicto* into the realm of utopia:

> It is a vanity to conceive, that there would be ordinary borrowing without profit; and it is impossible to conceive, the number of inconveniences that will ensue, if borrowing be cramped. Therefore to speak of the abolishing of usury is idle. All states have ever had it, in one kind or rate, or other. So as that opinion must be sent to Utopia.[32]

In his response to certain criticisms of usury, voiced by both philosophers and statesmen, Luzzatto uses the same argument, focusing on the stimuli that give rise to the ubiquitous phenomenon of moneylending:

> usury is a sin constantly condemned, but in every time and place practiced. For two stimuli of our fragility contribute to it: the necessity of those who need the money and therefore give the interest, and the avidity of the

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[30] For Luzzatto, see Ravid, "Moneylending," 262.

[31] ftp://sunsite.unc.edu/pub/docs/books/gutenberg/etext96/ebacn10.txt (accessed May 2008).

[32] ftp://sunsite.unc.edu/pub/docs/books/gutenberg/etext96/ebacn10.txt (accessed May 2008).

> moneylender. If this transgression were not committed by Jews, it would be perpetrated by others with greater extortion.

Bacon sums up his opinion on the integration of usury into the economic system: usury should be reserved to a small group under the control of the authority, for "it is better to mitigate usury, by declaration, than to suffer it to rage, by connivance."[33]

Chapter 10 closes the first part of the *Discorso* with the claim that the protection of the Jews is a magnanimous yet profitable act for the doge and his government, drawing a comparison between the relationship between Joseph and the pharaoh, as recounted in Genesis.

The first ten chapters present a logical argument, concluding with the affirmation of the economic, social, and political suitability of the Jews for the conduct of commerce and of their trustworthiness toward the city of Venice. There is nobody else who can perform the task. The rhetorical style is far removed from a *peroratio*, or a *petitio*, as some modern scholars interpret the "discourse." There is some pride in the achievement of the Jews and even some criticism concerning the high interest rates they are compelled to demand. The text is, of course, also an apology for Judaism and the Jewish presence in Venice, but is also serves as a caveat against their expulsion from the city.

Chapter 11 marks the beginning of *part 2* of the *Discorso*. Luzzatto begins by observing, with Socrates, that the human being is nothing but "a multiplicity of different animals, wrapped and entangled within themselves."[34] If the condition of a single man in all his multiplicity is to be considered a "very arduous and difficult thing," he argues, then arriving at a judgment on an entire group of people, such as the Jews, for example, must *a maiori* be all the more complicated. Their only common and essential characteristic is the "firmness and inexpressible tenacity in the belief and observance of their religion, a uniformity of dogma regarding their faith during the course of 1,550 years."[35]

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[33] See below, p. 212.

[34] *Discorso*, 35v: "(Socrate) pronunziò non sapere se egli fosse un solo animale, overo una moltiplicità di diversi in se stessi anodati, ed invilupati, talmente trovava in se medesimo confuse le virtù, e li vizii, li eccessi, e le moderazioni."

[35] *Discorso*, 38r: "fermezza e tenacità indicibile nella credenza, ed osservazione della loro religione, uniformità di dogmi circa la loro fede per il corso di 1550 anni." If we add 70 or 72 years, dating from the destruction of the Temple, we arrive at 1620 or 1622 as the date of the composition of the book. However, I think that Luzzatto is not precise in this matter.

Although dispersed throughout the world, the Jews are united by their sharing the same religion and common roots, which comes to expression in mutual acts of human charity and hospitality among them. Having offered his praise to Jewish solidarity and unity, Luzzatto can introduce his main point in this chapter: Jewish criminality and its punishment. Two classes of crime are here considered. The first is criminal activity that can be "cured," that is, "overcome by the doctor alone, with his ordinary purges and evacuations." The second class is of a more perilous nature: it encompasses criminal activity that is communicable and must be treated with harsh punishment. Luzzatto lists here "felonious conduct by a people, religious conversion, invasion of the city, and uprising against the state and the civil order" as crimes that should be punished by "exile, prison, galleys, mutilation of limbs, and death itself, which will suffice to remedy and eradicate such crimes" (39r).

When punishment is required, the judge should punish only the individual and not the group or "nation" to which the individual belongs. In the case of the adoration of the golden calf and the mutiny of Korah, the punishment concerned the entire people only because the inclination to the crime was shared by each individual. In such cases, "it is necessary for the supreme Prince to intervene with the eminence of his own majesty and supreme authority." Nevertheless, since that time, "the wicked actions of the Jews were never of such a pernicious nature—not only in the City of Venice, but also in other places throughout the course of approximately 1,550 years." And further:

> one cannot convince oneself that the king of Spain would today decide to expel completely and rigorously the Granadans, a people so numerous and full of farmers and other artisans, because of some act of larceny, assassination, or particular delinquency committed by fifteen or twenty of these people. The entire world marveled at that very resolution, which he had enacted for that act. But certainly the internal motives of such a severe decree related to some secret conspiracy that he uncovered, which entwined itself throughout all of the Granadan nation, and which perhaps deserved slaughter rather than exile. There is no doubt that condemning the many for the crime of the one is against natural norms and the teaching of divine law. One finds nothing in this world of such great perfection that some evil is not annexed or added to it by wicked abuse. (40r)

The logic of Luzzatto's argument is perfectly clear: the criminal acts of the individual, such as the abandonment of his own religion, fall under the responsibility of the individual involved. To this principle

Luzzatto contrasts the procedure, unfortunately quite common, of expelling the entire community in punishment for the criminal acts of individuals.

Chapter 12 addresses the criticism of the Jewish presence as voiced by three different groups: religious zealots, politicians and statesmen, and the common people. The religious zealots claim that toleration of a religion that differs from the official faith is contemptuous; politicians argue that it is not worthwhile to tolerate a diversity of religions in the same city, both because of the possibility of sacrilege being committed and because of the bad example that one group may provide to the other; the common people simply believe and repeat any calumny or false slander invented out of hatred for the Jewish nation. In response to the religious zealots, Luzzatto notes that the pope himself admits Jews into the city of his own residence, and that they have been living there for over eight hundred years. To the politicians he offers a very detailed response, stressing the physical separation between Jews and Christians, which is reinforced by Jewish law, according to which ritual contact and sexual relations with non-Jews are prohibited, as is proselytism. As for the crime of usury practiced by the Jews, he adds that it is only tolerated by their laws rather than expressly permitted and, referring indirectly to Francis Bacon (see above), he states:

> When such a transgression was not committed by a Jew, there was perhaps no lack of others, who with greater extortion of the poor and needy would practice such a contemptible profession, reducing the number of usurers.... And I do not say this to defend such actions, but merely to demonstrate that such enormity, like some others, is not an essential property of the Jews, as many presume to assert; rather it is an accidental result that comes from the strictness of the life and conditions of the time.

As for the denunciations of the common people, Luzzatto responds:

> Truth alone is harsh, and not very pleasing, whereas falsity is admired and delightful. The former is subjected to the occurrence of events; the latter free and wandering. The former is produced by the action of the object that impressed it in our mind, while the latter depends upon human judgments, and like our offspring, one brings them loving affection.

He then deals more specifically with the calumny of the Jews having been unfaithful, and with their purported friendship with pirates. Contrary to what his opponents maintain, Luzzatto describes the Jews as a harmonious part of society, living in reciprocal sympathy with their neighbors, in keeping with the will of God, who "decreed that

all humanity should conform together in unanimous amity, each man considering himself a citizen of one commonwealth" (46r). Religious differences, as he points out in *chapter 14*, are by no means a good reason for war (51v).[36]

Chapter 15 is the longest in the *Discorso.* In it, Luzzatto is ostensibly addressing the criticism launched by Tacitus against Judaism. As has already been demonstrated in great detail, however, the true focus of his attention is the criticism voiced by Machiavelli.[37] A full examination of this chapter, in all its political and cultural ramifications, would be beyond the scope of the present essay. I hope to come back to it in a later publication on the principle of *raison d'état* in Jewish thought.

Chapters 11–15 are, in essence, apologetic, an attempt to counter current opinions concerning the Jews. The chapters that follow are a characterization of the Jewish "nation." In *chapter 16* there is also a change of rhetorical genre. Here Luzzatto discusses Judaism in a descriptive manner, portraying the Jews as a group and focusing particularly on their attachment to study. In this context he also discusses the distinction between various classes of sages. In this often translated and quoted chapter, he distinguishes between rabbis, philosophers, and Kabbalists.

> The Rabbis among the Hebrews are those who take it upon themselves to have the traditions of the way of observing and following the rites contained in the laws, which for a great number of years were preserved orally from the time of the legislation [at Sinai] until the period of the Emperor Antoninus, when aphorisms and tractates about them were composed by Rabbi Judah, a most famous man of those times.…
>
> There follows the second class of learned theologians, or philosophers as we like to call them, and they are those who, by joining human reason with the authority of the Divine word, have endeavored to expound upon the Scripture with harmonious agreement. Among them, one can include two most famous men who flourished in the nation at the time when it still retained some form of liberty.
>
> There follow the Kabbalists, the third order of Hebrew sages. Their doctrine is not otherwise necessary for the Hebrews to accept, although

[36] But see Isaac Abravanel, *Perush al nevi'im aḥaronim* (Tel Aviv, n.d.), 91; and Johann Maier, *Kriegsrecht und Friedensordnung in jüdischer Tradition* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000), 403.

[37] Abraham Melamed, "Simone Luzzatto on Tacitus. Apologetica and Ragione Di Stato," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 143–170.

> nevertheless it is received with approval by some of the nation and especially in the Levant and Poland.[38]

Chapter 17 is concerned with the question of the "cause of the various permissions granted to the Jews, and also several expulsions that befell the Jewish Nation." Luzzatto puts forth the (very credible) thesis

> that someone who is unable to confront the above-said matters, will endeavor to argue using the weapons of example and authority to say that if the Jews bring so many benefits, why do the most prudent princes and most sagacious republics exclude the Jewish people from their state.

The reasons for expulsion, he suggests, can be multiple, including the practice of "usury," or the possession of extensive real estate, but also simply hatred and disdain for the Jewish nation. As a counterbalance to these observations, Luzzatto concludes the *Discorso*, in *chapter 18*, with an overview of the Jewish presence in Europe. The Jews have succeeded in keeping their own essential identity largely intact (89r), because their existence is a manifestation of divine will. Dispersion has made them obedient and immune to all innovation in rites and dogma:

> And although captivity and dispersion are the greatest calamities that can occur to a people and a nation, rendering it vile and abject with the contempt and scorn of peoples, nonetheless it is a most efficacious cure for endurance and preservation; it removes jealousy and suspicion from the ruling princes and from the pride and boastfulness of the distracted people, who become humble and docile because of it.

Luzzatto argues that the total number of Jews in the world is unknown. He names the countries in which Jewish communities exist, praising Turkey in particular for the freedom it allows them in owning land; also mentioned are the Holy Land, Germany, Poland, Lithuania and the pontifical state in Rome. In conclusion, he states:

> This is what it has occurred to me to say in connection with that nation as far as appertains to the interests of prince and peoples who admit them, and in particular of the Most Serene Republic of Venice, which receives them into its state with such benevolence and protects them with its usual justice and clemency.

The second part of the *Discorso* is, of course, also an apology for Judaism, but of a different character. Whereas the first part was a direct

[38] 80r–v.

defense against attacks on Judaism—accusations of usury, of disruption of social cohesion, of friendship with pirates, and so forth—the second takes a more positive stance, focusing on Jewish intellectual history and the beneficial presence of Jews in their social surroundings.

9.2 *The* Sitz im Leben *of the* Discorso

The *Discorso* has generally been seen as an apology for the Jewish community of Venice. Some scholars claim that the immediate cause, the stimulus that moved Luzzatto to compose a plea for recognition of the status of the Jews of Venice, was a recent and unforeseen event. In 1636, a quantity of merchandise was stolen from the main shopping thoroughfare of Venice, the Merceria. Some of the stolen goods were later found in the ghetto. As a number of Christian noblemen were also involved in the matter, it became a major affair, with political repercussions. For a time, the Jews were in danger of being totally expelled from Venice; a number of them were, in fact, banished from the city. In order to get to the bottom of the affair and effect a reconciliation between the Jews and the Venetian government, a committee of enquiry was appointed, including three delegates from the ghetto: Shmuel Meldola of Verona, Simone Luzzatto, and Israel Conigliano, an intimate friend of the minister Ser Marco Giustiniano.

This unhappy episode first became known to modern scholars in 1949, when Moshe A. Shulvass published[39] a newly discovered document which mentions that Simone Luzzatto [on this occasion?] "composed an elegant work on the Jews, in the vernacular, and dedicated to the ministers, and which has been well received by them." One difficulty in establishing a link between the composition of the *Discorso* and the scandal of 1636 is that there are certain indications that the treatise may have circulated in the community for some time before its publication in 1638.[40] On the other hand, a point in favor of the presumption of a connection is the fact that the *Discorso* focuses specifically on the problem of expulsion, and on the question of crimes committed by individuals and the proper form of their punishment. Nevertheless, the significance

[39] Moshe A. Shulvass, "A Story of the Misfortunes which Afflicted the Jews in Italy" (in Hebrew), *Hebrew Union College Annual* 22 (1949): 1–21; see also Ravid, *Economics*, 10ff.

[40] See Ravid, *Economics*, 16.

of the *Discorso* goes beyond the contingent problem of a single episode and a rhetorical plea for grace. In a tractate written in defense of a minority, the author's attitude is surprisingly modern: he presents the Jews not as supplicants begging for the good favor of the authorities; rather, they request only to be respected for their capabilities, that is, for their political and economic usefulness to the society. It is for this reason that Luzzatto rejects as utopian all visions of communal life based on complete equality among all citizens. He prefers a world of castes, such as that found in India, with the distinctions being based, however, on economic and social criteria. His worldview is clearly influenced by the medieval concept of the estates.

For this reason, I am doubtful as to whether Luzzatto's *Discorso* can be assigned to the Renaissance genre of works in praise of Venice, the *laudes Venetiarum*. In the wake of the moral and naval victory of Lepanto, in 1571, the city-state of Venice began a decline, which was definitively completed with the loss of Crete in 1669.[41] At the time Luzzatto published his tractate, Venice was only a pale shadow of its past. Seen within the context of mythic Venice, the *Discorso* does not possess the principal and fundamental characteristics of this new literary genre. Specifically, it makes no mention of the political model of the Serenissima, which was based on the biblical tradition of Moses and the seventy-two elders. A few brief words on this phenomenon are required.

Praise of Venice is a well-known topos in the political literature of fifteenth- and sixteenth- century Italy. Probably the first to create and develop the myth of Venice was the humanist Pier Paolo Vergerio (1370–1444).[42] In his vision, the greatness of Venice derived from its geographical position and the excellence of its institution. Mention should also be made of Giorgio da Trebisonda (1396–ca. 1472), who consid-

[41] On the history of the Jews and Venice see Benjamin Ravid, *Economics*; Cecil Roth, *The History of the Jews in Venice* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society; repr., New York: 1930; repr., 1975); Gaetano Cozzi, ed., *Gli Ebrei e Venezia. Secoli XIV–XVIII*. Atti del Convegno internazionale organizzato dall'Istituto di storia della società e dello stato veneziano della fondazione Giorgio Cini (Milano: Edizioni Comunità, 1987); Benjamin Arbel, *Trading Nations. Jews and Venetians in the Early Modern Eastern Mediterranean* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

[42] David Robey and John Easton Law, "The Venetian Myth and the 'De Repubblica Veneta' of Pier Paolo Vergerio," *Rinascimento* 15 (1975): 3–59 (Latin text, pp. 38–49). For an English translation, see R. G. Witt, "Pier Paolo Vergerio," in *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts*, vol. 2, *Political Philosophy*, ed. J. Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 117–127.

ered the constitution of Venice as a republic to be the embodiment of Plato's ideal state: the Major Council (*Consiglio maggiore*) represents the democratic component, the senate the aristocratic element, while the doge is the equivalent of a king.[43] Another author of significance was the humanist Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), whose treatise *De laude Venetiarum*[44] similarly praised not only the geographical position but also the civic cohesion and institutions of the city.

Among Jewish authors, the first to praise the Venetian institution was the philosopher and statesman Isaac Abravanel.[45] Immediately following the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian peninsula, Abravanel had spent a short period in Naples before finding protection in the republic of Venice in 1503,[46] where he was able to experience the government of the Laguna at first hand. Employing a method that recalls the exegetical rules of Messer Leon in his *Nofet Ṣufim*,[47] Abravanel drew a comparison between the composition of the government of the Serenissima and the system recommended to Moses by his father-in-law Jethro in the

[43] John Monfasani, "George of Trebizond," in *Cambridge Translations* (cited in the preceding note), 128–134.

[44] Poggio Bracciolini, *Opera omnia*, ed. Riccardo Fubini, 4 vols. (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmo, 1964–1969), 2:925–937.

[45] Cf. Abraham Melamed, "The Myth of Venice in Italian Renaissance Jewish Thought," in *Italia Judaica*, Atti del I convegno internazionale (Rome: Pubblicazioni degli archivi di Stato, 1983), 401–413; Benjamin Ravid, "Between the Myth of Venice and the Lachrymose Conception of Jewish History: The Case of the Jews of Venice," in *The Jews of Italy: Memory and Identity*, ed. Barbara Garvin and Bernard Cooperman (Maryland: University Press, 2000), 151–192.

[46] On Abravanel in general and on his political theories in particular, see Isaac Baer, "Don Isaac Abravanel and his Relation to Problems of History and Politics" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 8 (1937): 241–259; Reuven Kimelman, "Abravanel and the Jewish Republican Ethos," in *Commandment and Community. New Essays in Jewish Legal and Political Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 195–216; Benzion Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman and Philosopher* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1953); Leo Strauss, "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching," in idem, *Isaac Abravanel. Six Lectures* (Cambridge: Trend and Loewe, 1937): 93–129; Ephraim E. Urbach, "Die Staatsauffassung des Don Isaak Abrabanel," *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 81 (1937): 257–270; Hans-Georg von Mutius, *Der Kainiterstammbaum. Genesis 4/17–24 in der jüdischen und christlichen Exegese. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des Mittelalters nach dem Zeugnis des Don Isaak Ben Jehuda Abravanel* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1978).

[47] *The Book of The Honeycomb's Flow by Judah Messer Leon*, ed. I. Rabinowitz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); see Robert Bonfil, "'The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow' by Judah Messer Leon. The Rhetorical Dimension of Jewish Humanism in Fifteenth-Century Italy," in *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume*, ed. Barry Walfish, vol. 2 (Haifa: University Press, 1992), 21–33; Hanna Liss, "'Ars rhetorica' als Peshat? Jüdische Bibelauslegung in der Renaissance am Beispiel von Juda Messer Leon und Asaria de Rossi," *Trumah* 9 (2000): 103–124.

book of Exodus (19:21): the institution of judges, righteous men who hate venality, as heads of tens, hundreds, and thousands. Abravanel comments:

> You should know that all these different models of government which I told you about can be found in the great city of Venice. They have instituted the "Major Council" (*Consiglio Maggiore*), constituted of more than a thousand people; further there is another council called the "Pregadi", which consists of two hundred members. Finally there is the council of the forty, called *Quarintia*,[48] and another of the ten called *Cosigo dei dien.*[49] I have no doubt that it is in conformity with the biblical text, which speaks of the "heads of the thousand, of the fifty, and of the ten."[50]

Abravanel sees the Venetian constitution as a model of the ideal state, perfected by the introduction of a democratic component. In his commentary to the same passage from Exodus, in 1505, he adds:

> Jethro advised Moses to elect and constitute heads according to his own will and selection. Moses, on the contrary, told the people itself to elect their own heads.[51]

Abravanel tended to overemphasize the democratic aspect of the Venetian republic, not lastly because of his own aversion to monarchy. The monarchic principle is here totally ignored, as it is out of place in the institutional correspondence between spiritual (*hanhagah ruḥanit*) and human government (*hanhagah enoshit*). The latter is based on democratic, aristocratic, and monarchic principles, in an indirect reference to the theory of mixed government as put forward by Polybius, according to which the judges are elected by the local courts, while the directive council is aristocratic.

For Abravanel, the spiritual government (i.e., priests and prophets) acts as supervisor of the human regime. The monarch is limited in his power by the aristocratic council and by the elected parliament. The reason for this contempt for the monarch goes probably back to biblical skepticism toward the institution of kingship, as expressed in the books of Samuel. The only true king is God; the human king is created by the will of the people, who must accept the fatal consequences of

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[48] I.e., "Quarantia."
[49] I.e., "Consiglio dei dieci."
[50] *Perush ʿal ha-torah* on Exodus 18:13 (repr., Jerusalem: 1984, 157a); see Netanyahu, *Abravanel*, 168ff.
[51] *Perush* on Exod 18:13 (fol. 31, col. 4); see Netanyahu, *Abravanel*, 168ff.

this choice, and who are capable hereby of also committing the sin of idolatry.

This same subject is the focus of a little book by the physician David de Pomis, the *Breve Discorso*,[52] a tractate long believed to have been lost, recently rediscovered and published by Guido Bartolucci.[53] De Pomis follows Abravanel in his exegesis of the passage concerning Jethro and his rejection of the monarchy. He provides a very detailed exegetical analysis of the text, intended to prove that the Venetian republic is nothing other than a reflection of the first biblical constitution and institutions:

> What shall be said of the rules which this holy republic holds to in the distribution of offices and authority? Is it not similar to that commanded by God to Moses for the distribution of the Holy Land and of all the other land and kingdoms that he gave to Israel's children? It happens that all that they conquered was distributed to each tribe by chance, similar to the procedure used today by the Venetian gentlemen in the election ballots, who mix will and fortune in accordance with divine will.[54]

Providing the Venetian constitution and institutions a foundation in the biblical texts is not the exegetical concern of Simone Luzzatto. His intent is only to write on "the State of the Jews," as he states in the subtitle to his booklet: *Et è un'appendice al Trattato dell'opinioni e Dogmi de gl'Hebrei dall'universal non dissonanti, e de Riti loro più principali* (That is, an appendix to the tractate of the universal, not dissonant, opinions and dogmas of the Jews, and of their most important rites). This is not an allusion to a lost tractate on Jewish rites and dogmas, as some scholars maintain, even if Luzzatto himself seems to endorse the existence of such a tractate in 91r.[55] Whether such a book did in fact exist is still somewhat dubious. One of Simone Luzzatto's contemporaries, and a colleague in office, was Leone Modena da Venezia, who wrote a tractate on Jewish rites[56] in the vernacular, which was published in Paris, in

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[52] The text of the *Breve Discorso* is preserved in Modena, Biblioteca estense, Fondo estense, Italiano 981, alpha H.9.2; see next footnote.

[53] Guido Bartolucci, "Venezia nel pensiero politico ebraico rinascimentale: un testo ritrovato di David de Pomis," *Rinascimento* 44 (2005): 225–247, text on 240–247.

[54] "Ma che diremo de l'ordine, che tiene questa santa republica venetiana nella distribuzione delli offici e reggimenti? Non è ella somigliante a quello che comandò Iddio a Moise nella divisione di Terra Santa e di tutti gli altri altri paesi e regni che diede alli figliuoli di Israel?"

[55] "…le qual cose nel trattato dei Dogmi, e Riti sono discussi e ventilati." (All these things are discussed and examined in the treatise on dogmas and rites.)

[56] *Historia de riti Hebraici Vita, & osseruanza de gl'Hebrei di questi tempi di Leon Modena rabi Hebreo da Venetia*, 2nd ed. (Venice: Benedetto Miloco, 1678); see Mark R. Cohen,

1637. In the second edition of that work, published in Venice in the same year as Luzzatto's *Discorso*, Leone gives his reasons for the new printing.[57] The third of these he explains as follows:

> And thirdly, for the following reason: if you happen to have at hand another composition, in which mention is made of, or which deals with Jewish rites or dogma, you are now informed that the present work was printed in the first month of the year 1637, in Paris. (I am writing this) so that nobody can question my claim of originality and to remind you of the sentence: *Facile est inventis addere* (It is easy to add something to what has been already invented). Against such doings, the Decalogue has no law.[58]

If Modena is here referring to Luzzatto's *Discorso*, as I assume he is, we can conclude (1) that his enigmatic formulation ("si facesse mentione, o si trattasse, de Riti") refers to the subtitle of the *Discorso*; (2) that there is no other book in circulation on the "Rites," to which the reference can apply, other than the *Discorso*; and (3) that his claim of originality is a meant as a reproach to Luzzatto, who had added something to what Modena had written. Modena is fully aware that Luzzatto's treatise is, in fact, nothing but a presentation of Judaism, in the vernacular, to a "universal" audience. It is a plea for respect for a religious community, with all its alien customs, rites, and dogmas, which, however distinct, brings important benefits to the Venetian republic, economically and politically.

9.3 *The Impact of the* Discorso

Luzzatto was one of the most influential Jewish personalities of the Baroque period. This statement is demonstrable and not merely intended as an apology for a rabbi who has been constantly relegated in scholarship to the role of an apologist of minor political interest.

"Leone da Modena's *Riti*: A Seventeenth Century Plea for Social Toleration of Jews," in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in the Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 429–473.

[57] The first to refer to this text is Ravid, *Economics*, 17 n. 10.

[58] Quoted from Ravid, *Economics*, 17 n. 10: "…& terzo, perche capitandovi alle mani qualch'altro componimento dove si facesse mentione, o si trattasse, de Riti, e Dogmi Hebraici, siate avvisati, che questo mio usci stampato il primo mese dell'anno 1637 in Parigi, accio che non mi si levi la prorogativa del luogo originario, & vi sovvenga quella sentenza *Facile est inventis addere*; Se ben a questo aggiungere il Decalogo non v'ha posto legge."

A first indicator of Luzzatto's importance can been seen in the fact that his political apology for Judaism, a plea for maintenance of the status quo of Jewish existence in the "illustrious city of Venice," was not quickly lost from the memories (*damnatio memoriae*) of his Christian colleagues, but continued to be read and commented on, and to evoke responses.

Three years after the publication of the *Discorso*, Melchior Palontrotti responded directly with a pamphlet entitled "A Brief Answer to Simone Luzzatto."[59] The Jewish convert Giulio Morosini, whose apologetic work *Derekh Emunah* refutes some of the arguments proposed by Luzzatto, praises him, nevertheless, for his high level of learning ("uomo stimatissimo per la lettura ebraica"), noting that Luzzatto's eloquence and knowledge were widely acknowledged also by Christians ("grandemente accreditato per le science e per l'eloquenza").[60] Luzzatto's ideas and arguments continued to influence both Jewish and Christian authors. Manasseh ben Israel tacitly adopted Luzzatto's arguments in his *De fidelitate et utilitate Judaicae gentis libellus anglicus.* The deist John Toland read the book, was impressed, and planned a translation into English.[61] Most probably through the intermediary of Toland's works, and through the unattributed citations by Manasseh, the indirect influence of the *Discourse* can be recognized in Moses Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem.*[62] It is referred to directly by Johann Friedrich Herder in his *Adrastea.*[63]

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[59] *Breve Risposta a Simone Luzzato* (Rome: s.l., 1641).

[60] Quoted from Benjamin Ravid, "*Contra Judaeos* in 17th Century Italy: Two Responses to the *Discorso* of Simone Luzzatto by Melchiore Palontrotti and Giulio Morosini," *AJS Review* 7/8 (1983): 301–351, here 333.

[61] Isaac Barzilay, "John Toland's Borrowings from Simone Luzzatto: Luzzatto's Discourse on the Jews of Venice (1638) the Major Source of Toland's Writing on the Naturalization of the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland (1714)," *Jewish Social Studies* 31 (1969): 75–81.

[62] Alexander Altmann in his introduction to *Jerusalem* cites Luzzatto's work and notes: "Es wäre reizvoll, die von Mendelssohn angeführten Argumente für die 'Nützlichkeit' der Juden mit denen Luzzattos, Manassehs und Tolands im einzelnen zu vergleichen. Was schon bei einer flüchtigen Gegenüberstellung ins Auge fällt, ist der neue Zugang zur Frage, den Mendelssohn in der populistischen Theorie findet. Diese Lehre, die in seiner Zeit viel Anklang fand, sieht in der Bevölkerungszunahme das wesentliche Gut und den Reichtum des Staates, und Mendelssohn macht sich diesen Gesichtspunkt völlig zu eigen." In Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften. Jubiläumsausgabe*, vol. 8, ed. Alexander Altmann (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Fromann, 1983): xviii.

[63] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Werke*, vol. 10: *Adrastea (Auswahl)*, ed. Günter Arnold (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2000).

Many of the ideas expressed by Luzzatto reappear somewhat later, in another context and discussion:[64] the place of the Jews in economic history, as seen by German scholars in the twentieth century.[65] As Toni Oelsner puts it, "the idea that the Jews are the commercial people par excellence, that they fulfilled a particular function in the economic development of the Western world, has its long history, and it is by no means of German origin. But it was left to three German economists, Wilhelm Roscher (1817–1894), Werner Sombart (1863–1941), and Max Weber (1864–1920), to raise this idea, intertwined with legends and stereotypes, to the level of a scientific theory."[66] Werner Sombart[67] maintained that "the Jew was naturally gifted for trade. Thus from a mercantilistic point of view it was concluded that the Jew's respected position in society is assured when and wherever commercial enterprise gains prestige (Sombart) or when his services are needed (Roscher)."[68]

It is not a mere coincidence that a revival of Jewish interest in the political ideas of the Venetian rabbi first took place in 1947, following the decimation of Jewish life in Europe and the simultaneous attempts to establish an independent (Jewish) state in Palestine. Confronted with the question of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, American Jewry reacted with a memorandum to President Truman, in which they proposed the establishment in Palestine of a secular democratic state to which immigration would be numerically limited, but open to all, with no preference given on the basis of religion. It was Luzzatto who furnished the clearest arguments for a Jewish political existence not based on religious beliefs, both in the Diaspora and in a "neutral" state of Palestine where Jews would have the same rights as in the Diaspora.

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[64] On this aspect see Jonathan Karp, *The Politics of Jewish Commerce: Economic Ideology and Emancipation in Europe, 1638–1848* (Cambdrige: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[65] That is also the subject dealt with by Toni Oelsner, "The Place of the Jews in Economic History as viewed by German Scholars," *Publications of the Leo Baeck Institute. Year Book* 7 (1962): 183–212.

[66] Ibid., 183.

[67] Werner Sombart, "Der Anteil der Juden am Aufbau der modernen Volkswirtschaft," *Neue Rundschau* 21 (1910): 145–173; idem, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1911).

[68] Oelsner, "Place," 185. Wilhelm Roscher, "Die Stellung der Juden im Mittelalter, betrachtet vom Standpunkt der allgemeinen Handelspolitik," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft* 31 (1875): 503–526.

It is thus hardly surprising that in 1947, the Jewish magazine *Commentary* decided to publish excerpts from the work of "A Jewish Apologist of 17th Century Venice," translated by Felix Giovanelli. In the introductory remarks to these excerpts, it is noted that Luzzatto's work "represents one of the first attempts, if not the very first, to frame Jewish apologetics in other than theological dimensions."[69] The editors[70] understood the true novelty of Luzzatto's approach, characterizing him as "the first, Jew or Gentile, to take a cool and sober look at the position of the Jews in Europe and draw up a balance sheet of assets and liabilities in social, economic, and political terms."[71] The enthusiasm of the editors is unmistakable: "Luzzatto's rationalism in that early day," they point out, "emboldened him to arguments whose unabashed 'materialism' would shock present-day rabbis."[72] The decision to translate Luzzatto into English followed an assessment of his role in Jewish political thought by Yitzhak Fritz Baer in his book *Galut*, which had been translated into English that same year.

Also in 1947, at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Lester Walter Roubey submitted as his rabbinical thesis an English translation of the tractate (excluding chapter 15).[73] It is noteworthy that, according to the history of the congregation where Roubey served as rabbi, the Israeli flag was, in 1949, at his urging, "removed from the pulpit on the grounds that it was inappropriate to display the flag of another sovereign country."[74]

9.4 *Conclusion*

Simone Luzzatto's *Discorso* is the first tractate on the political status of the Jews under non-Jewish, Christian rule. The rabbi of Venice was addressing his views on a matter of topical importance to an audience of Venetian rulers, described as lovers of truth. He did not refer to the political greatness of the Venetian empire; he did not base his plea on

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[69] Introduction by the editors in Felix Giovanelli, ed., "The Situation of the Hebrew. A Jewish Apologist of the 17–Century," *Commentary* 3 (1947): 371.

[70] Irving Kristol was managing editor of the magazine from 1947 to 1952.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] In the same year, he was appointed rabbi of the congregation *Shaarai shommayim* at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where he served from 1947 to 1952.

[74] Published at http://www.shaarai.org/classical.html (accessed November 22, 2005).

the divine nature of the Venetian constitution as was common among the authors of the "Venetian myth." Luzzatto's arguments center on the usefulness of the Jews to the city. He points out the advantages of the Jews as traders and merchants, their trustworthiness, their obedience to the magistrates, and their ability to separate religion from politics.

It is to maintain this separation that Luzzatto's praise of the government of Venice and the doge are placed in the *captatio benevolentiae*. The attempt to capture this goodwill is implicit in his comparison of Judaism with Catholicism, in contrast to Protestantism. Luzzatto's purpose is to institutionalize the Jewish *ethnos* as a fixture within the social structure of the city-state by providing a standard description of it. In keeping with this goal, the rabbi traces a selective history of Judaism, in which the Karaites, for example, have no place; the Kabbalah receives mention only as a minor phenomenon; and concern with philosophy is clearly subordinate to the study of the Torah.

The rabbi ventures to present an image of Judaism that goes beyond prejudices and atavistic hatred. It is specifically addressed to the "cultori dell'invita verità." Exactly what is meant by this expression, which is used in the dedication, is not clear. Earlier translators have preferred to consider it as a misprint and to amend the text to read "invicta verità" (unconquerable truth). There is, however, no need to change the wording of the text. The concept of "reluctant truth" fits very well into the system of Luzzatto's political thought. The expression "lovers of the reluctant Truth" alludes to the Aristotelian conception (*De anima* 3) according to which Truth—as opposed to artistic perception, which depends on the imagination—is free from preference: "For imagining lies within our own power whenever we wish (e.g., we can call up a picture, as in the practice of mnemonics by the use of mental images), but in forming opinions we are not free: we cannot escape the alternative of falsehood or truth."[75] Lovers of the "reluctant/unwilling" Truth accept it, regardless of the form in which it may be propagated. In Luzzatto's own words (*Discorso* 5r–v):

> Therefore, with the minimum of talent that divine majesty granted me, I proposed to compose a concise but truthful account of this nation's principal rites and most commonly shared opinions, which are not dissonant or discrepant from the universal ones. In writing this text, I tried with all

[75] Translated by J. A. Smith, http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/a8so/complete.html (accessed February 26, 2008).

> of my powers (even though I am from the same nation) to abstain from any emotionality or passion that could make me deviate from the truth. Thus I hope to meet discreet readers,[76] who, void of any anticipation or troubled judgment, are not about to follow the vulgar custom of only approving and favoring happy and adventurous individuals, and always damning those who are disheartened and afflicted. Rather, with upright judgment they will balance their opinions on the subject, which my imperfection dictated to me, and in saying this I will omit an extended reflection on the antiquity of this race, on its unmixed blood that has existed for such a long period of time, on the tenacity of this nation's rites and belief, and on its inflexibility during times of oppressions. I will only add to my aforementioned proposal a discussion of some of the profits that the Jewish nation that lives in Venice brings to this illustrious city. With this, I do not intend to offer any ambitious apparatus of profits and gains; rather I only wish to demonstrate that this nation is anything but a useless member of the general population of this city.[77]

The author's commitment to his subject is consistent with the Tacitean vision of historiography: "sine ira et studio." His intention is to provide as neutral a portrait of the Jews as possible, describing their presence in Venice and the (economic) advantages they bring. Although himself a member of the Jewish "nation," a *pars in causa*, he will nevertheless maintain his impartiality. In return for his unbiased presentation of the argument, he expects his readers also to form their opinion on the subject without prejudice—a fundamental premise of scholarship, to this very day.

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[76] A rhetorical term used to address the reader; see, e.g., Galileo Galilei, "Al discreto lettore," in his *Dialogo sopra I due massimi sistemi del mondo*, ed. Fabio Atzoni (Milano: Sansoni, 2001), 7.

[77] *Discorso* 5r: "Per il che con quel minimo di talento mi ha concesso la divina Maestà, mi son proposto nell'animo formare compendioso, ma verace racconto de suoi ritti principali, ed opinioni più comuni dall'universale non dissonanti, e discrepanti, nella quale applicazione ho procurato con ogni mio potere (benchè io sia della istessa nazione) astenermi da qualunque affetto, e passione che dal vero deviare mi potesse, così spero incontrare discreto lettore, che vacuo d'ogni anticipato, ed preoccupato giudizio non sia per seguire il volgare costume, di solo approbare, e sentir bene de avventurati, e felici, e sempre dannare li abbattutti, ed afflitti; ma con retto giudizio farà per billanciare quello in tal proposito mi ha dettato la mia imperfezione. Tralasciarò il considerare a lungo l'antichità della stirpe, il non mescolato sangue per sì lungo tratto di tempo conservato, la tenacità de ritti e credenza, la inflessibilità nelle oppressioni, solo aggiungerò al detto mio proponimento la esposizione d'alcuni profitti, che la nazione ebrea dimorante nella inclita città di Venezia l'apporta, non avendo in ciò fine di rappresentare ad altrui ambizioso apparato di utili, ed emolumenti, ma solo dimostrare non esser detta nazione affatto inutil membro del comun popolo di detta città."

CHAPTER TEN

BODY OF CONVERSION AND IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL: SARA COPIO SULLAM, THE "BEAUTIFUL JEWESS"

In 1856, the book *Les quatre martyrs* was published in Paris. In it, art historian Alexis François Rio attempted to present the lives of four exemplary Roman Catholics as paradigms of a "life of sacrifice." It is the fourth of these biographies that is of particular interest to us here,[1] namely that of the Genoese scholar Ansaldo Cebà, designated by Rio as "le martyr de la charité" (the martyr of charity).[2] As Rio reports, Ansaldo had carried on a lively correspondence with the poet Sara Copio Sullam,[3] of the ghetto of Venice, in which he had tried to convince her

[1] The first biography was that of the British Count of Arundel, Philipp Howard (1557–1595), who died in England at the time of "Bloody Mary." Rio calls him the "le martyr de la verité" (the martyr of truth). The second was that of the polymath scholar Elena Lucrezia Piscopia Cornaro (1646–1684), of Venice, the first woman to receive a doctorate at a European university; she was termed by Rio "la martyre de l'humilité" (the martyr of humility). The subject of the third biography, Marc-Anton Bragadin, was also of Venetian origin; commander of Famagusta in Cyprus, he had been skinned alive by the Turks, and is presented by Rio as "le martyr soldat" (the martyr soldier).

[2] Alexis François Rio, *Les quatre martyrs (Philippe Howard, Ansaldo Ceba, Héléna Cornaro, Marc-Antoine Bragadino)* (Paris: Bray, 1856).

[3] For the nineteenth-century literature on Sara Copio Sullam, see: Moses Soave, "Sara Copio Sullam," *Corriere Israelitico* 3 (1864): 157–60; 188–96; Emanuele Antonio Cicogna, "Notizie intorno a Sara Copia Sulam: Coltissima Ebrea Veneziana del Secolo XVII," *Memorie dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 13 (1864): 227–46; Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart*, vol. 10, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Leiner 1897), 134–36; Abraham Geiger, "Sara Copio Sullam," *Jüdische Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und Leben* 7 (1869): 178–183; Ernest David, *Sara Copia Sullam, une héroïne juive au XVII^e siècle. Étude historique et biographique* (Paris: Wittersheim, 1877); Abraham Berliner, *Luchot avanim: Hebräische Grabinschriften in Italien* (Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann, 1881), 78ff.; Mayer Kayserling, *Die jüdischen Frauen in der Geschichte, Literatur und Kunst* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1879; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1991), 159–170; Nahida Remy, *Das jüdische Weib* (Leipzig: Laudien, 1892), 170–184; repr., ed. Esther Sharell (Frankfurt: Cultura Judaica, 1999); Gustav Karpeles, *Jewish Literature and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1895), 124–128; Moritz Steinschneider, "Die italienische Litteratur der Juden," *Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums* 43 (1899): 318; Eden Sarot, "Ansaldo Ceba and Sara Copia Sullam," *Italica* 31 (1954): 138–150. A complete biography can be found in Carla Boccato, "Sara Copio Sullam, la poetessa del Ghetto di Venezia: Episodi della sua vita in un manoscritto

to convert to Christianity. Cebà's biography was not the first published mention of this highly gifted Jewish poet and intellectual in connection with the *respublica literaria*.[4] Nevertheless, it was most probably Rio who provided the impetus for scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* to take up the study of her life and work.[5] We know, for example, that Rio's book was used as a source by the orientalist Moritz Abraham Levy, of Breslau, in preparing an 1862 lecture on Sara Copio Sullam, in which he recommends her as a model of extraordinary erudition, general education, and religious zeal.[6] The Italian Renaissance was, in any case, the period to which representatives of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* were by far the most partial, seeing it as a first Enlightenment and a highpoint in the Jewish scientific tradition—in marked contrast to the "darker centuries" of the Middle Ages. As Fritz (Isaac) Baer has shown in his *Galut*, there was a widespread fascination with the humanist era in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Berlin.[7]

Sara was born about 1590, in the ghetto of Venice. Raised by her father Simone Copio in the court culture of the time, she read literary, philosophical, and theological works. By the age of 15, she was able to read Latin, Greek, Spanish, Hebrew, and Italian. She displayed musical talent, remarkable social graces, and a gift for improvising poetry.[8] In addition, she organized an academy in her father's house, which was frequented not only by Jews (among them Leone Modena), but also by members of the nobility of Treviso, Padua, and Vicenza.[9] Her teacher

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del secolo XVII," *Italia* 6 (1987): 117–121. For further bibliographical references on Sara, see also the footnotes below.

[4] I exclude here the first mention in Johann Christoph Wolf's *Bibliotheca hebraea* (Hamburg: Liebezeit, 1727), 3:1162, and other direct or indirect references in the older literature.

[5] This is easily recognizable in reading Heinrich Graetz and Moritz Levy (see above, n. 3), whose reliance on Rio is obvious.

[6] Moritz A. Levy, "Sara Copia Sullam. Lebensbild einer jüdischen italienischen Dichterin aus dem siebzehnten Jahrhundert," *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Juden und des Judentums* 3 (1862): 67–92.

[7] Itzhak F. Baer, *Galut* (New York: Schocken, 1947); see Giuseppe Veltri, "Von Faszination und Irrtum des Humanismus: Jüdisches Denken in der Italienischen Renaissance," in *An der Schwelle zur Moderne: Juden in der Renaissance*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri and Annette Winkelmann (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1–21.

[8] Cecil Roth, *Venice* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1930), 237–238.

[9] See Prospero Mandosio in *Bibliotheca romana seu Romanorum Centuriae* (Roma: de Lazzaris, 1698), 2:113, cited in Carla Boccato, "Lettere di Ansaldo Cebà, Genovese, a Sara Copio Sullam, poetessa del Ghetto di Venezia," *Rassegna mensile di Israele* 40 (1974): 172.

was the poet and man of letters Numidio Paluzzi, with whom she later had a falling out, attributed to his unfaithfulness.[10] All sources agree that she was highly gifted in both literature and philosophy, and that she was also an exceptional beauty, graced with a very pleasant and sweetly melodious voice. In 1613, she married Giacobbe Sullam and had several children, all of whom died at an early age. She passed away on February 15, 1641 (5 Adar 5401). Her epitaph was written by Leone Modena; it was first published by Abraham Berliner in the nineteenth century.[11]

The Italian poetess from the ghetto of Venice has acquired a certain amount of fame in the centuries following her death. This is most easily explained by the fact that her desire to achieve wider cultural recognition, while simultaneously maintaining her own religious identity, anticipated in many ways what was to become the central issue of modern Judaism. Her "salon" in the Venice ghetto was a precursor to the cultural activity of the European Jewish intellectual elite that reached its height in nineteenth-century Berlin. Even Heinrich Graetz, who was usually rather taciturn when it came to expressing praise, was enthusiastic about Sara: "Young, charming, with a noble heart and a keen intellect, striving for great things and a lover of the Muses, Sara Sullam enchanted both old men and young boys. [...] She basked in a world of beauty, radiating her enthusiasm in a moderated, soft, and delicate work."[12]

What is exceptional about this personality—who has, in recent years, increasingly attracted the interest of scholars in Italy and elsewhere—is, in my view, not so much her great literary talent; far more fascinating, and intriguing, is the way she epitomizes, in and through her life, one of the most important issues in both Christianity and Judaism of the seventeenth century: the question of conversion and identity. In this, her exceptional physical beauty and artistic gifts played an important role, as a pendant to philosophical views on the immortality of the soul. This was a question much discussed at the time, and it is presumably not by coincidence that this discussion was influenced by contemporary debate on conversion. That mundane aesthetics are only a reflection

[10] On Paluzzi's stormy relationship with Sara, see Lori J. Ultsch, "Sara Copio Sullam: A Jewish Woman of Letters in 17th-Century Venice," *Italian Culture* 18 (2000): 73–86, http://www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst?docId=5002381364.

[11] Berliner, *Luchot avanim*, 80 n. 159.

[12] Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 10:135.

of the divine world (*imago divina*) was, at that time, a generally accepted principle.[13] The fact that this conception of aesthetics was constructed on the pillars of Christian religious philosophy is, however, something that was not really taken into account until the questions of the immortality of the soul and the eternity of matter were introduced into the discussion. This I will try to show in the pages that follow.

There are two episodes in Sara's sadly brief life that are of particular relevance to this complex of issues. The first was her correspondence with the Genoese priest Ansaldo Cebà, and the platonic love relationship that grew out of it. The second was her dispute with Baldassarre Bonifaccio, archdeacon of Treviso and later bishop of Capodistria. In both cases, the relationship revolved around the issues of conversion—with repeated, if vain, attempts to bring it about—honest dialogue, physical beauty, the immortality of the soul, philosophical debate and dispute between cultures, and sincere apologetic discourse.

10.1 *On Love, Cultural Recognition, and* unio fidei

In 1615, Ansaldo Cebà published his epic poem *La reina Esther*.[14] For Sara Sullam, this literary event provided the impulse for initiating an important correspondence that, after an anonymous beginning, gave rise to an intellectually and personally active and passionate exchange with the poem's author,[15] who later commented: "My poem moved a

[13] See, for example, Agnolo Firenzuola. *Delle bellezze delle donne*, in *Opere*, ed D. Maestri (Turin: UTET, 1977), 725: "…perciò che la donna bella è il più bello obietto che si rimiri, e la bellezza è il maggior dono che facesse Iddio all'umana creatura; con ciò sia che per la di lei virtù noi ne indiriziamo l'animo alla contemplazione e per la contemplazione al desiderio delle cose del cielo." Bibliography by Emma Maria Barboni, http://www.nuovorinascimento.org (accessed June 2005).

[14] *La reina Esther. Poema heroico di Ansaldo Cebà* (Milano: Gio. Battista Bidelli, 1616).

[15] For editions of of writings by Sara Copio Sullam, see Leoncello Modona, *Sara Copio Sullam. Sonetti editi ed inediti* (Bologna: Soc.Tip. già Compositori, 1887); Carla Boccato, "Un episodio della vita di Sara Copio Sullam: il Manifesto sull'immortalità dell'anima," *La Rassegna mensile di Israele* 39 (1973): 633–646; eadem, "Lettere di Ansaldo Cebà, genovese, a Sara Copio Sullam, poetessa del Ghetto di Venezia," *La Rassegna mensile di Israele* 40 (1974): 169–191; eadem, "Sara Copio Sullam, la poetessa del Ghetto di Venezia: episodi della sua vita in un manoscritto del secolo XVII," *Italia* 6 (1987): 104–218; eadem, "Una disputa secentesca sull'immortalità dell'anima—Contributi d'archivio," *La Rassegna mensile d'Israele* 45 (1988): 593–606; Umberto Fortis, *La "bella ebrea". Sara Copio Sullam poetessa nel ghetto di Venezia del '600* (Torino: Silvio Zamorani editore, 2003); see also Don Harrán, "Doubly Tainted, Doubly Talented: The Jewish Poet Sara Copio (d. 1641) as a Heroic Singer," in *Musica franca: Essays in Honor of Frank*

noble Jewish woman to seek from me the friendship of which these letters offer testimony, and I did not decline to fall in love with her soul."[16] She responded to the poem in May 1618, composing a sonnet which opens with the famous lines:

> The beautiful Jewess, who in pious chant
> Implored for grace the choirs most sublime,
> Thus, in sacred love amongst the stars in heaven,
> Happy, she rejoices in the most exalted spirit…[17]

Our knowledge of Ansaldo's relationship to Sara is based largely on his letters to her, which were published in 1623.[18] Sara was not happy about the publication, as she mentions in at least one letter to a friend.[19] Her letters to Ansaldo have unfortunately been lost.[20] Sara was probably no more than twenty years old when their correspondence began. Ansaldo, who was fifty-three at the time, refers to himself as a piece of "old wood" that "can catch fire and burn more easily than young wood."[21] Sara's great beauty, of which Ansaldo learned from a report by his servant, ignited in him a great love, perhaps not entirely platonic—a love "which among some Catholic priests, even in their old age, is often not entirely free of a certain sensuality,"[22] as Graetz wrote, with a certain ironic, even sarcastic, undertone. The impulse for this friendship came from the fact that Ansaldo, in his poem on Queen Esther, had spoken of a heroine in the times of the knights, thus elevating the Jewish people of that age, in Sara's eyes, from the station of servants to the exalted

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A. D'Accone, ed. Irene Alm (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1996), 367–422; Marina Arbib, "The Queen Esther Triangle. Leone Modena, Ansaldo Cebà, and Sara Copio Sullam," in *The Lion Shall Roar. Leon Modena and His World*, ed. David Malkiel (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, Magnes Press, 2003), 103–135.

[16] "Il mio Poema…mosse una nobile Hebrea a voler meco l'amicitia di che ragiona in queste lettere e io non ricusai di far l'amore con l'anima sua, per migliorare la conditione della mia," Cited in Boccato, "Lettere," 176.

[17] Published by Modona, *Sara Copio Sullam*; see now Fortis, *La "bella ebrea,"* 101:
> La bella Ebrea che con devoti accenti
> Grazia impetrò da più sublimi cori,
> Si che fra stelle ne i sacri ardori
> Felice gode le superne menti…

[18] *Lettere di Ansaldo Cebà scritte a Sara Copia e dedicate a Marc'Antonio Doria* (Genoa: Giuseppe Pavoni, 1623); see the detailed essay on this by Carla Boccato, *Lettere*, 169–191.

[19] See her letter to Isabella della Tolfa, January 8, 1622, published by Fortis, *La "bella ebrea,"* 157.

[20] Or destroyed by Cebà, as Lori J. Ultsch, "Sara Copio Sullam" (see above, n. 10) claims.

[21] See the notes below.

[22] Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 10:135.

heights of heroic fame. Ansaldo's work was interpreted by Sara as the literary transfiguration of the Jewish woman, making her the heroine of a nation that at that time lived, in the view of Sara's contemporary in the ghetto of Venice, Rabbi Simone Luzzatto, only as the caretaker of the flame of its past glory.[23] In Sara's eyes, Ansaldo had given back to a shattered "nation" a remnant of its former greatness. In her typically ornate, Baroque style, Sara informed him that his poem was always with her and, at night, under her bedstead.

Ansaldo answered Sara's letter on May 19, 1618. From the outset, it was clear that his purpose, as a priest, was to convince Sara to convert to Christianity. Nevertheless, or, possibly for that very reason, the tone of the letters varies, alternating between love and criticism, literary recognition and theological apologia, much like the variations in a conversation typical of courtly lovers.[24] They exchanged portraits, a common practice for adding a visual element to friendships with strangers, in an age that did not try to conceal a certain veneration for images. This is reflected in a sonnet by Sara that begins:

> The portrait is of the one who, in her heart,
> Wears alone your image engraved,
> Hand at her breast, to all the world proclaiming:
> Here I carry my idol, for all to adore…[25]

In his efforts to convert her, Ansaldo recommends that she read the Gospels and the works of the Dominican Luiz de Granada.[26] Graetz comments: "Cebà tried in vain to undermine her faith, using expressions of tenderness, of critique, and of sentimental yearning, referring now to a possible dissolution of their relationship in the offing, now to his longing to be united with her in a heaven of bliss." Graetz mentions an episode that has a certain humorous element, and which he summarizes

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[23] Simone Luzzatto, *Discorso circa il stato de gl'Hebrei et in particolar dimoranti nell'inclita città di Venetia* (Venice: Gioanne Calleoni, 1638).

[24] As Ultsch ("Sara Copio Sullam," see n. 10) notes: "The poems exchanged between the two present themselves as a time-honored exercise in formal Petrarchism enlivened by a taste for baroque literary conceit in which the man attempts to woo the woman to embrace not him, but Christianity. Singing the praises of the unseen, distant, yet certainly beautiful Jewess becomes a literary tour de force for Ceba."

[25] Fortis, *La "bella ebrea,"* 111:
L'imago è questa di colei ch'al core
Porta l'imago tua sola scolpita,
Che con la mano al seno al mondo addita:
Qui porto l'Idol mio, ciascun l'adore,…

[26] Spanish mystic of the Dominican order (1504–1588).

with a literary flourish: "When he asked her permission to pray for the Catholic salvation of her soul, she granted him that wish on the condition that she also prayed for his conversion to Judaism."[27]

I do not intend to treat here all the various elements in this highly interesting correspondence between an older priest and a young Jewish woman, which could easily furnish the plot for a historical novel. As mentioned above, this is not, in my view, the aspect of greatest interest for Jewish studies or for the history of philosophy. More important, and less discussed,[28] are Cebà's artful attempts to convert Sara, and the latter's unyielding response, her resolute determination to stand firm in her Jewish faith. The anthropological image that clearly emerges from the correspondence is shaped by the unconditional ardor of Ansaldo's efforts to bring her to conversion. Physical beauty and intelligence are an integral part of the picture that, along with art and talent, has molded European anthropological understanding since antiquity. After Augustine, however, these have not been regarded as the primary attributes of man, who was made corrupt through Adam's fall. According to general philosophical, and thus Thomist, dictates, this corruption is bound up with matter, while the spirit remains immortal through salvation by Christ.

In Ansaldo's view, Judaism is thus part of the realm of the flesh, even of idolatry, as he expressly states.[29] Thus, his last request to Sara before his death was not to write him any more letters, since that would cause him to tarry on earth, stating explicitly: "It is not enough for you to believe in the immortality of the soul, if you do not go down the path that will bring you salvation." Elsewhere he formulates this even more clearly: "Not my friendship . . . [but only] faith can make you immortal; not any faith, but the Christian faith."[30]

Such statements can, of course, only be properly understood in the light of anthropological views current at the time. The religious debate in that period was decisively influenced by the Christian notion that only a portion of the soul is immortal, namely the intellect purified by baptismal water, while matter is subject to decay. As a non-Christian,

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[27] Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 10:135.

[28] Ultsch ("Sara Copio Sullam," see n. 10) does discuss his proselytizing, noting, "Copio is a Jewess whom Ceba hopes to redeem by his performative act of publication."

[29] Letter, August 31, 1619, see Boccato, "Lettere," 182: "Io vi vorrei Christiana, e voi mi vorreste idolatra."

[30] Letter, February 15, 1620, see Boccato, "Lettere," 184.

a Jew can only be a part of matter, and thus of the world of corruption. This is at the core of the debate that Sara later had with another cleric.

10.2 *On the Conversion of the Soul and Its Immortality*

The archdeacon of Treviso, Baldassarre Bonifaccio, was a participant in Sara's learned "academy" or "salon" in the ghetto of Venice. He had also tried his hand at drama, composing a tragedy entitled *Amata*,[31] but was principally known as *doctor utriusque juris*, and was lauded as a man of letters blessed with a "clear intellect."[32] Until recently, it was only known that Sara had written him a letter in which she expressed her doubts about the immortality of the soul. In reply, he published a small tractate, pillorying the heretical views of the Jewess. Sara answered this attack with a *Manifesto*, in which she sought to remove any doubts about her "orthodoxy." In it, she openly presents her views, censuring the brashness of a cleric who had hoped through effrontery to reap some profit from her fame and honor. Modern and contemporary commentators add that the original letter by Sara was only a kind of philosophical exercise, and that her *Manifesto* was a panicked reaction fueled by a fear that the Inquisition would accuse her of heresy and burn her at the stake—and that, in the worst case, it could lead to the expulsion of the Jews from Venice. That was a scenario of horror initially sketched by Heinrich Graetz[33] and supported in the literature by Moritz Levy, Leonello Modona, Carla Boccato, and Umberto Fortis.

To begin, it should be noted that, with the exception of a few brief notes, there is, to date, very little critical scholarship on the philosophical texts in question. The dispute between Sullam and Bonifaccio has been interpreted solely based on what is generally known. This philosophical-theological dispute is, however, not merely incidental. It is neither is a literary exercise nor a panicked reaction. Rather, it reflects the sphere of literary culture that was open for public discussion in that space and

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[31] Baldassarre Bonifaccio, *Amata, tragedia di Baldassare Bonifaccio* (Venice: Pinelli, 1622); *Lettere poetiche di Baldassare Bonifaccio, per difesa, e dichiaratione della sua Tragedia* (Venice: Pinelli, 1622).

[32] For a bibliography on Bonifaccio, see Boccato, "Una disputa," 593–594, and the corresponding footnotes.

[33] *Geschichte der Juden*, 10:136; Graetz points here to the counterexample of Uriel da Costa "in libertarian Protestant Amsterdam."

century, and in which the church still wished to play a didactic role. The Inquisition was still very interested in *Christian* heretical views, but not in those enunciated *by Jews* deviating from general *Jewish* opinion, and it was never a tribunal for that.[34]

However, the possible reasons that could have moved Bonifaccio to openly challenge Sara, in what had initially been merely a peaceful exchange, remain something of a mystery. We know that it was Bonifaccio who initiated the dispute, with a letter to Sullam in early January, 1619. This letter remained in manuscript form until 1988, when it was found and published by Carla Boccato.[35] The letter, which was contained in Bonifaccio's papers, is addressed to Sabba Giudea, who has been identified as Sara.[36] The occasion appears to have been his desire to wish her a happy New Year. At first glance, the letter seems like a harmless discussion of the immortality of the intellect, that part of the soul which avoids human decay and corruption. On closer examination, however, this New Year's greeting can be shown to be an astute Christian provocation on an eternal theme, conversion to Christianity, with the obvious aim of persuading Sara, by means of philosophical and theological arguments, to convert. I will review the main points of the argument.

Baldassarre Bonifaccio begins by noting that the year becomes younger while man grows older, because the former is constantly renewed (being a celestial body) while our life is limited in time,

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[34] On this question, I consulted Professor Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, specialist on the Venetian Inquisition, who confirmed to me that in the ecclesiastic documents of the period in question there is no trace of trials on Jewish heretic ideas.

[35] Boccato, "Una disputa," 593–606, text 603–604.

[36] Boccato attributes this obvious error to the poor state of the often-corrected manuscript of the author. It is also conceivable that the archdeacon is consciously associating and comparing Sara with the Queen of Sheba (Saba). According to Christian literature, a topic of the conversation between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba was the immortality of the soul. This was the opinion of the monk Jacob Filippo Foresti (1454–1520) in his book *De plurimis claris scelectisque mulieribus opus prope divinum novissime congestum* (1497). His book was republished in the collection of Johannes Ravisius, ed., *De memorabilibus et claris mulieribus: aliquot diversorum scriptorium opera* (Paris: Simon de Colines, 1521) which enjoyed huge popularity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: The text reads (39b): "Cui cum primo aenigmata et quaestiones quae ei prius insolubiles videbantur, atque ab ipso de agnitione veri dei, et de creaturis mundi, necnon et de immortalitate animae, et iudicio futuro: quod apud eam et apud doctores eius gentiles duntaxat philosophos incertum manebat, proposuisset, et earum solutiones ab eo velocissime audisset: ultro confessa est ipsius sapientiam, longe suam excessisse." Text online at http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/camenaref/muliers.html (accessed June 30, 2007).

"…carved by the eternal God out of the eternity of being."[37] We cannot hope to preserve our being perpetually because, unlike that of the celestial bodies and spheres, our matter has disposition only to one form.[38] Moreover, because of Adam's original sin, man has forfeited his initial immortality. Only that part of the soul which is reason, and which was obedient to God, had the supernatural ability to prevent the decay and corruption of matter, a faculty that was lost through the primal sin. Repentance made it possible to be absolved of the sin, but the capacity for immortality was not restored. Since that juncture, matter cannot hope for immortality, as the woman of Tekoa says in 2 Samuel 14:14: "For we must die, and are as water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again."[39] Like water, man has a hybrid fate, because he belongs to the world above, like the "small parts of water" which dissolve in the air,[40] and to the world below, like the "larger parts of water" that drain into the ground. The material part of man will dissolve and waste away in the grave, while the spiritual part enters the air and is there preserved.

This is the first, "innocent" part of the letter. Baldassarre makes use here of *philosophoumena* that presume a Christian reading of the Bible. It is worth noting that the reference to the woman of Tekoa, seemingly an allusion to the Old Testament, can also be construed as an indirect allusion to Christ on the cross. Jesus describes his condition using the words of Psalm 21:15: "I am poured out like water" (*sicut aqua effusus sum*). Probably in keeping with an ancient Christian tradition, now in philosophical guise, Thomas Aquinas, here indirectly cited by Baldassarre, connects the two verses: the woman of Tekoa points to the

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[37] Boccato, "Una disputa," 603: "…che standosi nell'interminabile dell'eternità in guisa ch'egli da lei non è circonscritto, cava il tempo dall'evo."

[38] There is something skewed in the text of Baldassarre, which according to Boccato, "Una disputa," 603, reads: "…né possiamo sperare che l'essere nostro si conservi perpetuamente. Non essendo materia, salvo quella del cielo, che non habbia dispositione che ad una forma, sarebbe stato bisogno che i primi propagatori dell'humana generatione si fossero conservati nell'originale giustitia, se dovea la loro posterità conservarsi immortale." According to Aristotle, the motion of the celestial bodies is eternal and circular (see Aristotle, *Physics* 12.7). See the following note.

[39] *Omnes morimur et quasi aquae dilabimur*. Boccato, "Una disputa," 603 reads *acquae*, probably a scribal error. This verse is a topos of Christian homiletics and sermons on the occasion of death (*Tractatus de Morte non Timenda*, etc.). Baldassarre quotes only the first part of 2 Samuel 14:14, leaving out *in terram* ("on the ground").

[40] See also Thomas Aquinas, *In psalmos Davidis expositio a psalmo XXI ad psalmum XXX Reportatio Reginaldi de Piperno*, Ps. 21 (22): "Aqua leviter effunditur et proiicitur: sic ergo effusus sum."

mortality of man in the image of water spilled upon the ground, while Jesus symbolizes the merging of the spirit with the air. The indirect reference to the cross has been included consciously, as the archdeacon later discloses in the letter, where his intention to convert Sara is clear. The body, because mortal, is also especially weak. The sole hope is salvation through Christ, who is the only one who can rebuild the temple of the body. Man is an ugly house that becomes a decrepit ruin. The cleric concludes his philosophical speculations with the sentence: "Only my Christ, the divine architect, who built the universe, can destroy and rebuild that temple in which human intellect resides like a god. And in this sense he spoke and confirmed with his work: *Possum destruere templum hoc et in triduo reaedificare illud* [Matthew 26:61]."[41]

Sara Sullam was lured into responding to these arguments and replied, with a letter dated January 10[42] in which, in keeping with the patterns and usages of her time, she continued the philosophical discussion about the immortality of the soul, expressing her "doubts" concerning the construction of the cleric. She had read the letter in her "academy" to her friends Paluzzi and Corniani. Her response to Baldassarre is very sophisticated in its formulation and logical in its philosophical structure, stringent in its conclusions and informative in regard to the theses indirectly alluded to by Baldassarre. She immediately seizes on the first point, the comparison between the year, which through cyclic seasons becomes younger, and man, who grows ever older.

The fact that one year is followed by another, that the year is renewed (Baldassarre: "the year becomes younger"), also applies to mankind, although the life of a human being is longer than one revolution around the sun. Throughout the duration of a man's life, we see his identity as an individual. The biographical dates of a human

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[41] Italian text from Boccato, "Una disputa," 604: "Solo il mio Christo, architetto divino ch'edificó l'universo, può distruggere e fabbricare quel tempio nel quale, com'una Deità, risiede l'intelletto dell'huomo. E però disse e confermò con l'opera: *Possum destruere templum hoc et in triduo reaedificare illud*." The Vulgate reads "templum Dei," which certainly does not fit in with Baldassarre's intentions. The King James Version also reads, "I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days."

[42] The letter was published by Baldassarre in his *Risposta al Manifesto della Signora Sara Copia del Signor Baldassare Bonifaccio* (Venetia: appresso Antonio Pinelli, 1621), fols. 5r–6v, and republished by Fortis, *La "bella ebrea,"* 145–147. The transcriptions of Baldassarre (and therefore of Fortis) are not free from errors: for example "effects" instead of "affects" (5r); "language" (6r) instead of "lineage" and other spelling mistakes.

life mark its individuality, as a fragment in time. Just as an individual year loses its essence to a number, a human being loses his individual essence through time. This sentence contains the main problem of the theory of human individuality (but also the problem of his moral responsibility and fate after death, which Sara does not mention *expressis verbis*). The essential identity of the individual, Sara adds, is not due to his belonging to the species of "man," for "if the essence of a single human being would not be distinguished from the others by dint of its individual essence, we would have to conclude that if the essence of Socrates were lost, then that of Plato, that is, of other individuals, would also be lost, so that the death of an individual would mean the death of the species."[43]

The idea that matter is corruptible, as held by the Peripatetics, is, in Sara's view, easier to claim than to prove. In fact, if substance is an internal and external part of the composite and is eternal, how is it possible to assert that a thing can take on the quality of corruptibility from a part that is in itself eternal and non-corruptible? This conflicts with the general rules of logic.

It is evident that matter is immortal: this can be seen in the fact that when any composite decomposes, its basic elements remain. If the Aristotelian composite of substance and form is mortal, which of the two components is eternal, and which is doomed to decay? To solve this question, Sara seizes on the substance and form of heaven. Before we continue, it is important to note that, according to Aristotle, here expressly mentioned, matter is eternal, but corruptible, while form is incorruptible, but not eternal, i.e., matter decomposes into its constituent elements, which then find a new form (the so-called "appetite of matter"). The substance of heaven longs for form, and although many forms are conceivable, only one is actually realized (*in actu*) for heaven and remains eternal. Heaven is actually finite, but eternal. If matter is eternal, only the form of heaven could be corruptible. But this cannot be the case in regard to heaven, because it has only one form and one

[43] Letter to Baldassare Bonifaccio (also in Fortis, *La "bella ebrea,"* 145–146): "…se l'essenza di un uomo non si distinguesse essenzialmente dall'altra, ne seguirebbe che, mancando l'essenza di Socrate, mancasse anche quella di Platone, e cosí de gl'altri, in modo che nella morte di un individuo morirebbono tutti."

substance, which fully fills the effective power of the matter.[44] Thus, in Aristotelian philosophy, there is not an infinite number of heavens.

The situation is different in respect to human existence, since there are many human beings. Sara reasons: if we follow Aristotle's notion and believe that the soul is passed on by procreation, one may ask why God did not create man immortal from the start, if he indeed intended to preserve him in this way? But if the human being was created mortal, and we sink and are drained into the ground, as in the image of the woman of Tekoa, then we are only temporary human beings, not always the same, although the species always remains one and the same. For that reason, neither the year nor any other transitory, short-lived being can bring about renewal and restoration, just as when a mason rebuilds a house that has been destroyed, it will not be the same house as before, even if made from the same bricks.

Sara is speaking in this text about the eternity of matter, *materia*, and not about the mortality or immortality of the soul, and about the transitoriness of man, which is a function of number, and thus of motion. She does not propose any clear alternative philosophy, but only asks questions about questions. One thing is certain: she rejects a direct connection between original sin and generation, because that would not follow logically from the idea of an original plan by God, and would, according to Baldassarre's logic, be the outcome of *ad hoc* planning (with God only waiting until man sins). In particular, she rejected the notion of Christianity as some kind of a *reconstruction* of Judaism. If we suppose that the Jewish religion, or the Jew as such, since the time of Adam, is a destroyed house, then Christ erects a new building, since he cannot rebuild the old. *Ergo*, we would argue, Christianity cannot simply build upon Judaism. This is a subject richly reminiscent of philosophical discussions at the time of Mendelssohn, in which Judaism was defined as a sub-structure of Christianity.

Baldassarre went beyond Sara's courtly and discursive tone, with the publication two years later, in 1621, of a small, sixty-one-page volume entitled *Dell'immortalità dell'anima; Discorso di Baldassare Bonifaccio*,

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[44] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12.8, trans. W. D. Ross: "Evidently there is but one heaven. For if there are many heavens as there are many men, the moving principles, of which each heaven will have one, will be one in form but in number many. […] So the unmovable first mover is one both in definition and in number; so too, therefore, is that which is moved always and continuously; therefore there is one heaven alone." See http://www.classicallibrary.org/aristotle/metaphysics/book12.htm.

composed in the form of a public dispute.[45] One has the impression that he invested time and energy in writing a tractate for the public, and that its aim was to reduce the influence of Sara's "academy" by endeavoring to depict her as an "Aristotelian." It thus becomes clear that the first letter was conceived as a conscious provocation designed to incite Sara to a response.

Baldassarre makes no secret of the fact that he views their dispute as a contest, and he embarks, without hesitation and armed with a "golden sword,"[46] into battle against the "moon of the lady philosophers."[47] His bill of indictment is clearly a renewed provocation, since he accuses Sara of disrespect for the Jewish religion and obedience to the "poisoned" philosophy of Aristotle.[48] In order to demonstrate his knowledge of the Hebrew terms for "soul," he distinguishes between *neshamah* ("spiracolo di vita, animo ragionevole"), *nefesh* ("anima sensitiva dei bruti"), and *ruaḥ* ("spirito, sostanza incorporeale").[49] Baldassarre sums up Sara's critique: immortality cannot be predicated on worldly things because their number is finite. Sara's argument was: if all souls were immortal and infinite, they would be drawn into the world, which is eternal, and this would contradict the Aristotelian principle according to which nothing infinite can exist in nature, which is eternal but finite. Baldassarre replies: if we assume that Aristotle's theory about the eternity of the world is true (which he, Baldassarre, fervently denies) the doctrine of the immortality of the soul does not pertain to matter but only to things of the spirit ("cose spirituali come l'anima"),[50] so that the infinite would not remain in the finite (Baldassarre fails to say that for Aristotle, finitude (extension) and immortality [motion] are not the same!).

Another of Sara's arguments is as follows: if the soul were immortal, we would have an infinite number of souls, which would be a *contradictio*, because they would not be perceptible qua number, and thus not

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[45] Venetia: Pinelli, 1621. The text I used is available online from the Herzog-August-Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, http://diglib.hab.de/drucke/83-12-quod-3/start.htm (accessed May 2005).

[46] Bonifaccio, *Discorso*, 6: "…non ho bisogno dello scudo, ma solamente della spada…questa spada non è già di ferro per offender, ma d'oro per arricchire."

[47] Ibid., 5: "A gran torto Lucretio disse che Epicuro era il sole dei filosofi: ed io dirò con molta ragione che voi siete la Luna delle filosofesse." Note here the reference to Epicurus!

[48] Ibid.: "pestifera dottrina del venenoso maestro."

[49] Ibid., 7.

[50] Ibid., 8.

conceivable individually. Baldassarre replies: Since the soul is separate from matter and number is valid only for substance that is divisible, it has no quantity. On the other hand, if the world is eternal for Aristotle, we would have an infinity of days. Then immaterial souls would also be countable, because the infinitude of time is countable. Baldassarre here suppresses the argument that infinity of motion, which generates time, derives from the unmovable first mover, and that the "in-formed" matter is finite due to its extension. Moreover, the days do not differ from one another, as Sara says, while the souls should differ as individual entities. Baldassarre is aware of the problem, because he sees the individual soul, in agreement with Thomas, as participating in the divine spirit, and not as identical with divine substance (which would be tantamount to a Spinozan conception).

Sara's second main argument runs: no agent can exist without action. Here Baldassarre does not appear to deal directly with the point Sara is making. Her assertion is that souls, as human essences, cannot be identical, otherwise the death of an individual would mean the death of the species. By contrast, Baldassarre deals here with the way in which the body is separated from the soul, since no matter can exist without actual concrete form. The soul perceives differently when it is within the body and when it is outside the body. The one occurs through thought, the other through the species in which it participates, by means of the divine light. The first type of perception (with the body) is action, the second (without a body) is passion. This means that one comes about through the active intellect, the second through the passive intellect. Here, it would be appropriate to ask whether the passive soul, the participation in the species, does not indeed represent the entire species, if it is infinite in regard to time, and thus immortal.

The third argument is important for our thesis here. Sara writes that if one speaks of corruption, the reference cannot be to matter, but only to form, since matter dissolves into its elements, which are, obviously, not destroyed. In order to circumvent this problem, Baldassarre speaks of separation, not corruption. He states that in the separation of soul and body, the body (matter) remains only a potentiality, without existence. Baldassarre underpins his conclusions with a proof from the realm of sense perception:

> Would we need an additional proof, when we perceive with the senses that the substance of our fragile bodies wastes away every day? Would it not move irrevocably toward destruction if we did not maintain it each and every day with the food which we lose each day? Let us not be

> deceived—your gleaming eyes will become bleary eyes. Your breast will turn limp and flabby, your skin wrinkled. The body will become a corpse, decompose to putrescence and slime. But not the soul…[51]

Baldassarre does not respond directly to Sara's philosophical question, preferring rather, in typically Baroque discursive style, the *ad hominem* argument of putrefaction, a topic important to him. At the end of his short book he includes a poem:

> Sara, your beauty so beguiling,
> That it scorns being counted but second among the best,
> Is a thing far more transitory than a blossom,
> Is far more fleeting than a wisp of wind,
>
> And if I could say—peace be upon you—
> What is hidden, wrapped within your beauty,
> Then I would say that it is the grave,
> Where the impure soul lies buried because of original sin.
>
> That is the sin from whence sprang the body,
> Which pilfers and robs the immortal form of life
> And corrupts the image of God.
>
> Run, run to the purifying fountain
> Where life now springs forth: Christ is the pious bird
> Who with his blood animates the dead children.[52]

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[51] Ibid., 11: "E che occore altra proua, se prouiamo col senso che la materia di questo nostro corpo fra[gi]le ogni di si corrompe, e preciterebbe spacciatamente alla distruzione, tutte le colte che da noi non si ristorasse continuamente col cibo, quello che andiamo ogni giorno perdendo? Cotesti vostri occhi brillanti diverranno cispi, non ci inganniamo; vizze diuerranno le poppe, e grinze le carni. Diverrà cadauere il corpo, e rimarrà finalmente putredine, e fango. Non cosi l'anima…"

[52] Ibid., 61:

> Sara, la tua beltà cotanto audace
> Che sdegna tra le prime esser seconda
> E però più caduca assai che fronda,
> E però più che vento assai fugace.
>
> E, se potessi dir, ma con tua pace,
> Ciò che la tua bellezza in se nasconda,
> Io direi ch'ella tomba, ou'alma, immonda
> Di colpa originale, sepolta giace
>
> Questa è la colpa, onde quel colpo uscio
> Che la forma immortal di vita priua
> E corrompe l'imagine di Dio
>
> Corri, corri al lauacro, ond'hor deriua
> La vita: Christo è quel augel sì pio
> Che col suo sangue morti figli auuiua.

The aesthetic theory reflected here is linked to religion. Baldassarre speaks of "feminine beauty," but without referring to the corresponding tractates where beauty and virtue are seen as a divine composite,[53] which augurs and anticipates the beauty of the heavens. The true weakness of Sara's letter, in Baldassarre's eyes, was not the theory of the mortality of the soul in general, but rather *her soul*, because she was a Jewess.

Having just recuperated from an illness, and surprised by the publication of the tractate, Sara answered with the only publication that she issued during her life,[54] in which she attacked her opponent with vehemence and sarcasm, armed with all the rules of rhetoric, or as Graetz put it: "with mature dialectics, masculine courage, and crushing force applied against her slanderous accuser."[55] That is perhaps the impression the reader gets initially. Yet, if one looks more carefully, one notices that Sara does not really add any serious new arguments here, aside from two remarks *ad hominem* about Baldassarre's poor knowledge of Hebrew and an ironic comment that he should wish he were dead, if indeed he so fervently desires immortality of the soul after death. Sara's rhetoric repeats clichés that are suitably Baroque, but it is hardly comparable to the logical deductive speculations of her previous letter. Consider only her tone here: acrimonious, sarcastic, insulting, offensive, invidious. That is all. She begins with an avowal of faith that sounds like a statement of credo: "The human soul, Mr. Baldassarre, is incorruptible, immortal, and divine, created by God and breathed within our body at that time when what forms the organs is able to receive [the seed] in the womb."[56] This thesis is, in its tenor, as Christian as it is Jewish, and derived from her faith. Sara refuses to deal any further with the topic. The reason becomes clear in the following sentences:

> If, in a few conversations, I have raised philosophical or theological questions, that should not be interpreted as doubt or fluctuation in my faith,

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[53] See, for example, Agnolo Firenzuola, *Delle bellezze delle donne* (see above, n. 13).

[54] *Manifesto Di Sarra Copia Svlam Hebrea: Nel quale è da lei riprouata, e detestata l'opinione negante l'immortalitá deli' Anima falsamente attribuitale dal Sig. Baldassare Bonifaccio* (Venice: Pinelli, 1621), http://diglib.hab.de/drucke/83–12–quod-4/start.htm.

[55] Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 10:135.

[56] "L'anima dell'uomo, Signor Baldassare, è incorruttibile, immortale e divina, creata e infusa da Dio nel nostro corpo in quel tempo che l'organizzato è reso abile nel ventre materno a poterla ricevere." Text also in Fortis, *La "bella ebrea,"* 150; according to *Vocabolario degli accademici della Crusca* (Venice, 1612) "organizzare" means "formare gli organi" with reference to Francesco da Buti's commentary on Dante.

> but rather only as [my] curiosity to hear, together with you, about the solution of difficulties even by means of strange and alien doctrines. I acted thus in the assumption that this is permitted to every person who is eager to learn, and thus also to a woman, a Jewish woman, who is constantly confronted with these topics by those who attempt, as you well know, to compel her to accept the Christian faith.[57]

For that reason, she also answers with a sonnet:

> I know that beauty which pleases the world,
> Is a flower limp and fleeting, rich in its arrogance.
> I have never given much attention to the garment
> That covers me.
>
> My heart rots and goes to waste
> Due to an even more elegant wish, Baldassarre.
> Which is why, with courage and greedily,
> I seek that source from which the wave gushes forth,
>
> Which pays true fame to the names of others.
> She who wishes to leave her own image to the world
> Immortal and living, should not seek another spring or river.
>
> For if a wave should come that will render the soul
> blessed toward the heavens, by bathing my face or breast,
> I shall not hesitate to shed tears.[58]

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[57] Sullam, *Manifesto*, non-paginated, edited in Fortis, *La* "*bella ebrea*," 150: "…che se pure in alcun discorso io vi ho promossa alcuna difficoltà filosofica o teologica, ciò non è stato per dubbio e vacillamento che io abbia avuto nella mia fede, ma solo per curiosità d'intendere da voi, con la soluzione dei miei argomenti, qualcuna curiosa e peregrina dottrina, stimando ciò esser concesso ad ogni persona che professi studij, non che ad una donna, e donna Ebrea, la quale continuamente vien posta in questi discorsi da persone che si affaticano di ridurla, come voi sapete, alla Cristiana fede."

[58] Fortis, *La* "*bella ebrea*," 120:

> Ben so che la beltá, ch'al mondo piace
> È fior caduco e di superbia abbonda
> Ma de la spoglia fral che mi circonda
> Qual si sia, stima in me l'alma non face
>
> Per più nobil desìo mio cor si sface,
> Baldassar, ond' ardita e sitibonda
> Quel fonte cerco, onde stillar suol l'onda
> Che rende ai nomi altrui fame verace
>
> Né cercar dee altro Fonte o altro Rio
> Chi di lasciar immortalmente viva
> La sua memoria al mondo ha pur desio
>
> Ché s'a far l'alma in Ciel beata arriva
> Onda, che bagni il volto o 'l petto mio,
> Di lacrime versar non sarò schiva.

To become immortal, Sara says, you do not need a new spring or source (such as baptism). You need water, but that of your own "tears."

It is clear that Baldassarre's letter to Sara was meant as a provocation, and she allowed herself to be provoked to a response. In the society in which she had grown up, it was customary to raise *dubitationes* and ask *quaestiones* in order to spark a discourse in its requisite acuteness. Sara did this, and was now like a burnt child who dreads the fire, because the archdeacon wanted to use the opportunity to force her, over and over, to deal with the topic of conversion.

Nonetheless, the question remains legitimate: Why did she try to answer only with sarcasm and a vehement profession of faith, without a foundation of philosophical argument? Was she really frightened about the Inquisition, and thus decided to craft an avowal of her orthodoxy in order to avoid being accused of heresy, as others have argued? In my view, that is impossible, since the *Manifesto* is composed in a tone of voice so biting that she could have been accused of heresy simply on that basis. Baldassarre was, after all, an archdeacon, accused by a Jewess of vanity, false zeal, and ambition, and of ignorance in various fields of philosophy, theology, and the Italian and Hebrew languages—and accused, most pointedly, of the cowardice of a knight who is content to measure his prowess against a woman! I do not see here any fear of the church whatsoever!

My thesis is as follows: the topic of the immortality of the soul was a highly explosive subject at the time, not only for Christianity but also, and particularly, within Judaism. *That* is most likely why Sara did not want to get involved, in such a public forum, in the vehement discussions then prevalent among rabbis, not only in Venice but also in Amsterdam. Thus, it is no accident that this topic, which ranked among the most important theological, philosophical, and social issues of the time, was treated with the proper focus and attention by various Venetian Jews, such as Leone Modena, in his unpublished apologia, *Magen va-Ḥerev*, or David del Bene, in his *Kissot le-vet David*.

After Sara's debate with the priests, the topic of the immortality of the soul and eternal damnation was discussed with greater vehemence among the Jews. In 1622–1623, the Jewish physician Samuel da Silva published his *Tratado da immortalidade da alma*, a polemic against the now lost tractate of Uriel da Costa, the Portuguese Jew who had converted to Christianity and then returned to Judaism, entitled *Sobre a mordalidade da alma do homem*. Da Costa replied in 1623 with the tractate *Exame das tradições farisaicas conferidas com a lei escripta, contra a immortalidade da*

alma (Amsterdam, 1623–1624), in which he denied the immortality of the soul. The question is further discussed by Manasseh ben Israel (*Nishmat Ḥayyim*), Saul Levi Morteira, Isaac Aboab de Fonseca, and Moses Raphael d'Aguilar. This was not just a theological-philosophical discussion; it was also relevant for the question of the rehabilitation of the crypto-Jews, who had been converted by force to Christianity—a subject that goes beyond the confines of the present paper.[59]

Sara probably suspected that the Christian and Jewish discussion about the soul's immortality was only a subterfuge in order to discuss the place of the Jews and Judaism within Christian society. For the Christians, the most important issue was honor and fame for a Jewish woman, who had talent, beauty, and good manners, but who did not follow the "true religion," and thus had no access to the world beyond. Her answer to that was clear and unambiguous: "…the fact that I remain a Jew should eliminate any doubt about my viewpoint. For had I believed and, as you say, were I not afraid of the loss of the happiness of the other life, there were indeed ample opportunities for me to improve my situation by changing the law [the religion]. That is a fact known to many in authority, since they incessantly tried to bring it about."[60] Her silence down to her death can serve as the best commentary on her avowal of faith, because to speak against the Christians would mean that she doubted the immortality of the "Jewish" soul.

Giorgio Bassani speaks in his novel *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini* of Sara and her literary talent, her active exchange of letters with the "gentiluomo" Ansaldo and his vain attempts to convert her. He closes with the terse remark: "Una gran donna, in conclusione, onore e vanto dell'ebraismo italiano in piena Controriforma" (A grand woman,

[59] See Alexander Altmann, "Eternality of Punishment: A Theological Controversy within the Amsterdam Rabbinate in the Thirties of the 17th Century," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 40 (1972): 1–88; Asa Kasher and Shlomo Biderman, "Why was Baruch de Spinoza excommunicated?," in *Sceptics, Millenarians and Jews*, ed. David S. Katz and Jonathan I. Israel (Brill: Leiden, 1990), 98–141, also online: http://www.tau.ac.il/~kasher/pspin.htm.

[60] Sullam, *Manifesto* (no pagination): "…benché, a rimuovere ogni dubbio della mia opinione in questo, dovrebbe bastare il mio preservarmi Ebrea, perché, quando i credessi, come voi dite, e non temessi di perder la felicità dell'altra vita, non mi sarebbero mancate occasioni col cangiar legge, di migliorare il mio stato; cosa nota a persone di autorità, che l'hanno instantemente procurato e tentato."

ultimately, the honor and pride of Italian Jewry at the height of the Counter-Reformation).[61]

10.3 *In Conclusion: Souls and Bodies*

Leaving aside the biographical elements that emerge from the correspondence between Cebà and Sara, and from her contest with Bonifaccio, one may wonder whether any light is cast here on the subject of the construction of the Jewish body and the immortality of the Jewish soul. In Cebà's Christian theology, there is no doubt that the soul of the Jewess cannot heal her body until she undergoes baptism. As long as Sara does not become a Christian, her Jewish beauty is thus only a deceptive physical feature that conceals imminent physical corruption. Beauty of the body is nugatory unless bound up with morality of the soul, which for Christians is possible only through the sacrament of baptism. This becomes the main point, constantly reiterated in Baldassarre's numerous attempts to convert Sara. He views the Jewish religion as a product of the "incurable" Adamic original sin. The Jewish body—just as that of any other person not adhering to the Catholic Church—is a dilapidated and collapsing old house that can only be rebuilt through Christ. Christian aesthetics and anthropological attitudes are clearly dependent on the conversion of the soul, which then retroactively heals the body.

A further element operating in the background in this confrontation is the anthropological image divided along the fault lines of religion: for Christians, the soul is individual, which is why both Cebà and Baldassarre urge Sara to convert: so that her soul does not remain "incurable" for all eternity. For Jews, the question of the individual soul remained controversial, as I have noted. Sara appears rather to believe that all Israel will be healed and saved, which is why she excludes a personal individual conversion. That is how I interpret the dedication of the small tractate to her father, where she sees herself as his offspring and perpetuator, the conserver of his name ("conservazione del tuo nome").[62] Her father's soul, she continues, gave her the essence of composition

[61] Giorgio Bassani, *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini* (Torino: Einaudi, 1962), 182; quoted in Fortis, *La "bella ebrea,"* 17.

[62] Fortis, *La "bella ebrea,"* 149.

from which she was then born into the world.[63] Beyond the figurative and poetic language, one can perceive the philosophical conviction here that body and soul (in Judaism) constitute a *synholon*, an essential composite guaranteeing the continuation of Judaism. The belief in *continuatio* is the conception of immortality that strengthens Sara in her faith as a Jew. To be and remain a Jew thus becomes an argument for the immortality of the soul.

[63] Ibid., "onde a te, Anima dilettissima, che desti l'essere a quel caro composto da cui fui generata in questo mondo."

POSTFACE

In 1548, or possibly 1549, the Jewish physician Amatus Lusitanus met with an unnamed friend in a bookshop, probably in Ancona, where together they discovered the polemical work of Franciscan Friar Petrus Colonna Galatinus, *De arcanis catholicae veritatis contra obstinatissimam Judaeorum nostrae tempestatis perfidiam*. It had been printed in 1518, by the Jewish publisher Gershom Soncino, in Orthona.[1] While the two friends were admiring the editorial elegance of the work, and the erudition of its author, a further visitor joined the group: the thirty-five-year-old scholar Azariah de' Rossi, who, according to Lusitanus's report, was a very profound expert in Hebrew and Latin letters. Lusitanus wrote: "He entered as the third in our party and gave his view, especially concerning the two Jesuits that appear in this work, in defense of the famous Reuchlin, who at the time was in prison; he defended him from calumnies and endeavored to vindicate him."[2]

The discerning reader will be wondering whether it is appropriate to conclude the present volume by introducing this curious episode of a meeting in a bookshop in Ancona. However, the role of printed books in the Renaissance was central. They were the medium that permitted the easy and effective propagation of ideas—through pamphlets, new editions, and even prayer books. Over time they would entirely replace handwritten manuscripts, rendering obsolete the *ars scriptoria*. The print "revolution" was without any doubt comparable, in its time, to the expansion of the Internet in the modern world—although, to be sure, Gutenberg's technique did not have the same explosive and implosive impact on all strata of society as the World Wide Web has

[1] See François Secret, *Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance*, 2nd ed. (Milan: Arché; Neuilly-sur-Seine: Arma Artis, 1985), 102–105; Benigno F. Perrone, "Pietro Colonna Galatino, O.F.M. (1465–1540) in un testo di Mariologia francescana condotto con metodo 'filologico-cabbalistico,'" *Studi Francescani* 80 (1983): 127–164; Roberto Rusconi, "Circolazione di testi profetici tra '400 e '500: La figura di Pietro Galatino," in *Il Profetismo Gioachimita tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento*, ed. Gian Luca Podestà (Genua: Marietti, 1991), 379–397.

[2] Harry Friedenwald, "Two Jewish Physicians of the Sixteenth Century. The Doctor, Amatus Lusitanus, the Patient, Azariah dei Rossi," in idem, *The Jews and Medicine. Essays*, vol. 2 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press 1944), p. 393.

had. There is, however, something else about the episode in the bookshop that makes it quite singular: it involves three Jews[3] discussing a work of anti-Jewish polemics and admiring its editorial value and the erudition of its author. It is an intriguing picture, which would, as a narrative, sound incredible, if placed anywhere but in a Renaissance bookstore. Moreover, the event to which Lusitanus alludes—albeit with some imprecision[4]—is the famous and ignominious controversy over the use of Jewish sources by Johannes Reuchlin. The attack on Reuchlin was initiated by Jacob van Hoogstraten, who accused the German scholar of heresy for his "Judaizing" writings and theses.[5] The fascinating element is our story is the indirect praise it implies for a leading Christian intellectual—to whom even Gershom Scholem later felt indebted, referring to himself as "Reuchlin redivivus." In sum, this single episode contains within it all the ingredients that went into making the Renaissance a new intellectual age: the Jewish-Christian debate, the interest and curiosity of intellectual Christianity for Judaism, and the timid Jewish reaction to humanist culture with its openness to the challenges of the new epoch. I would dare to say: the new age was an age of curiosity and intellectual exchange.

The Renaissance was also the turning point in the development of various aspects of Jewish thought and philosophy, as I have tried to demonstrate in this book. It is no surprise to find confirmation in the sources that Jewish philosophy, as such, actually begins in the humanist period, just as discussion of the Christian origins of philosophy begins

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[3] I suppose that the friend of Lusitanus ("one of my best friends") was also a Jew. Concerning him Lusitanus wrote: "…whose fate it is to be living now in Rome in most unfortunate conditions." Lusitanus alludes here perhaps to the "new conditions" of Roman Jewry under the pontificate of Paulus IV and his bull of July 12, 1555, the *Cum nimis absurdum*, which instituted the ghetto of Rome.

[4] In 1518, there were no Jesuits to be mentioned in the work of Galatinus published in that year; the order was not approved by the pope until 1540. Colonna Galatinus was a Franciscan, while Jacob van Hoogstraaten was a Dominican and an opponent of Reuchlin.

[5] On the controversy, see J. H. Overfield, "A new look at the Reuchlin affair," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 8 (1971): 165–207; Marianne Awerbuch, "Über Juden und Judentum zwischen Humanismus und Reformation. Zum Verständnis der Motivation von Reuchlins Kampf für das jüdische Schrifttum," *Reuchlin und die Juden*, ed. Arno Herzig and Julius H. Schoeps (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1993), 189–200; Hans Julius Schoeps, "Der Reuchlin-Pfefferkorn-Streit in der jüdischen Historiographie des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts," in ibid., 203–212; Frank Dabba Smith, "The Reuchlin Controversy," *Journal of Progressive Judaism* 4 (1995): 77–88.

to unroll. The humanist conception of man is not, of course, based on an anthropological study of human beings in their social and religious environment, but on an ideal *homo christianus*, seen as the perfection of humanity in Christ—a *novus Adam*. The crisis over the belief in the perfection of man as a Christian prerogative would come to a head during the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. With the Protestant Reformation and the ensuing wars of religion, the alleged links between religion and peace, Christianity and the perfection of humanity, would be severed forever—as predicted by Isaac Abravanel at the beginning of the sixteenth century.[6] It is no coincidence that this period first gave birth to the ghetto as a cultural and social institution, and, in some cases in Northern Europe, as an instrument for the total isolation of the Jews from their surroundings.

The tendency toward containing the Jews in isolation was a product of Christian uncertainty in the face of the political fragmentation along religious lines then taking place in Christendom. The unity of the Jews, which went beyond state sovereignty, was seen as a dangerous threat to Christianity, undermining its very foundations as a divine institution. In my opinion, it was not the expulsion from Spain that gave rise to Kabalistic and messianic expectations among the Jews—as Gershom Scholem's well-known thesis would have it—but rather the political changes that began to dominate European thought as early as the thirteenth century: the fragmentation of power and authority that reached its climax in the sixteenth century and could, from that time onwards, no longer be overlooked. The attempt by Simone Luzzatto to present the Jewish "nation" as unpretentiously obedient to authority, grateful for every protection, and useful in mercantilism, is the convincing proof of the reverse attitude of the governments. Within the logic of the historical facts, it is understandable that the Christian attitude toward the *Old* Testament becomes transformed into a political reflection on Jewish ceremonies and rites. Publications on Jewish laws and customs were regular items on the bestseller lists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, up until the beginning of the Enlightenment. The intent of such publications was not to provide knowledge of Judaism

[6] Isaac Abravanel, *Perush 'al nevi'im aharonim* on Isaiah 11:1; see Johann Maier, *Kriegsrecht und Friedensordnung in jüdischer Tradition* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000), 403.

per se. It was, rather, "to expose Judaism as an unbiblical religion that posed a danger to Christian faith."[7]

The threat posed by Judaism touched not only old, but also all "new" Christians (converts, in particular, the so-called Marranos), who not rarely abandoned Christianity at the first available opportunity in order to return to their native religion. The denigration of Jewish antiquity and of the Jewish presence in modern society was the Christian antidote against the poison of re-conversion. The Jewish response to conversion can be summarized in the wish of Azariah, as quoted by the inquisitor of Ferrara: "…For two years I have tried my best to convert the Jew Bonaiuto (Azariah) dei Rossi to Christianity. Alas, all was and is fruitless, because yesterday, in the morning, he begged me to write to you that he wishes resolutely to remain a Jew, yet not an insane Jew. For he does not wish to stop telling the truth in favor of any religion."[8] The struggle between identity and cultural dialogue is the main achievement of Renaissance cultural history and philosophy—at least in Judaism.

[7] Stephen G. Burnett, "Distorted Mirrors: Antonius Margaritha, Johann Buxtorf and Christian Ethnographies of the Jews," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25 (1994): 275–287, here 276.

[8] "…non ho però gia doi anni mancato di far ogni opera aciò Bonaiuto dei Rossi hebreo si facesse christiano ma tutto sempre è stato et è vano perche ultimamente hieri matina mi pregò che scrivesse a lei, come rissolutamente vuole star Hebreo, ma non pazzo hebreo, cio è che vogli cessar di dir la verita in favor d'ogni religione." Document published by Joanna Weinberg, "Azaria dei Rossi: Towards a Reappraisal of the Last Years of his Life," *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa* 8 (1978): 511.

DOCUMENTATION STYLE, TRANSLITERATION, AND REFERENCES

The documentation system follows in the main the *Chicago Manual of Style* (humanities style). The transliteration of Hebrew words follows the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1972), while the transliteration of Greek words observes the common rules of classicists (where, for example, υ in a diphthong is "au," etc., and standing alone "y"), with the exception of the tonic accents, which are not necessary for the reproduction of Greek letters.

Quotations from the biblical text are taken from the New International Version, unless I expressly quote from an English translation of a rabbinic text. Slight changes to the wording of biblical quotations are not mentioned, provided there is no distortion of the original meaning. Titles of biblical, rabbinic, Jewish-Hellenistic, and other Jewish or Christian literature have not been abbreviated. Unless otherwise noted, all other translations of rabbinic and early Christian as well as medieval Jewish and Christian authors are my own.

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In place of the bundle of pages that would result from listing all the sources that were consulted in the preparation of this book, I list here only the items that are directly concerned with the topics dealt with in this book. The reader is referred to my forthcoming book on Jewish philosophy for a detailed bibliographical report on Jewish philosophers and their doctrines in the Renaissance and early modern period.

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INDEX