

The People and the Book: Print and the Transformation of Jewish Culture in Early Modern Europe¹

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In the past several decades, the study of Jewish culture and society in early modern Europe has come into its own with a remarkable explosion of books and essays written on almost every aspect of this fascinating period. Most of this scholarship, however, is exclusively focused on a particular region or locality, denying, it would seem, the very possibility that a distinct early modern Jewish cultural experience can ever be meaningfully described. I wish to assert that such a description is possible and desirable.

I have recently tried to describe a trans-regional culture in early modern Europe, linking in some sense disparate communities and, more significantly, disparate historiographical traditions rarely in contact or in conversation with each other. In searching for larger patterns of cultural formation common to Jewish communities in Italy, Central and Eastern Europe, the Ottoman empire and the Western Sephardic Diaspora in such cities as Amsterdam and Hamburg, I did not expect to efface the specificities and singularities of the sub-cultures of Jewish life other historians have carefully described. Instead, I proposed only another interpretative layer, a perspective on

¹ The following essay is based on my oral presentation at the University of Florida on December 1, 2008. These remarks are now considerably expanded in *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, New Jersey, 2010).

their work that emphasizes connections, contacts, and conversations over time and across specific localities. I relied especially for my analysis on the notion of connected histories, articulated by Sanjay Subrahmanyam in his own work on early modern world history, highlighting the dialectical relationship between local conditions and continental patterns.²

A central theme in this description of a trans-regional Jewish culture in the early modern period is the knowledge explosion precipitated to a great extent by the printing of Hebrew as well as Yiddish and Ladino books. In this discussion, I would like to focus on this one factor alone in assessing Jewish cultural transformations across Europe as a whole, arguing that the movement of books and the activities of their publishers and salesmen played a critical role in creating a connected history of early modern regional Jewish communities. With the significant involvement of Christian publishers in the business of Hebrew printing, and the emergence of a significant Christian readership of Jewish books, the image of Jews and Judaism in early modern Europe was also significantly enhanced.

² See, for example, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997): 735-62 [Reprinted in Victor Liebermann, ed. *Beyond Binary Histories: Re-Imagining Eurasia to c. 1800* (Ann Arbor, 1999), pp. 289-316]; *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges* (Oxford, 2004) and the companion volume, *Explorations in Connected History: Mughals and Franks* (Oxford, 2004).

I begin with a rich illustration of the impact of the printing of Hebrew books on Jewish readers: the publication of Joseph Caro's standardized code of Jewish law, the *Shulhan Arukh*. Caro, legal scholar and mystic (c.1488-1575), lived most of his life in the Ottoman Empire, especially Safed.³ The code was first published in Venice in 1565 as the

³ For what follows, I rely heavily on the essays of Elhanan Reiner, including his "The Ashkenazic Elite at the Beginning of the Modern Era: Manuscript versus Printed Text," *Jews in Early Modern Poland-Polin*, ed Gershon Hundert, 10 (1997): 85-98; idem, "Transformations in the Polish and Ashkenazic Yeshivot during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and the Dispute over Pilpul, (Hebrew)" *Ke-Minhag Ashkenaz ve-Polin: Sefer Yovel le-Chone Shmeruk*, 1989, pp. 9-80; idem, "The Attitude of Ashkenazi Society to the New Science in the Sixteenth Century," *Science in Context* 10 (1997): 589-603; idem, "A Biography of an Agent of Culture: Eleazar Altschul of Prague and his Literary Activity," pp. 229-247; idem, "The Rise of the Large Community: On the Roots of the Urban Jewish Community in Poland in the Early Modern Period (Hebrew)," *Gal-Ed* 20 (2006): 13-36 [The essay appears in English in a shorted version entitled: "The Rise of an Urban Community: Some Insights on the Transition from the Medieval Ashkenazi to the 16th Century Jewish Community in Poland," *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów Jewish Historical Quarterly* 3 (2003): 364-72]. Reiner is presently completing a monograph on this topic. I wish to thank him for allowing me to read part of this work before publication. On the *Shulhan Arukh* in general, see Isadore Twersky, "The *Shulhan Aruk*: Enduring Code of Jewish Law," *Judaism* 16(1967): 141-58; Joseph Davis, "The Reception of the "Shulhan Arukh" and the Formation of Ashkenazic Jewish Identity," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 26 (2002): 251-276.

ultimate digest of legal practice for Sephardic Jews living primarily in Mediterranean regions and reflecting their long-held customs and traditions. However, when this code was republished in Krakow in 1578-80, it was dramatically expanded by the addition of the glosses of the equally famous rabbi Moses Isserles of Krakow (1525 or 1530-1572), who sought to adjust the text to fit the needs of his fellow Ashkenazic Jews living in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, Isserles boldly introduced the text into his rabbinical academy in Krakow, thus reducing the totality of Ashkenazic legal practice to the material referred to in this composite work, and more importantly, producing a new legal compendium whose traditional boundaries separating Ashkenazim and Sephardim by long established custom were dramatically blurred.

As Elhanan Reiner carefully explains, Ashkenazic culture originating in medieval central Europe was based on a limited library of rabbinic works, learned orally and transmitted through *hagahot* (glosses) written by a later exegete that eventually merged with the original text itself as they were studied, transmitted, and recopied. In contrast to the medieval Christian book, an authoritative text for Ashkenazic Jews was thus not the original text but its latest version consisting of the latest accretions to the text. The authority of the text thus depended on the authority of its most recent rabbinic interpreter and transmitter. This all changed when Isserles decided to print his glosses to accompany Caro's legal digest. By committing his oral comments to writing and linking them to the fixed code of Caro, Isserles hoped to preserve at least a part of the earlier oral and scribal tradition in this new printed book so that, in Reiner's words, a kind of printed manuscript emerged.⁴ When his contemporary, the Ashkenazic rabbi Hayyim ben Bezalel

⁴ Reiner, "Ashkenazic Elite," pp. 97-98.

strenuously objected to Isserles' innovation, this critic was fully aware of the consequences that would result. A binding code with its privileged commentary in the pages of a printed book would arrest the elasticity of the tradition, diminish the importance of local Ashkenazic customs, and degrade the authority of individual rabbinic commentators. All would be subsumed under the centralizing authority of a supra-communal canon whose ultimate authorities were Caro and Isserles themselves.

Reiner's insightful description of the genesis of the *Shulhan Arukh* with its *Mappah* {the Isserles gloss} offers to the modern observer of late sixteenth century Jewish culture a lasting icon that a unified culture fusing Sephardic law with Ashkenazic custom could exist among early modern Jews and that it was made possible through the new invention of the printed book and its circulation. Before print, no one could have imagined the seemingly improbable merger of two distinct legal traditions on the pages of a book or the obliteration of localized oral traditions of authority and transmission. Nor could anyone have imagined the extraordinary layout of multiple commentaries from different eras and regions surrounding the core text of the Talmud and simultaneously appearing on the same page in the first printed edition in Venice in the first decades of the sixteenth century. Equally significant was the publication of the *Magna Biblica Rabbinica*, also published in Venice in multiple editions in the sixteenth century. Initially produced by Daniel Bomberg, the Christian printer, with the assistance of Jewish proofreaders, these newly formatted Jewish sacred texts were clearly imitative of Christian publishing practices of their own canon law.

The truly revolutionary implications of these publication events have only recently been appreciated through Reiner's scholarship as well as others. It is now

possible to understand how the migration of Hebrew books from Venice into Eastern Europe created a crisis for the rabbinic elites of Poland-Lithuania, one more enduring and more repercussive than even that engendered by the publication of the *Shulhan Arukh* itself.. Accustomed to the fluid scribal culture of texts with exegetical notes, rabbinic teachers had long felt comfortable in modifying the law according to local custom and current usage. The appearance of a printed text arrested considerably this creative and open process, establishing a kind of canonical text, one not easily “invaded” by scribal glosses and novel formulations. The text became the ultimate word, not the teacher, and thus diminished his authoritative capacity for interpreting the law. The text now available in multiple copies and purchased by larger numbers of students no longer could be easily supervised and controlled by an overseeing rabbinic elite. Through the elevation of the status of the text through print, the rabbinic master was less in a position to contest its supremacy.

One additional transformation was engendered by the new Hebrew printing houses of early modern Europe. With the publication of multiple commentaries and authors flowing first from Venice, then Constantinople, then Amsterdam as well as other Eastern European communities, Ashkenazic readers living in Poland-Lithuania were ultimately exposed to the classics of the Sephardic library. The Ashkenazic yeshivot were soon invaded by Sephardic biblical commentaries written initially in Spain and later in the Ottoman empire; the medieval philosophical tradition was revitalized in Eastern Europe with the appearance of the Maimonidean corpus in print; Sephardic and Italian sermons were regularly disseminated in Eastern Europe, along with a massive library of kabbalistic books; and even astronomical textbooks and a medical encyclopedia written

by a graduate of Padua's medical school could be read in Prague and Krakow.

Eventually the process was reversed as the library of Ashkenazic culture and traditions meandered southward to Italy, eastward to the Ottoman Empire, and westward to Amsterdam and London.⁵

⁵ On the controversies over the invasion of the Sephardic library in Eastern Europe, including the debate over the study of Maimonides' philosophical works in Isserles' *yeshivah*, see Reiner's essays in note 2 above. On the printing and circulation of exegetical, homiletical, philosophical, and kabbalistic works in Eastern Europe, see Jacob Elbaum, *Petihut ve-Histagrut: Ha-Yezirah ha-Ruhanit-Ha-Sifrutit be-Folin u-be-Arztot Ashkenaz be-Shalhei Ha-Me'ah Ha-Sheh-Esrei* (Jerusalem, 1990), especially pp. 67-248. On scientific works, see idem, pp. 248-79 and David Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven, 1995; Detroit, 2001), pp. 54-99. On Tobias Cohen's medical encyclopedia, see idem, pp. 229-55. See also Shifra Baruchson, *Sefarim ve-Korim: Tarbut Ha-Keriyah shel Yehudei Italia be-Shalhei Ha-Renasans*, (Jerusalem, 1993); idem, "Diffusion of Books: Sacred Writing and Classical Literature in the Libraries of Renaissance Jews," (Hebrew) *Italia* 8 (1989): 87-99; Robert Bonfil, "The Libraries of Jews," (Hebrew) *Pe'amim* 52(1992): 4-15; Ze'ev Gries, "Printing as a Means of Communication among Jewish Communities," pp. 5-17; idem, *Sifrut Ha-Hanhagot: Toldedoteha u-Mekoma be-Hayyai Hasidov shel ha-Besht*, (Jerusalem, 1989); idem, *Sefer Sofer ve-Sippur be-Reishit Ha-Hasidut*, (Jerusalem, 1992); idem, *The Book in the Jewish World* (Oxford, 2007); Joseph Hacker, "The Hebrew Press in Constantinople in the Sixteenth Century (Hebrew)," *Areshet* 5 (1972): 457-93; and Meir Benayahu, "The Shift of the Center of Hebrew Printing from Venice to Amsterdam

The significant role of the presses of Venice, Istanbul, Amsterdam, and elsewhere in the formation of a connected early modern Jewish culture is compelling. Printing shattered the isolating hold of potent localized traditions and attitudes as one community became increasingly aware of a conversation taking place long distances away. Writing from far-away Prague, Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel's [the Maharal] bitterly denounced the Italian Azariah de' Rossi's scholarly work, the *Me'or Einayim*, published in Mantua in 1575, only a short time after the book was published. Similarly this time, moving in reverse direction from south to north, the Venetian rabbi Leon Modena's compared the structure of his sermons with those published by Ashkenazic and Levantine [=Ottoman] rabbis he had obviously read. Print made Jews more aware of other Jews than ever before.⁶

Scholars have also delineated another result of the printing revolution, one paralleling closely the reading patterns of Christian readers in the age of Reformation. The emergence of cheap books initiated another form of a cultural transformation. The itinerant preachers, teachers, scribes, cantors and other secondary elites discovered a

and the Competition with the Jewish Printing in Constantinople (Hebrew)," *Mehkaram al Toledot Yahadut Holland*, Joseph Michman, ed., vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 41-68.

⁶ See Lester Segal, *Historical Consciousness and Religious Tradition in Azariah de' Rossi's Me'or Einayim* (Philadelphia, 1989), pp. 153-61; and Robert Bonfil, "Some Reflections on the Place of Azariah de Rossi's *Meor Eynayim* in the Cultural Milieu of Italian Renaissance Jewry," in Bernard Cooperman, ed., *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), pp. 23-48. Modena's reference is in Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching 1200-1800: An Anthology* (New Haven and London, 1989), p. 412.

forum for disseminating their own views. Print helped to shatter the exclusivity and hegemony of rabbis, who were simultaneously recognizing their own diminished status vis à vis wealthy lay communal leaders. They proved incapable of controlling the outpouring of small books and pamphlets quickly and inexpensively produced for a lay public, opening up new readers and audiences, men, women, and children, and exposing them to aspects of a tradition that had once been the exclusive prerogative of highly educated legal scholars.⁷

One subject whose secrets had been guarded zealously by the rabbis before print was the kabbalah. According to the well known thesis of Gershom Scholem, beginning with the expulsion of Spain in 1492, the kabbalah became a more potent and significant force, responding directly to the existential challenges of Jewish life not only among the Sephardic refugees but throughout the Jewish Diaspora. His explanation has been refined and challenged by later scholars but the general picture of the elevation and dissemination of kabbalah in early modern Europe remains legitimate and surely the printing press was a major catalyst in generating this development.⁸ Christians were

⁷ See Reiner, “A Biography of an Agent of Culture,”; the works of Ze’ev Gries mentioned in note 4; Chone Shmeruk, *Sifrut Yidish be-Polin* (Tel Aviv, 1978); Elbaum, *Petihut ve-Histagrut*; Moshe Rosman, “Culture in the Book (Hebrew),” *Zion* 56 (1991): 321-44; idem, “On Being a Jewish Woman in Poland-Lithuania at the Beginning of the Modern Era,” in *Kiyum ve-Shever*, pp. 415-34; Israel Halperin, “The Council of Four Lands and the Hebrew Book,” in *Yehudim ve-Yahadut be-Mizrah Eropah*, pp. 78-107.

⁸ See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1960), pp.244-324; idem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah 1626-1676* (Princeton, 1973); Moshe

actually the first to publish kabbalistic books in the sixteenth century. Contemporary Jews had mixed reactions to the dissemination of what was for them an esoteric lore. By mid-century, a major conflict emerged within the Jewish community over the printing of the classic *Zohar* and other compositions related to it. The final outcome was the printing of two separate editions in Mantua in 1558 and in Cremona in 1560, but not without certain fear and foreboding about the consequences of divulging divine secrets in print. These inhibitions very much paralleled those expressed when the Talmud and *Shulhan Arukh* were published. In both instances, rabbinic control and supervision of knowledge were at stake. But in the case of the kabbalah, the situation was even more complicated and painful to the guardians of Jewish culture because the Christians had jumped the gun, so to speak, by publishing at their will what the rabbis would never have allowed their own co-religionists to do so openly. And these same Christian Hebraists were taking liberties with previously protected Jewish secrets in a manner the rabbis deemed irresponsible and theologically dangerous. Jews were ultimately obliged to publish kabbalistic works in order to present what they considered to be authentic versions of their own cultural legacy.⁹

Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven and London, 1988); Yehudah Liebes, *Sod ha-Emunah ha-Shabta'it* (Jerusalem, 1995).

⁹ See Isaiah Tishby, "The Controversy about the *Zohar* in the Sixteenth Century in Italy (Hebrew)," in his *Hekrei Kabbalah u-Sheluhoteha* (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 79-130; Moshe Idel, "From Hiding to Printing an Esoteric Law: Between R. Isaac Sagi Nahor and Rabbi Isaac Luria," typescript.

In the sixteenth century, the number of kabbalistic books was relatively modest compared to the publication of other Hebrew books. This radically changed by the late seventeenth century with the wide distribution of both learned and popular kabbalistic texts emanating originally from Safed, crossing the boundaries between north, south, east and west in the wake of the messianic movement of Shabbetai Zevi. Indeed, the universal appeal of messianic figure and his prophets well into the eighteenth century, as Ze'ev Gries persuasively argues, is as much a product of the networks of communication engendered by the publications of his followers and detractors as anything else. Lurianic kabbalah, through the Sabbatean printing press, captured the attention of elites and non-elites alike in both the Sephardic and Ashkenazic worlds and ultimately left its impact on Jewish worship and ritual life as well.¹⁰

Accompanying the publication of these Hebrew books and others were those in Yiddish and Ladino. In fact, Yiddish and Ladino were languages that were virtually created by the unique conditions of Jewish life in early modern Europe. Through the flourishing book industry in Italy, in Eastern Europe, in the Netherlands, and in the Ottoman Empire, works in these Jewish languages were widely disseminated, including translations of works in other European languages, challenging the privileged place of Hebrew books and offering modes of popular communication and literary outlets that would transform Jewish culture for centuries to come.

¹⁰ See Gries, *Sifrut Ha-Hanhagot*; Jacob Barnai, *Shabta'ut: Hebetim Hevrati'im* (Jerusalem, 2000), pp. 69-90; idem, "The Spread of the Sabbatean Movement in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in Sophia Menache, ed., *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: The Pre-Modern World* (Leiden, 1996), pp. 313-37.

In the case of Yiddish, a wide reading public emerged across the continent truly creating a common European-wide Jewish culture transcending localized communities and linking especially the West and the East. While Yiddish books had initially been published in Italy and in Poland, by the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Amsterdam became the center of Yiddish printing in the Jewish world. Between 1650-1800, over five hundred different works were printed. The presses catered both to internal use, appealing to the growing numbers of Ashkenazim who had settled in the city, as well as to Jewish authors and publishers who came from long distances especially to print their volumes. Attracted by the relative lack of censorship and by the liberal printing business that published books in many languages, it was not unusual for Eastern European book dealers to travel to Amsterdam in order to publish their manuscripts and return home to sell their new library of printed books. This image of a Jew from Krakow traveling across the continent, with a variety of other Jewish merchants, to publish a Yiddish book in what had been the center of the Western Sephardic Diaspora is as good a snapshot as any of the actual existence of a trans-regional Jewish culture by the seventeenth century.¹¹

¹¹ On Yiddish books, see Shlomo Berger, “Yiddish and Jewish Modernization in the 18th Century,” (Hebrew) *Braun Lectures in the History of the Jews in Prussia* 12 (Ramat Gan, Israel, 2006); idem, “An Invitation to Buy and Read: Paratexts of Yiddish Books in Amsterdam 1650-1800”, *Book History* 7 (2004): 31-61; Chava Turiansky and Erika Timm, *Yiddish in Italia* (Brescia, 2003); Miriam Gutchow, *Inventory of Printed Books in the Netherlands* (Leiden, 2006); and Jerold Frakes, *Early Yiddish Texts 1100-1750* (Oxford, 2004). See also the interesting essay of Avriel Bar-Levav, “Between Library

Ladino works in the Ottoman Empire began to appear considerably later than Yiddish ones but they too were widely distributed because of print and helped to shape an entirely new Jewish reading public. Centuries after the first Hebrew books had been published in Istanbul in the late fifteenth century by the first generations of Sephardic immigrants to the city, Ladino printing came into its own with the publication in 1730 of Jacob Huli's *Me'am Lo'ez*, an encyclopedic biblical commentary and distillation of Sephardic Jewish culture. It was followed over the next century and a half by a flow of popular Jewish books attempting to educate and popularize Jewish knowledge. The heyday of the Ladino book also coincided with the publication of the first Turkish book of 1729. Lacking any prior manuscript tradition upon which it could develop, Ladino works represented a bold acknowledgement by rabbinic leaders of the need to communicate in the vernacular and to Jews lacking sophisticated Jewish knowledge. What is most interesting about this blossoming of Ladino literature in print is that it emerged at a time conventionally acknowledged as a period of decline for both Ottoman culture and Jewish culture. Long after the Sabbatean crisis of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ottoman Jewish life could hardly be described in a state of stagnation and degeneration.¹²

Awareness and the Jewish Republic of Letters (Hebrew)," in Yosef Kaplan and Moshe Sluhovsky, eds., *Sifriyot ve-Osfei Sefarim* (Jerusalem, 2006), pp. 201-24.

¹² On Ladino, see Yitshak Molcho, "La Littérature judéo-espagnole en Turquie au premier siècle apres les expulsions d'Espagne et du Portugal," *Tesor de los Judios Sefardies* 1 (1959): 15-53; Abraham Yaari, *Catalogue of Books in Judeo-Spanish* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1934); Aron Rodrigue, *Guide to the Ladino Materials in the Harvard College*

Alongside the publication of Jewish books in Ladino and Yiddish, was the steady accretion of books written in Western languages by Jews, demonstrating, among other things, the need for Jewish authors to speak to Christian readers beyond the immediate community of their own co-religionists or to conversos whose primary language was Spanish or Portuguese. This phenomenon was generally restricted to the West, particularly to Jewish intellectuals living in relatively open environments such as Italy and the Netherlands. Already in the sixteenth century, several Jewish authors such as Elijah Delmedigo, Jacob Mantino, Samuel Usque, and the most famous example of all, Judah Abravanel, alias Leone Ebreo, chose the unusual path of publishing books in Latin or Italian.¹³ In contrast, while Jewish preachers had often addressed their congregations in

Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Elena Romero, “Literary Creation of the Sephardi Diaspora,” in *Moreshet Sepharad: The Sephardic Legacy*, vol. 2, pp. 438-460; and Matthias B. Lehmann, *Ladino Rabbinic Literature and Ottoman Sephardic Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2005).

¹³ On Leone Ebreo’s work, see, for example, Arthur Lesley, “The Place of the *Dialoghi d’amore* in Contemporaneous Jewish Thought,” in David Ruderman, ed., *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, (New York, 1992), pp. 170-88; Barbara Garvin, “The Language of Leone Ebreo’s *Dialoghi d’amore*,” *Italia* 13-15(2001): 181-210; On Usque’s work, see Martin Cohen, trans., *Samuel Usque’s Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel* (Philadelphia, 1965). On Delmedigo’s work, see M. David Geffen, “Insights into the Life and Thought of Elijah Delmedigo Based on his Published and Unpublished Works,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 41-42 (1973-74): 69-86. On Mantino, see David Kaufmann, “Jacob

the vernacular, they often remained reticent to publish the written versions of their oral remarks in any language other than Hebrew.¹⁴

By the seventeenth century, this development of publishing in the vernacular took on added momentum with the emergence of apologetic works written either to convince conversos to return to the Jewish fold or to counter a negative image of Jewish religion and culture emerging in print among certain Christian authors. Such Jewish intellectuals in Italy as Leon Modena and Simone Luzzatto, and their counterparts in Amsterdam such as Menasseh ben Israel, Isaac Orobio de Castro, and many others, felt compelled to raise their voices in a language accessible to assimilated Jews and Christians alike and within a cultural matrix understandable to both.¹⁵

Mantino: une page de l'histoire de la Renaissance," *Revue des études juives* 27 (1893): 30-60, 207-38.

¹⁴ See Robert Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 298-316; David Ruderman, ed., *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto* (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1992); Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching 1200-1800: An Anthology* (New Haven, 1989), pp. 1-63.

¹⁵ See Mark Cohen, "Leone da Modena's Riti: A Seventeenth Century Plea for Social Toleration of Jews," in Ruderman, *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (New York, 1992), pp. 429-73; Benjamin Ravid, *Economics and Toleration in Seventeenth Century Venice*, (New York, 1978); Yosef Kaplan, Henry Méchoulan, Richard Popkin, eds., *Menasseh ben Israel and his World* (Leiden, 1989); Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro* (Oxford, 1989).

A wonderful example of how apologetic writing in the vernacular could redefine the very essence of Judaism when presenting it to others is the sixteenth chapter of the Venetian rabbi Simone Luzzatto's *Discorso circa il stato de gl'hebrei et in particular dimoranti nell'inclita città di Venetia*, published in 1638. In this chapter, Luzzatto offers an intellectual profile of the Jewish community as one consisting of three distinct groups: Talmudists, philosophers, and kabbalists. The division appears strange from an internal Jewish perspective where Talmudists were also philosophers and kabbalists and the distinction between those who upheld the law and interpreted it and those who were pre-occupied with "meta-halakhic [legal]" concerns was artificial. Luzzatto probably borrowed these categories from a similar division written by the Catalan Jewish thinker Profiat Duran at the beginning of the fifteenth century. But his division of Jewish intellectuals is also reminiscent of those of Johann Reuchlin, the famous German Christian Hebraist of the sixteenth century. Reuchlin clearly appreciated good Jewish kabbalists but separated them from those Talmudists he deemed disreputable because they blindly followed the letter of the law. Luzzatto hardly disparaged the Talmudists; on the contrary, he provided an accurate and complementary portrait of the legal development of Judaism. Nevertheless, by isolating the Talmud and its transmitters from the rest of Jewish culture, he gave greater attention to those areas of Jewish culture more accessible to Christian readers and more easily translatable into their terms of references. Thus he demonstrated the glorious traditions of Jewish philosophical reflection and its interrelatedness with common developments in Islam and Christianity. And kabbalah in its close association with Neo-Platonism and Pythagoreanism, again reminiscent of

Reuchlin's articulation, was to be understood and appreciated as part of the exotic and legitimate occult traditions of Western civilization.¹⁶

The genre of apologetic works presenting Judaism in the simplest and most attractive manner addressed simultaneously wavering Jews and indifferent or antagonistic Christians. The publication of vernacular works was surely an acknowledgment on the part of Jewish religious leaders of the need to reach out to those who no longer bothered or were incapable of reading Hebrew books. And we should add parenthetically that books eventually opened the possibility of presenting Judaism not only in words but also in icons. The emergence of illustrated *minhag* [custom] collections as early as the sixteenth century in Italy, and culminating in the publication of Leon Modena's manual of Jewish life, accompanied by the famous illustrations of Jewish events and observances of Bernard Picart are two notable examples of how books could be used to visualize Jews and Judaism in novel ways.¹⁷

¹⁶ Simone Luzzatto, *Discorso circa il stato de gl'hebrei et in particular dimoranti nell'inclita città de Venetia* (Venice, 1638), pp. 73-85. For a discussion of this work, see Ravid, *Economics and Toleration*. See also Profiat Duran, *Ma'aseh Efod* (Vienna, 1865), introduction. On Reuchlin, see note 20 below. For a different interpretation of this chapter, see Robert Bonfil, "A Cultural Profile," in Robert Davis and Benjamin Ravid, eds., *The Jews of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore and London, 2001), pp. 170-73.

¹⁷ On the use of English manuals on Judaism written simultaneously for internal and external usage, see David Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry's Construction of Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 240-68. On the illustration of *Minhag* books, see Diane Wolfthal, "Imagining the Self: Representations

My account up to now has focused primarily on the impact of the Jewish book on Jewish culture and society. But the printing of Jewish books was not only an activity engaging Jews; it also affected profoundly the Christian world as well through Christian publishers of Jewish books, through Christian readers, and through the activity of Church censors allowing Jewish books to be sold and disseminated as long as they did not violate the doctrinal purity of the Christian faith. The study of Judaism by Christians has a long history before the early modern period and individual Christian scholars pursued Hebraic subjects throughout the Middle Ages, especially related to biblical exegesis and medieval theology.¹⁸ By the end of the fifteenth century, two significant changes in the cultural

of Jewish Ritual in Yiddish Books of Customs,” in *Imagining the Self, Imagining the Other: Visual Representation and Jewish-Christian Dynamics in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period*, ed. Eva Frojmovic (Leiden, 2002), pp. 189-211. On Picart and representations of Jews in the early modern period, see Richard Cohen, *Jewish Icons: Art and Society in Modern Europe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1998), pp. 10-67; Samantha Baskind, “Bernard Picart’s Etchings of Amsterdam’s Jews,” *Jewish Social Studies* 13 (2007): 40-64, and Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Winjand Mijnhart, *The Book that Changed Europe: Picart’s and Bernard’s Religious Ceremonies of the World* (Cambridge, Ma., 2010).

¹⁸ Scholarship on medieval Christian attitudes towards Judaism and Jewish texts is vast. A sampling might include Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1983; Harry Halperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars* (Pittsburgh, 1963); Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, 1982); idem, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jews in Medieval*

landscape of European Christendom affected profoundly Christian involvement with the Jewish book. The first was the influence of the Renaissance and Reformation on Christian Hebraic scholarship; the second was the critical impact of the printing press on the production and dissemination of Hebraica for Christian readers.

The most prominent Renaissance figure to approach Hebrew books in a way radically different from that of earlier Christian scholars was Pico della Mirandola (1463-94). With the assistance of Jewish tutors as well as others who converted to Christianity, Pico studied Hebrew texts while assembling a most impressive collection of Jewish exegetical, homiletical, and philosophical writing translated from the Hebrew into Latin. But his first passion was the kabbalah to which he devoted his primary energies as a student of Jewish literature. For Pico and some of his associates, the kabbalah was the key to lay bare the secrets of Judaism, to reconcile them with the mysteries of other religions and cultures, and thus to universalize them. Through the kabbalah, the essential differences between Judaism and Christianity could be eradicated.¹⁹

Christianity (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1999); and more recently, Deeana Copeland Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish Text in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2007).

¹⁹ For a more detailed discussion of Pico and the Christian kabbalah, see David Ruderman, "The Italian Renaissance and Jewish Thought," in Albert Rabil Jr., ed., *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms and Legacy*, three vols., (Philadelphia, 1987), vol. 1, pp. 382-433. See also Umberto Cassuto, *Ha-Yehudim Be-Firenzi bi-Tekufat ha-Renasans* (Jerusalem, 1967); Fabrizio Lelli, "Yohanan Alemanno, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e la cultura ebraica italiana del xv secolo," in Gian Carlo Garfagnini, ed.,

Pico subsequently became the pioneer figure in the dramatic reevaluation of Jewish literature and the gradual penetration of contemporary Jewish thought into European culture. His Christianization of kabbalistic techniques and his amalgamation of Renaissance magic and Jewish mysticism, while officially condemned by the Church, were enthusiastically received by a notable number of Christian thinkers in Italy, France, Germany, and England well into the eighteenth century. The Christian kabbalah of Pico left its mark on Renaissance culture through its integration with Neo-Platonism. It also influenced both the Catholic and Protestant Reformation through its impact on such thinkers as Egidio of Viterbo, Francesco Giorgio, Cornelius Agrippa, and especially the aforementioned Johann Reuchlin.

After Pico, Johann Reuchlin(1455-1522) was the most prominent Christian scholar to master Hebrew sources and to utilize them in revitalizing Christian theology. In *De Arte Cabalistica*, first published in 1517, Reuchlin followed Pico in considering kabbalah a higher and theologically licit form of magic, a source of divine revelation to be correlated with the highest truths of Neo-Platonic and Pythagorean philosophy. Reuchlin's commitment to Jewish texts aroused the antagonism of some of his

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, convegno internazionale....(Mirandola, 1994); Bernard McGinn, "Cabalists and Christians: Reflections on Cabala in Medieval and Renaissance Thought," in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, eds. Richard Popkin and Gordon Weiner, (Dordrecht, 1994), pp. 11-34; Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Renaissance* (London, 1979); and Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge, Ma., 1989).

contemporaries in Reformation Germany, especially the Dominicans of Cologne who initiated a bitter campaign to ban the reading of Hebrew books. Reuchlin's well-reasoned responses to the extreme accusations of a Jewish apostate named Johann Pfefferkorn drew him unwittingly into an acrimonious debate over the value of Jewish learning for Christians and the place of Judaism in Christian society.²⁰

But Reuchlin was hardly alone in his appropriation of Hebrew learning in the cause of Christian reform. Other Protestant thinkers in the first half of the sixteenth century focused on the more conventional sources of Jewish knowledge beyond the kabbalah. In their return to the Hebrew Bible, they were especially attracted to the literal sense of the text. They mastered biblical Hebrew and its grammatical foundations and they also probed rabbinic exegesis in attempting to grasp the original meaning of Scripture. Scholars such as Paul Fagius and Sebastian Münster published Hebrew grammars, examined Jewish rites and customs, and explored the Pharisaic context of the utterances of Jesus. Others, like Michael Servetus, even used Hebrew sources to offer a radical critique of Trinitarian Christianity.²¹

²⁰ See, for example, Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony: Sixteenth Century Christian Hebraica in the Age of Renaissance Nostalgia*, (Athens, Ohio, 1983); Heiko Obermann, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in the age of the Renaissance and Reformation*, 1984; Erica Rummel, *The Case Against Johann Reuchlin: Social and Religious Controversy in Sixteenth- Century Germany*, (Toronto, 2002).

²¹ See especially Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*; and more recently, Dean Phillip Bell and Stephen Burnett, eds., *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in Sixteenth- Century Germany* (Leiden, 2006).

By the seventeenth century, Hebraic studies reached new heights among a gifted circle of Christian scholars who included Johannes Buxtorf I and his son Johannes Buxtorf II, Edward Pococke, Johann Christof Wagenseil, John Lightfoot, John Selden and Christian Knorr von Rosenroth. The Buxtorfs produced translations of some of the classic philosophical texts of Judaism; Wagenseil published Jewish anti-Christian works in Hebrew and Latin; while Christian Knorr von Rosenroth compiled a vast compendium of kabbalistic texts which he called the *Kabbala Denudata*, making available to Christian readers the most extensive anthology of its kind. By the seventeenth century, scholars such as Lightfoot and Selden mastered the large rabbinic corpus of Jewish law and studied it for the insights it provided in understanding early Christianity and ancient legal systems. Their work was continued by Wilhelm Surenhusius who published the entire *Mishnah* with commentaries in an elegant Hebrew and Latin edition by the end of the century. Well into the eighteenth century, erudite Christian scholars studied Hebraica along with Arabic and other Semitic languages, paving the way for the study of these fields within secular universities as well as Christian seminaries.²²

²² Frank Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism Through Christian Eyes* (Cambridge, Ma., 1992); Allison Coudert and Jeffrey Shoulson, eds., *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists, Jews, and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia, 2004); Allison Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614-1698)* (Leiden, 1999); Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggeman, ed. *Christliche Kabbala* (Thorbecke, 2003); Steven Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564-1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century*, (Leiden, 1996) and see the review of the latter by

Besides their learned tomes of erudition on Jewish literature, Christian authors, including the older Buxtorf himself, composed the first ethnographic accounts of Jewish customs for Christian readers. This interest in contemporary Jewish practice was fundamentally ambivalent. It still reflected the older medieval polemical stance towards Judaism, but on the other hand, its ethnographic depictions preserved a relative posture of objectivity and neutrality towards their subject. Jewish practices were normalized and demystified by these descriptions and presented as simply those of another ethnic group alongside Muslims, Hindus, and the other peoples of the world that European society was encountering by the seventeenth century.²³

Amnon Raz- Krakotzkin in *Tarbiz* 68 (1999-2000): 449-455. See most recently, Jason Rosenblatt, *Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi: John Selden* (Oxford, 2006) David Ruderman, *Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth- Century England* (Philadelphia, 2007); and Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge, Ms., 2010).

²³ See Yaakov Deutsch, "A View of the Jewish Religion: Conceptions of Jewish Practice and Ritual in Early Modern Europe," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*, 3, Band, 2001, 273-95; Steven Burnett, "Distorted Mirrors: Antonius Margaritha, Johann Buxtorf and Christian Ethnographies of the Jews," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25 (1994): 275-87; Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, "Christian Ethnographies of Jews in Early Modern Germany," in *The Expulsion of the Jews: 1492 and After*, eds. Raymond Waddington and Arthur Williamson (New York, 1994), pp. 223-35.

The centers of Christian printing of Hebrew books were generally concentrated, north of the Alps in the German principalities, France, and the Netherlands. While the Italian and Ottoman Hebrew presses catered primarily although not exclusively to Jews, these presses in the North focused on the needs of Christians publishing, for the most part, works dealing with biblical scholarship. In the case of Amsterdam, however, with its significant resources for Jewish publications, often exported to the East, the distinction between Christian and Jewish presses becomes more confusing. The press of Menasseh ben Israel, Amsterdam's most well known Jewish public intellectual, was surely a case in point, producing books read by both Christians and Jews. In other centers of Christian printing in the North there existed a close correlation between the printing of Hebrew books and the presence of Hebrew professors at Protestant universities.²⁴

Christian Hebraism thus constituted an intellectual explosion fed by print and university learning; a Christian spiritual quest rooted in the essential notions of rebirth and reform propelling the intellectual and religious developments of the sixteenth century and beyond; and also an appropriation and aggrandizement of the Judaic element of Western civilization to be utilized and appreciated for Christians alone. As has been often remarked, the new Christian scholars were often infatuated with Jewish books with little regard for actual living and breathing Jews.

This last point was sorely appreciated by contemporary Jews who noted with mixed feelings the emergence of the new Christian Hebraism. On the one hand, they

²⁴ In addition to the references in the previous notes, see especially Stephen G. Burnett, "Christian Hebrew Printing in the Sixteenth Century: Printers, Humanism, and the Impact of the Reformation," *Helmantica* 51 (2000): 13-42.

initially were flattered by the attention Christian scholars were giving their own religious heritage, even seeking out Jewish teachers with whom to study.²⁵ For some Jews living in Renaissance Italy, this attention appeared to reflect well on their own self-image; Jewish culture, especially its esoteric dimension, was in vogue. Jews and their post-biblical libraries “were in” among the most elite of Christian intellectual circles. But as time went on, some Jews began to realize the unsettling fact that Christians, to an unprecedented degree, could master Judaic traditions without recourse to Jews. The Jewish intellectual could ignore his Christian rival, could choose to collaborate with him, or could even embrace his assumptions, at least partially, in studying Judaism.

In the final analysis, Christian Hebraism thus became a new factor in the intellectual and psychological development of Jewish scholars. From Pico and Reuchlin in the fifteenth century to Benjamin Kennicott, Robert Lowth and Johann David Michaelis at the end of the eighteenth century,²⁶ Jews faced a formidable challenge in understanding their own cultural legacy. They were no longer the sole arbiters of the sacred texts of the Jewish tradition, and certainly not of the Hebrew Bible. The more Christians mastered the Hebrew and Aramaic languages and the more they could consult

²⁵ See, for example, the testimony of Elijah Halfan, cited in Moshe Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance,” in Ruderman, *Essential Papers*, pp. 107-08.

²⁶ On Kennicott and Lowth, see D. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, chapters 1-2. On Michaelis and Christian critiques of the Massoretic text, see Edward Breuer, *The Limits of Enlightenment: Jews, Germans, and the Eighteenth-Century Study of Scripture* (Cambridge, Ma., 1995).

medieval Jewish authors, the more they could also claim to understand the Jewish tradition, especially the Hebrew Bible, better than the Jews themselves. To some extent, the mastery of Jewish books by Christian scholars was an expression of power relations, of aspirations to dominate Jews by acquiring intimate knowledge of their intellectual legacy. And in the new cultural space populated by Christian Hebraists and an increasing number of converts to Christianity, Jewish scholars were surely losing their hegemony over the interpretation of their own texts and their own traditions.²⁷

One final dimension of the printing of Jewish books by both Christians and Jews revolves around the censorship of Hebrew books by the Catholic Church, beginning in the sixteenth century. According to Amnon Raz Krakotzkin, Hebrew censorship should be treated as part of the Catholic campaign to censor all books as well as in the context of an emerging Christian readership of Hebrew books. Krakotzkin emphasizes the fact that censors did not necessarily prevent readings; rather they strove to preserve the text in a way non-injurious to a potential Christian reading public. Furthermore, Hebrew books emerged in a new setting unique to early modern Europe: the print shop usually owned by Christians where converts and Jews worked side by side. In this unique setting, editors, typesetters, and censors worked together, often making it difficult to determine where editing had concluded and censorship had begun. The ultimate effect of this shared endeavor was to reach a kind of consensus whereby Judaism could be fully expressed without deprecating the Christian other and Jewish self-definition could be articulated in

²⁷ On Jewish converts, see Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany 1500-1750* (New Haven, 2001); and Ruderman, *Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth- Century England*.

a neutral and non-polemical manner. The print shop offered an intimate space of non-belligerent encounter between Jews and Christians. The censor extended to the Jewish community an official legitimization of its literature while participating in a new articulation of Jewish identity. Thus the social context of printing Hebrew books offers yet another novel direction in which Jewish-Christian relations were emerging in early modern Europe.

In light of the above, it would be fair to conclude that the more tangible linkages existing across Jewish cultural boundaries and localized sub-cultures in early modern Europe were due in large part to the printing press. Print radically changed the manner in which the Jewish tradition was transmitted both to Jews as well as to Christians, expanded the intellectual horizons of many Jews, and made them more aware of their cultural connections with their own co-religionists scattered in far-off regions. It also elevated the study of the classical texts of Judaism and contemporary customs and rituals within the space of Christian high culture through the presses of both Jewish and Christian printers. Finally, it significantly enhanced the knowledge and appreciation of the “other” for at least some Christians and Jews while opening new opportunities as well as new challenges for Jewish-Christian relations for centuries to come.