

*Edited by Giuseppe Veltri and
Maria Diemling*

The Jewish Body

Corporeality, Society, and Identity in the
Renaissance and Early Modern Period

STUDIES IN JEWISH HISTORY AND CULTURE

The Jewish Body

Studies in Jewish History and Culture

Edited by

Hava Tirosh-Samuelson
(Arizona State University)

and

Giuseppe Veltri
(Leopold-Zunz-Centre for Jewish Studies,
University of Halle-Wittenberg)

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CONTRIBUTORS

HOWARD TZVI ADELMAN is the director of the Jewish Studies Program and an associate professor of History at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. His research and writing are in the area of early modern Italian Jewish history, including the life and thought of Rabbi Leon Modena of Venice and the history of women. The chapter included in this volume is based on his forthcoming book, *Jewish Women in Early Modern Italy: The Struggle for Ambiguity*.

RUTH BERGER lectures in Jewish Studies at the University of Frankfurt/Main. She specializes in the history of the Jewish family and has published studies on sexuality and family life in medieval and early modern ethical literature and on the development of family law in post-talmudic Halakhah, including *Sexualität, Ehe und Familienleben in der jüdischen Moralliteratur (900–1900)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003).

SAVERIO CAMPANINI earned his PhD in Jewish Studies from the Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia and is currently a researcher at the University of Bologna and at the Freie Universität, Berlin. His main topics of interest are the Kabbalah, Christian Kabbalah, and Gershom Scholem's life and works. He is the author of *The Book of Bahir: Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version* (Turin: Nino Aragno Editore, 2005).

MARIA DIEMLING is senior lecturer in Religious Studies at Canterbury Christ Church University, Kent. Her research interests include Jewish-Christian relations and Jewish social history in early modern German lands. She has published on Jewish converts, Christian ethnographic writing of Judaism and is currently working on perceptions of the "Jewish body" in the Early Modern Period.

ELEAZAR GUTWIRTH is professor of Jewish history at Tel Aviv University. He has published numerous essays on the history of Jewish culture and society in medieval and early modern Spain.

DON HARRÁN, Artur Rubinstein Professor Emeritus of Musicology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is the author of numerous books and has published widely in musicological and interdisciplinary journals on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian and Italo-Jewish musical topics. In 1999 he received the Michael Landau Prize for Scholarly Achievement in the Arts and in 2006 was named Knight (Cavaliere) of the Order of the Star of Italian Solidarity for outstanding service to Italian culture.

MOSHE IDEL is Max Cooper Professor of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and senior researcher at the Shalom Hartman Institute. He is the author of numerous studies on Jewish mysticism, including *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) and *Absorbing Perfections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

SERGIUS KODERA is head of the Department of Cultural Studies of the New Design University, St. Pölten, Austria. He also teaches at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Vienna. He specializes in Renaissance philosophy and has published on Leone Ebreo, Marsilio Ficino, Giordano Bruno and Giambattista della Porta.

ARTHUR M. LESLEY is associate professor of Hebrew Language and Literature at Baltimore Hebrew University. His research is concentrated on Hebrew writing in Italy in the fifteenth century, and he teaches modern Hebrew and Jewish literatures.

GIANFRANCO MILETTO teaches at the Heinrich-Heine-University of Düsseldorf. His research interests include biblical philology and Jewish culture in Italy in the Early Modern Period. He is the author of *L'Antico Testamento Ebraico nella tradizione babilonese: i frammenti della Genizah* (Turin: Silvio Zamorani Editore, 1992) and *Glauben und Wissen im Zeitalter der Reformation: Der salomonische Tempel bei Abraham ben David Portaleone (1542–1612)* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter Verlag, 2004) (= Reihe Studia Judaica 27).

GIUSEPPE VELTRI is professor of Jewish Studies at the Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg and director of the Leopold-Zunz-Zentrum zur Erforschung des europäischen Judentums. Among his publications are *Eine Tora für den König Talmi* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1994);

Magie und Halakha (Tübingen: Mohr, 1997); *Gegenwart der Tradition* (Leiden: Brill 2002); *Libraries, Translations, and 'Canonic' texts: the Septuagint, Aquila, and Ben Sira in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); and *Renaissance Philosophy in Jewish Garb: Jewish Thought and Philosophy on the Eve of Modernity* (Brill: Leiden, 2008).

RONI WEINSTEIN is a research fellow at the Department of Modern and Contemporary History, Pisa University. He specializes in social and cultural history of the Jews of Italy during the Early Modern Period. He is the author of *Marriage Rituals Italian Style: A Historical Anthropological Perspective on Early Modern Italian Jews* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). His forthcoming book is dedicated to the history of sexuality in the Jewish-Italian ambient.

ELLIOT R. WOLFSON is the Abraham Lieberman Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University. His main area of scholarly research is the history of Jewish mysticism, but he has brought to bear on that field training in philosophy, literary criticism, feminist theory, postmodern hermeneutics, and the phenomenology of religion. His most recent publications include *Language, Eros, and Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and the Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and *Luminal Darkness: Imaginal Gleanings From Zoharic Literature* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007).

JEFFREY R. WOOLF is senior lecturer in the Department of Talmud at Bar Ilan University, where he specializes in the history of Halakhah and the history of medieval Ashkenazic Jewry. Author of over thirty articles, he is currently completing a book entitled *A World Unseen*, to be published by Brill, which analyzes the central categories of medieval Ashkenazic culture.

NIMROD ZINGER is a Kreitman Doctoral Fellow in the Department of Jewish History in Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He is currently working on his doctoral dissertation that deals with medicine and magic in the daily life of German Jews in the Early Modern Period.

INTRODUCTION

The exploration of the body as a social and historical construct has in recent years become a popular and perhaps even fashionable topic. “Why all the fuss about the body,” medievalist Caroline Walker Bynum asked and pointed out that “[i]n a sense of course, ‘the body’ is the wrong topic. It is no topic or, perhaps, almost all topics.”¹ The paradoxical view of being a “wrong” subject because it encompasses almost the totality of human concerns, is historically reflected in the intellectual world which examined it in manifold contexts and in many different understandings, long before it became an academic trend. Even today, with an increasing number of book titles that include the word “body” available, there are many different ways how “the body” is being understood. What do we mean when we speak about “the body”?

Recent research has been particularly productive when examining the “real” body in all its facets, such as birth and death, illnesses, medicine, sexuality and reproduction, gestures, food, and the cultural and historical processes that shaped the perceptions of the body.² On the other hand, and in inverse proportion to the increase of interest in the body, there is little concern with its “old-fashioned” counterpart, the “soul.” The soul has become—at least since Sigmund Freud—the field of research of psychologists and psychoanalysts while the philosophy of, or the system of ideas, method, and conception evoked by the soul (metaphysics, center of knowledge and acknowledgment, conjunction with the divine intellect, etc.), a central topic in the ancient, medieval and early modern periods, lost its attraction and turned into the philosophical and ethical discussion on pure epistemology. Only in the theological discourse do the soul and the mind retain their validity as doctrines of ethical commitment to the beyond.

¹ Caroline Bynum, “Why All the Fuss about the Body?,” *Critical Enquiry* 22, 1 (1995): 1–33.

² The literature on these topics is vast. Still a useful methodological starting point is Roy Porter, “History of the Body,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 206–232. See also the comprehensive survey by Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine and Georges Vigarello, ed. *Histoire du corps* (Paris: Seuil, 2005–2006).

Yet, religion, or theology, is an important, if not the decisive, factor in understanding the forces that shape the body in pre-modern society, even if this was not obviously understood as a private matter but as an all-embracing cultural and social system. It has been argued that the human body is “always treated as an image of society” and that “there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social [and historical, one should add, M.D./G.V.] dimension” (Mary Douglas).³ This understanding of the body informs the present volume of collected essays which aims to develop new perspectives in envisioning Jewish corporeality in the Renaissance and the Early Modern Period.

Jews have often fashioned themselves as the “People of the Book.” However, as Howard Eilberg-Schwartz has noted in the introduction to the important collection of essays on “People of the Body” he edited in 1995, this may be an “excessively spiritual image.”⁴ Jews have bodies and the exploration of the ways in which Jews understand and handle their bodies is an important aspect of what it means to be Jewish.⁵ In contrast, Moshe Idel, in his contribution to this volume, warns against what he regards as a “recent overemphasis on the centrality of the body” in regard to Judaism. The more traditional understanding of Jews as the “People of the Book” seems to be replaced by the idea of the “People of the Body,” stressing the physical aspects of the performance of the commandments. Idel urges scholars interested in the perception of the body in Judaism to study the “role played by the religious actions dependent on it, and the manner, in which the importance of those performances impact on the perception of this body.” The body not only performs certain rituals but is changed by this performance, as the most obvious physical signifier of Judaism, circumcision, demonstrates. To have a circumcised body means, therefore, to be a Jew, exactly like being a Jew implies a ritual corporality, and indirectly, a variety of being “carnal Judaisms,” to modify the well-known expression of Boyarin’s coinage.⁶

³ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, The Cresset Press, 1970), 70.

⁴ If not a “borrowed identity”; on this concept see Giuseppe Veltri, “Geborgte Identität im Zerrspiegel: ‘Jüdische Riten’ aus philosophisch-politischer Perspektive,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 33 (2006): 111 f.

⁵ Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, ed. *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 7.

⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

Louis Jacobs has pointed out that “no article on the body is found in the standard Jewish encyclopedias,” since there is no single, unique view in Judaism.⁷ This volume is not offering a summary of Jewish attitudes on the body in the Early Modern Period either, but rather snapshots of a living world of references, which we call generalizing and therefore historically distorting, Judaism. For the Jewish world of the Early Modern Period was “characterized by a cacophony of discourses” (Bynum), just as any other culture of the time. The Judaisms presented here cover a wide geographical range from the Ottoman Empire to Polish and German Ashkenazi Jewry, with a particular focus on Italy.⁸ The sources discussed include, among others, legal core texts, autobiographical notes, poetry, philosophical treatises, letters and a sixteenth-century Italian folk-song. As the contributions demonstrate, these Judaisms engage intellectually and on a day-to-day basis with the non-Jewish world, share similar beliefs, and borrow cultural values. This cultural exchange is mutual, occurs on many different levels, and includes philosophers and priests, converts, healers and mothers.

The book is divided into four parts which reflect different methodological approaches and source material. Part I (*The Body in Historical and Social Context*) discusses the construction of the body in specific historical and social contexts.⁹

Roni Weinstein’s article on body perceptions in Jewish communities in early modern Italy sets the tone with a brief discussion of the increasing interest of the body in early modern European society. In a parallel development, kabbalistic writing during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was suffused with body images, especially in relation to divinity. Early modern Kabbalah reached out beyond the exclusive esoteric circles of the earlier period of Jewish mysticism to a growing part of Jewish society in an attempt to restructure Jewish life and religious practices. Weinstein argues that this had far-reaching implications for the shaping of the human body. Based on sources from a variety of literary genres, Weinstein shows that the discussion

⁷ Louis Jacobs, “The body in Jewish worship: three rituals examined,” *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 71.

⁸ Is this an indication that Italian Renaissance culture was more “body aware” than others at that time? Or does it simply reflect the research interests of Italian and Italophile scholars?

⁹ The following outlines of the contributions are mostly based on the authors’ summaries. Also direct and indirect quotations from the articles are not explicitly marked.

of the body and its functioning was not confined to a lofty theoretical level, but deeply affected the social and personal realities of bodily behavior, such as consumption, sleep, or body gestures, which is directly related to notions of the civilizing process and the refining of social manners, shame and shyness, and social control. The body is a focal point of reference to the crucial processes of changes that Jewish-Italian communities underwent in the Early Modern Period. An important observation is that these changes were closely related to the increasing cultural discourse on the body and its role in non-Jewish society in Italy, particularly in relation to the religiosity of the Baroque.

Italy is also an important part of the cultural context of *Eleazar Gutwirth's* contribution. He explores the concept of melancholy as a facet of late medieval and early modern medical discourse, which links the notion of body and soul with being in exile. Gutwirth argues that Amatus Lusitanus, in exile from his native Portugal, was an agent of culture closely interacting with the community within which he was active. His case notes are more than clinical observations of ailing bodies; they are an important source for the culture of the Jewish community of Salonika between 1559 and 1561. Although not all of those who sought Amatus' advice were Iberian, many of those who did were exiles or their descendants. An important aspect of this culture was the intellectual network of which Amatus, Afia, Almosnino, and others were part and which emphasized its ties to Italian and Iberian reading practices. Gutwirth especially stresses Amatus' curiosity about his patients' intellectual makeup. For Amatus does not see his role as purely clinical, physical, or technical because the body was neither divorced from the soul nor was it seen outside the city. Following this perspective, the link between exile and creation is as ancient as the link between alienation from place and alienation from self, i.e., between exile and melancholy.

The following two contributions deal with aspects of Ashkenazi early modern culture. While normative texts deal extensively with bodily functions, *Maria Diemling* explores the tension between halakhic expectations and the actual physical experiences of early modern Jews as described in seventeenth-century autobiographical texts. Focusing on descriptions of pregnancy and birth, illness and the plague, Diemling argues that the body is perceived in these examples of "self-fashioning" as a source of crisis, suffering and despair, not one of pleasure, satisfaction and enjoyment. The body has to be controlled according to halakhic expectations and the inability to do so leads to a sense of

guilt and is regarded as potentially life-threatening. It is ultimately God, however, upon whose mercy and justice physical experiences depend. Diemling notes that close interaction with non-Jews is described as a daily occurrence but could turn problematic in a real crisis, such as death in childbirth when under the attendance of a Christian midwife or during outbreaks of the plague. Similarity in attitudes toward the body and its treatment suggest a common culture with clear religious boundaries, with the regulations of religious law ascribing some physical experiences with a specific Jewish meaning.

While Maria Diemling's article focuses on the perspective of the people experiencing illness, *Nimrod Zinger's* contribution deals with the side of the healers. He notes that modern language and perceptions make it difficult to define early modern healers and their methods. On the one hand, as different healers apparently belonging to different categories bear similar characteristics, a dichotomous division cannot properly define the condition of medicine. On the other hand, in spite of their common ground, distinctions between healers did exist, and these differences were clearly understood by their contemporaries. Zinger discusses the reasons given for illnesses by eighteenth-century German-Jewish *Ba'alei Shem* (experts in practical Kabbalah), doctors, and their patients. He proposes a model of "medical pluralism" that enables a better understanding of the nature of the medical world of the German Jews in the Early Modern Period. Zinger shows how the *Ba'alei Shem*, many academically trained doctors and their patients believed that only a treatment based on three spheres, the medical, the spiritual and the popular, simultaneously will deal successfully with all the possible causes of illness. The suggested model treats each healer, healing method, and medical perspective individually, as they are expressed within a specific text. The model reflects the pluralistic outlook of the period's contemporaries, while it also demonstrates how various categories co-existed within their world.

The three contributions in part II (*The Halakhic Body*) discuss normative texts and examine the construction of the "ideal Jewish body" in law codes and responsa.

Jeffrey R. Woolf's article examines the attitude toward the body and physical pleasure in R. Joseph Caro's *Shulḥan Arukh*, an important legal work with a lasting impact on Jewish religiosity. Woolf argues that the *Shulḥan Arukh* is not characterized by an attitude of contempt for the body or the sensual. An individual's physicality or personal pleasure are not, per se, evil. They are evaluated solely in terms of their contribution

to one's living in accordance with God's Will. At the same time, the maintenance of the body and the satisfaction of its drives are not merely necessary actions to enable corporeal man to observe the mitzvot; they are enlisted as elements of Divine service. However, Woolf also detects an ascetic bent in the discussions contained in the *Shulḥan Arukh*. While R. Joseph Caro codifies the relevant rulings that express a positive attitude towards sexuality, he also codifies attitudes that are much more ascetic, and much more in tune with the author's inner mystical life. Woolf argues that in the latter case, a mystical impulse expresses itself in traditional halakhic terms and, thereby, becomes part of normative Halakhah.

Questions of sexuality, sex and gender have attracted much attention in the recent surge in cultural studies on the body. The articles by Howard Tzvi Adelman and Ruth Berger examine specific aspects of Jewish attitudes toward marital sex as discussed in legal sources. *Howard Tzvi Adelman* focuses in his article on the rabbinic discourse of virginity as a relationship between physical and emotional categories, between body and mind, and between biology and culture. Adelman notes that virginity can either refer to a specific physical marker or to the cultural state of a woman without any previous sexual experience, but that virginity may be more of a state of mind than a biological category. Based on Mary Douglas' taxonomy on the role of sexual relations in social systems and applied to examples from early modern Italy, Adelman argues that the discourse on virginity was also about honor, economic bargaining, sexual adversity, and pollution. In the negotiations of the female body when honor was at stake, the natural functioning of the body is obfuscated or misinterpreted, involving loss of the integrity. Social and economic aspects of the virginity are to be emphasized, because by raising questions about a woman's virginity, a man could attempt to renegotiate the entire financial package to his benefit. The negotiation of a woman's body mostly originated in the application of the category of honor of the opponents while the elaborated discussion on virginity might erase the meaning of it at all.

Ruth Berger argues that the prototypical early modern Jewish body is the married body. By examining the prevalent attitudes in responsa from the Ottoman Empire and Poland to "deviant bodies," people who fall below the "minimal standards" for being a husband or wife, Berger demonstrates that these minimal standards did not include physical health but rather focuses on the suitability for marital sex, which included male virility and female purity. Surprisingly, fertility was

not considered part of these minimal standards. Mental and physical health were relevant when they impacted sexual relations, either by weakening the body or by making it repulsive. Berger suggests that the tendency to apply stricter standards to female than to male bodies may be partly due to practical halakhic constraints and partly due to the gender bias inherent in a male-centered legal system. There appear to be no discernible differences between the Ashkenazi and Sephardi models of how a spouse should be, although Berger notes differences in the halakhic decisions taken in cases when one partner malfunctioned. She argues that these differences have less to do with an Ashkenazi predilection for protecting the sick or the family as an institution than with a more puristic, cautious, and not particularly pragmatic attitude toward Halakhah that had developed in the Ashkenazi tradition.

Part III (*Body, Mind and Soul*) includes four articles with a particular focus on Jewish mysticism, thought, and philosophy with reference to body, mind and soul and their correlation.

Continuing the theme of the body in the relationship between husband and wife raised by Adelman and Berger, *Moshe Idel* examines texts of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah. He explores the way in which the husband's attitude to the body of the wife reflects the importance of the body in general, and is related to some form of spiritual/theurgic experience. The isomorphism between a human and a supernal body serves as a condition for an experience of the spiritual by the corporeal. The pattern of the approach to the human wife became the exegetical pattern for understanding the attitude to the supernal feminine power. The triadic structure of the discussion is obvious: the three biblical obligations of the husband toward his wife are described in terms of the relationship between the *Shekhinah* to three divine *sefirot*: *Hesed*, *Gevurah* and *Tiferet*. The rabbinic system of commandments has become a manner of living in communion with the feminine divine power, just because they first functioned theurgically. Idel introduces the concept of ritual in the speculation of the Jewish body, as a power to affect and create other bodies as part of the extension and proliferation of the divine body in this world.

Arthur M. Lesley explores the early modern conception of the author in two works by the Hebrew scholar and physician Johanan Alemanno. Both books were intended to teach the attainment of immortal attachment to God and both open with an extensive account of the birth and infancy of the author discussed. Solomon's life, described from the narrative in the first book of Kings, is presented in the categories of

virtues from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and also through the stages of natural development of Tufayl's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzān*. The ways the arts of physiognomy and chiromancy read the physical features of the infant to discern his moral character corresponds to Alemanno's interpretation of the Song of Songs. A person with a physical defect has a spiritual defect, and the literal sense of the biblical book corresponds to the allegorical sense, and their combination thereof expresses the character of the author. Readings of Alemanno by a physiognomist and a chiromancer are found in the margins to the first draft of the book. They confirm his understanding of Alemanno's character and his life. Lesley argues that the correspondence between Alemanno's interpretation of the body and of the text does not match the findings of Daniel Boyarin's contrast between the attitudes of Greek Jews and Palestinian rabbis to the body and to the texts.

In the next article, *Sergius Koderá* suggests that Johanan Alemanno may have influenced Leone Ebreo in his understanding of the Song of Songs as the legitimate *Urtext* of all discourses on Love and in regarding Mosaic wisdom superior to Platonic Philosophy. Koderá's contribution examines the concept of beauty in Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore*. Koderá argues that beauty functions as a universal agent of coherence on all levels of being and the ensuing, decidedly positive, assessment of the role of the body in the order of creation. The attraction generated by beauty unites higher and lower beings, matter and form, men and women. It is by the sexual union of these opposites that the divine creation unfolds. Thus, the universe is structured along one metaphysical principle: the desire for the beautiful and/or the good, the urge to reproduce that beauty, and thereby to make the material world a perfectly beautiful representation of its Creator. The *Dialoghi* thus present a remarkably sensual and erotic account of a beautiful cosmos, modeled on human heterosexual relationships. Love for Christian Neo-Platonists, "of the like and for the like," is based on homoerotic relationships which led to a far less positive attitude toward the body, which is seen as a prison from which the soul had to escape, and a reduction in spiritual unity instead of reproduction as the central and unique human goal. Koderá argues that Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi* are a distinctly Jewish contribution to a Gentile debate on the cognitive potential of the emotional life.

The intellectual exchange of philosophical ideas in early modern Italy is also discussed by *Giuseppe Veltri* in his article on the correspondence between Sara Copio Sullam and two Christian clergymen, Cebà

and Baldassarre. Veltri argues that the exceptional aspect of Copio Sullam's personality lies less in her great literary talents; much more fascinating and intriguing is her ability to bring into focus, in and through her life, two central Christian and Jewish topics of the seventeenth century in an exemplary fashion, namely conversion and identity. In this her exceptional physical beauty and artistic gifts played a great role as a paradigm of philosophical discussion about the immortality of the soul. That was a question much discussed at the time and also, probably not incidentally so, influenced by contemporary debate on conversion. It was a contemporarily accepted tenet that aesthetics is but the expression of the divine world (*imago divina*). That this understanding of aesthetics was moored on the pillars of Christian religious philosophy is not really touched on until the discussion on the immortality of the soul and the eternity of matter.

Veltri's discussion of the intellectual dialogue between Sara Sullam Copio and two Christians links to part IV (*The Body in Jewish-Christian Discourse*) which deals with Jews in a Christian environment and the impact of their traditions on Christianity.

The question of how a Christian reading of Jewish mystical sources shapes ideas on the Jewish body lies at the core of the contribution by *Saverio Campanini* who discusses two of the first Christian Kabbalists in the early Renaissance period, and examines the combination of Jewish, Greek, and Christian motifs of the androgynous and questions how those motifs shaped the doctrine of Christian Kabbalah in its beginnings. Paulus Ricius, a Christian convert from Judaism, discussed the topic of the body of the Godhead in his *Isagoge*, first published in 1509. Campanini contrasts Ricius with Francesco Giorgio Veneto's *De harmonia mundi totius cantica tria* (1525), focusing particularly on the different disposition of the reproduction organs and the sign of circumcision, the main element of Jewish culturization of the body. Campanini notes that the sign of circumcision, which is very much present in the kabbalistic sources on which these Christian authors heavily draw upon, disappears from the representation of the body in their writings. Campanini argues that this was the price to be paid for the integration of Jewish mystical lore into a Christian system of thought.

Also focusing on Francesco Giorgio Veneto's *De harmonia mundi*, *Gianfranco Miletto* demonstrates in his article how a Jewish and a Christian author each integrated Renaissance culture into their respective religious tradition. One of the typical features of the Renaissance is

harmony, expressed in art and as a life-ideal whose patterns were sought after in classical culture. A considerable discrepancy existed between this ideal and reality, however. The desire for equilibrium and for artistic and intellectual serenity was jeopardized by the crisis of traditional values. Within a Christian (neo)platonist philosophy, one tried to find a new synthesis, that would offer a solution to the crisis of the traditional hierarchy of values. Particularly important in this context is *De harmonia mundi*: Miletto argues that Francesco Giorgio Veneto understands the world order in (neo)platonist-Pythagorean meaning as a series of numeral ratios which yield a musical harmony. Miletto shows through a textual comparison that Giorgio Veneto influenced the first sermon in Jehudah (Leone) Moscato's homiletical collection *Sefer Nefuzot Yehudah* ("The Dispersions of Judah," 1589). Moscato does not only use similar expressions but indeed displays the vision of the world as Giorgio Veneto, and some particular interpretations are also closely drawn from the *De harmonia mundi* and adapted to the Jewish context.

The concept of Jewish mysticism in Christian garb also appears in the contribution of *Elliot R. Wolfson*, who explores the theme of the body in the Christian Kabbalah of Moses ben Aaron of Cracow, also known as Johannes Kemper (1670–1716), focusing particularly on the perspective of the representation of Jesus in female images. Wolfson argues that the views expressed by Kemper reflected a much older polemical tactic employed by both Jews and Christians in their respective efforts to belittle the opposing faith by associating it with corporeality, typically engendered as feminine, in contrast to true spirituality, which is characterized as masculine. Kemper subtly undermines this line of attack by concomitantly ascribing a spiritual status to the somatic and a somatic status to the spiritual. The polemically-charged female characteristics are adopted by Kemper and transferred to the incarnate Christ. The ostensibly broken body, the humbling of the Divine taking on the investiture of the material world, is thereby redeemed and upheld as an icon of a new form of textual embodiment, affording an opportunity to the one who accepts Jesus, and especially to the Jew whom Kemper is seeking to convert as part of his own messianic scheme, to transmute the flesh into word by patterning itself on the Word made flesh. Wolfson suggests that the female representations of Jesus, therefore, indicate a reappropriation on Kemper's part of the Christian barb regarding the carnal nature of the Jews. The Jewish body is problematized to the extent that the Jews reject Christ. By returning to faith in Jesus, however, the Jews can redeem their flesh and thereby reclaim the true

angelic body to become the new human, which is the word incarnate, the Oral Torah, the Son who bears the image of the Father by being both the Mother exalted above in heaven and the Daughter despoiled below on earth.

The volume closes with a contribution by *Don Harrán*, which deals with the Renaissance art par excellence, music. A seemingly trivial Italian *poesia popolare* set to music in the mid-sixteenth century about Jews and their customs raises serious questions. On the surface, the verses appear to be about Jews in Bologna, where the composer (Ghirardo da Panico bolognese) and presumably the (unnamed) poet resided, and about the rite of circumcision. Even so, the verses cannot be so precisely pinned down: they refer to Jewish doctors and Jewish moneylenders; they can be linked to boisterous Purim celebrations; they perpetuate an earlier tradition of *canti carnascialeschi* and, at the same time, are influenced by the contemporary madrigal, particularly through the topos of “doctor poems” and their music, starting from the later fifteenth century; and they exemplify the *ebraica*, or popular, satiric songs about Jews composed in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as one of sundry regional, behavioral, and ethnic genres. It is not clear whether the poet is mocking the Jews or portraying them as they mock themselves. Harrán contextualizes the unusual vocabulary and suggests that the song might have been commissioned by Jews for inclusion in a Christian publication, and thus liable, then and now, to a double reading from Christian and Jewish points of view.

We planned this book as a contribution to the academic discourse about the “Jewish body” and the body in (the) Judaism(s) of the Early Modern Period. The demographic upheavals of the expulsions from the Iberian Peninsula and most German cities had a lasting impact on Jewish society. Political, cultural, religious and scientific changes, such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, the discovery of “the new world,” the printing press, the establishments of ghetti, and medical and scientific advancements all had direct and indirect body-related implications that, in our opinion, have so far only partially been explored.

The articles differ widely and many important topics receive no extensive treatment. The body in magic, notions of purity and impurity, food and clothing, mental illness, and homosexuality are just a few topics that would deserve closer scrutiny, as well as the body in visual

art, poetry or theater. We hope, however, that the contributions in this collection will provide stimulation for further engagement with the mappings presented here.

The first outline of this volume was drafted nearly three years ago. We would like to thank all the authors who contributed to this volume for their commitment to this project, their learned contributions, and their patience with what turned out to be a rather lengthy process. We are grateful to the specialist readers who peer-reviewed the articles for their care and expertise.

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Maria Diemling, Canterbury (United Kingdom)
Giuseppe Veltri, Halle-Frohe Zukunft (Germany)
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PART I

THE BODY IN HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

THE RISE OF THE BODY
IN EARLY MODERN JEWISH SOCIETY:
THE ITALIAN CASE STUDY*

RONI WEINSTEIN

In the mid-sixteenth century, Eleazar Azkari published a book, part of which was dedicated to enumerating the religious commandments according to their relation to various bodily organs. It could be argued that the innovation in *Sefer Haredim* was no more than a taxonomic change in the arrangement of religious commandments, or a further mnemonic aid. But even so, both motivations presuppose that the body has acquired a new importance in contemporary discourse and might serve as primary reference to further dimensions in Jewish culture. Put more generally, *Sefer Haredim* is emblematic of the rise of “the Body” in early modern Jewish life and culture. It is related to the intense religious atmosphere and pietistic-kabbalistic fermentation in Safed which shifted previous and contemporary mystical traditions from esoteric circles to ever wider publicity. This passage affected various aspects of Jewish life and provided new channels and modes for spreading the new kabbalistic message. The motivations behind these changes could not be confined to inner Jewish transformations, but must be related to a wider context, mainly Baroque Catholic religiosity.

I wish to examine the validity of these general claims in a case study of early modern Jewish-Italian communities. The shaping of the human body was not confined to the “religious” domain but related to further parameters of body functions, such as food consumption, sleep, body language and gestures, civilizing process, and refining social manners, shame and shyness, and social control. The body is a focal point of reference to crucial processes of changes undergone by Jewish-Italian communities during the Early Modern Period.

The documentary wealth and diversity of Jewish-Italian sources has been increasingly used to present fundamental aspects of a local “History of Private Life.” At the disposal of a future study of history of

* My gratitude to the editors of this volume, to the anonymous reader(s), and to Dr. Jonathan Garb for their wise comments.

the body could stand various literary genres: private letters in massive quantity, responsa literature of literary character, protocols of Jewish courts in dialogical form, public disputes, notary deeds, inquisitorial cases, illuminated manuscripts, material objects, Purim play and poems, and autobiographies. This documentary wealth could shed light on diverse aspects of daily life, intimate spheres, and the interpretation of contemporaries of their own culture. It enabled me to dedicate a detailed study to local marriage rituals and suggest an anthropological “reading” of the social-cultural mechanisms activated during these rites.¹ Further, Italy was one of the first places to absorb the kabbalistic writings and ideas from Safed, and later acted as an important channel of spreading them to Western and Central Europe.²

Increasing Occupation with the Body: The Non-Jewish Context

The challenge of confronting the theme of “history of the body” is relatively young in western historiography. A clear indication would be the scarcity of items dedicated to this theme in copious and well-computerized libraries such as Harvard University, Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, and Biblioteca nazionale centrale di Firenze. The extent of research on the body in a Jewish context is even more limited, as proved by a quick catalogue search of the National and University Library of Jerusalem, the computerized list of articles on Jewish culture and history (Rambi), or the lectures during the last conferences of the World Congress for Jewish Studies. Yet several individual and collective works written during the last ten years have contributed methodological foundations and indicated the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as fundamental points of change in respect to the medieval and late Renaissance periods.³

¹ Roni Weinstein, *Marriage Rituals Italian Style: A Historical Anthropological Perspective on Early Modern Italian Jews* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1–51.

² Moshe Idel, “Italy in Safed, Safed in Italy: Toward an Interactive History of Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah,” in *Cultural Intermediaries in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri and David B. Ruderman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2004), 239–269. The innovatory role of Kabbalah in sixteenth-century Italy is suggested by the pioneering article of Roberto Bonfil, “Change in the Cultural Patterns of a Jewish Society in Crisis: Italian Jewry at the Close of the Sixteenth Century,” *Jewish History* 3, 2 (1988): 11–30. See also idem, “Changing Mentalities in Italian Jews between the Periods of the Renaissance and the Baroque,” *Italia* 11 (1994): 61–79.

³ Georges Vigarello, ed., *Histoire du corps*, Vol. I—“De la Renaissance aux Lumières”

Speaking about the body entails speaking about the most concrete, of “flesh and blood”: smell and touch, food and clothing, illness and its cure. In short, the material and fundamental needs of life. But the body of past times could not be approached directly; it passes through cultural presentations of religious beliefs and practices, magical aids, material objects, and literary and aesthetic works. The shaping of the body, the gestures and body signs are internalized by long and complicated—often implicit and made to look natural—processes of formal education and informal orality. The body, apparently more than anything else, reflects the social and cultural diversity within each collective in regard to basic issues, and the gap between scholarly and popular culture. No literary genre could, by itself, serve as reliable source to the history of the body. It is a task necessitating the encounter of various kinds of documents and an encounter of various disciplines (for example, medicine, history of medicine, food habits, archaeology, art history, social manners, schools and pedagogical methods), to get closer to the concrete and living human body.

Several fronts mark the intense interest in the human body and the fundamental change during the Early Modern Period in Europe. The aspect most touching the life of the vast populations of Europe was the religious.⁴ The basic stand of the Counter-Reformation Church in Europe towards the body was one of suspicion and repulsion. The body was supposed to exert a malign influence over the believer and his religious devotions. Yet the old distinction between *carne* (the physical body) and *corpo* (earthly life and tendencies derived from bodily inclinations and needs) left a vast space for religious praxis, of such a kind that could bestow an important and positive role to the body. The post-Tridentine Church has allocated a central place to the figure of Christ. His life and suffering served as a real and very tangible model of imitation. The seventeenth century was an epoch with a growing concern about stigmatization, i.e., the appearance of Christ’s wounds on the cross on the believer’s body. It appeared especially on the body of women mystics in relatively small, but increasing, number. Its sense and legitimacy derived from the daily meditative activity performed by large groups of believers all over Europe on the “Passion” of Christ, his five types of sufferings, and his real and human life. Popular leaflets

(Paris: Seuil, 2005); Claudia Pancino, ed., *Corpi. Storia, metafore, rappresentazioni fra Medioevo ed età contemporanea* (Venice: Marsilio, 2000).

⁴ Jacques Gélis, “Le corps, l’Eglise et le sacré,” in *Histoire du corps*, 17–108.

spread among many believers the visual image of the suffering and humiliated body of the Savior. Veneration of the instruments of torture has added to the spread of the cult of “The Sacred Heart” (*Sacro Cuore, Sacre Coeur*). The Counter-Reformation Church accentuated the real presence of the body of Christ during the Eucharist sacrament, which gave birth to widespread religious devotion in confraternal activity, in *Corpus Christi* processions, as well as in individual and collective pietistic activity.

The desire of believers to absorb and take part in the physical suffering of Christ was one of the reasons for the popularity of the writings of Teresa of Avila. St. Teresa underlined suffering as the central experience in human life, to be made present and experienced in every aspect and moment of life. Physical illness and suffering was perceived as a gift by Divinity, and as an occasion to form closer ties with Christ. Death—the culmination of Christ’s suffering—is one of the leading themes of Baroque religiosity, in prayers, meditations, public sermons, and visual art. Death was presented in its horrific and threatening aspect alongside the “aesthetic” aspect, when using human bones in burial zones or chapels as decoration material. According to Church instructions, the issue of burial and management of remaining bones was to be treated in a more orderly and decent manner. The link between death, the existence after death, and salvation was not particular to this period. However, the intensification in making death present by visual-material objects and internal meditations, for didactic-religious ends, was indeed new.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed a new concern—more systematic and observational—in the old tradition of physiognomy. Yet physiognomy was far from being the only factor to affirm that the body speaks. This message was spread by other means, such as rhetoric manuals partially dedicated to corporeal techniques, books on “civilized” comportment, the requirements of self control and the observation of others, the art of conversation, the measurement of corporeal gestures, works on medicine that attempt to detect on the surface of the body the internal morbid symptoms, and books for painters guiding them to present the figures of Christ’s Passion. Destiny was decipherable on the human body, as the structure of face and forehead were traits of character, or symptoms of disease and social stigma.⁵ But

⁵ Jean-Jacques Courtine, “Le miroir de l’âme,” in *Histoire du corps*, 303–333, esp. 304, 306.

the body was not to be left as a passive object of observation and “reading,” but mostly as an arena of remodeling, through the norms incised, interiorized, and privatized, as Norbert Elias has shown in his work on the process of civilization; the body is a place of patient effort, of the repulsion of impulsive-spontaneous aspects, through meticulous elaboration of etiquettes, good manners, and firm self-control. It affected not only external patterns of behavior and manners of dress and food, but the threshold of shame and embarrassment. The extent of absorbing these practices and sensibilities had clear social repercussions in the way they drew social distinctions between the nobility, the bourgeoisie, and the common people.⁶ As these norms spread from courtly circles, they were conjoined with religious overtones, and were considered as obligatory for obedient citizens and good Christians. The taming of sexual impulses—in courtship traditions between the unmarried young, the exclusion of sexuality from marriage rituals, and instructions regarding the erotic life of married couples—was part of controlling the body in early modern society.

Scientific discoveries—anatomical dissections, the discovery of the blood circulatory systems, the use of the microscope—all led to the new visibility of the human body. They were available to wider public circles through the publication of illustrated anatomy books, and through publicly conducted operations in “anatomical theatres.” Rafael Mandressi, a historian of medicine, justly asked what the cultural background was which gave meaning to such public operations and why they were considered to be a reliable source of medical knowledge. The answer lies in the realm of contemporary anatomy with the visual experience, i.e., the capacity to expose and present the body to the human eye. Distinct physical elements could be seen and touched. The tendency to fragment was counterbalanced by the use of the microscope—described by Adriano Prosperi as the discovery of a “new world” of cultural impact, comparable to the geographical discoveries of Columbus and the astronomical discoveries of Copernicus and Giordano Bruno.⁷ The microscope led to the possibility to discover the cell as the component common to all human organs.

⁶ Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine, Georges Vigarello, “Préface,” in *Histoire du corps*, 7–12, esp. 11.

⁷ Adriano Prosperi, “Scienza e immaginazione teologica nel Seicento: Il battesimo e le origini dell’individuo,” *Quaderni Storici* 100, 1 (1999): 187.

Considering nudity as a constant component in western art is, according to the art historian Daniel Arras, illusory. The sixteenth century is the point of time for the erotic representation of body, a century that set the constants not only in art history for the long haul, but also in relation to social practices: “This process of erotization in presenting the body is particularly clear in the invention, during the sixteenth century, of a major theme in the European erotic imagery until the nineteenth century: the nude body of a woman, reclining, isolated, out of narrative context, offered solely to the spectator’s gaze.”⁸ Nudity (predominantly feminine) was confined in Renaissance art mainly to the private sphere, such as marriage boxes (*cazioni*) and the bedchamber, or in relation to mythological themes. Erotization of the human view was strongly reflected in manuals for confessors and penitents, around 1500–1540, underlining the sin of *Luxuria* (related to sexuality) instead of the old sin of avarice. It is associated with Christian awareness of the nude body, and feelings of shame and unease in regard to “the shameful parts.”

The various discourses on the body constructed, according to the well-known thesis of Foucault, a docile, corrected, enslaved, and normalized body. Whether taking this irritating thesis at face value or not, we must not ignore the impact of religious practices during the Baroque period on basic physical ideas, such as suffering, illness, and death. The mechanical and mathematical models of the body in contemporary medicine were interwoven with suggestions of shaping bodily functions according to sixteenth and seventeenth-century rationalities. Even the seemingly neutral manuals on public behavior and manners (civility) presupposed counter-models of unrefined (“bestial”) bodies of the popular classes, standing in relationship to grotesque or carnivalesque bodies. Civility stands in contrast to the animal state, but it is certainly not a born or a natural state. The taming and controlling of the body was explicit in sixteenth and seventeenth-century discussions where the boundaries between the scientific, political, religious, and cultural were vague.

⁸ Daniel Arras, “La chair, la grâce, le sublime,” in *Histoire du corps*, 411–476, esp. 429.

The Expanding Interest in Human Body in Early Modern Kabbalah

The biblical phrase “From my flesh I will look on God” (Job 19:26) remained of limited importance in midrash and medieval Jewish thought,⁹ but it acquired unprecedented importance in sixteenth-century Kabbalah schools of Safed, in both the Lurianic and Cordoveran branches and their later derivatives.¹⁰ Anthropomorphic descriptions of the Godhood are known in previous centuries, especially in *The Book of Splendor* (*Sefer HaZohar*) and post-Zoharic circles.¹¹ Yet the difference between Kabbalists preceding the sixteenth century and those of (mainly) Lurianic affiliations could appropriately be described as a “quantum leap,” that is a passage from one stage to another of a different quality. In the writings of Ḥayyim Vital, the main spokesman and synthesizer of Lurianic Kabbalah, the most concealed processes in the secret domain of Divinity were described in terms of conception (following the descent of the seed from the brain to the male sex organ during the sexual act between the feminine and masculine aspects of Divinity), embryonic development, birth, lactation, and various phases of growth until the age of twenty, all surprisingly similar to the human process. The five “faces of God” (*Parzufim*) include an interaction between the trinity of “divine father,” “divine mother,” and “primeval man” (*Abba, Imma, Adam Kadmon*), creating thus a sacred family. The Divinity was experiencing not only linear and “positive” processes of change and growth, but contraction, crisis and death,

⁹ In the Midrash it is mentioned in relation to circumcision, i.e., leaving a trace on the body, as a sign of the pact between God and his people. The medieval thought accepts this interpretation, see Israel Ibn Al-Nakawa, *Menorat Ha-Ma’or*, ed. Hillel G. Enelow (New York: The Bloch Publishing Company, 1929), 475.

¹⁰ On the Lurianic School, specially in relation to the body, see Rachel Elijor, “The Metaphorical Relations between God and Man and the Significance of visionary Reality in Lurianic Kabbalah,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 10 (1992): 47–57 (Hebrew); Mordechai Pachter, “*Katnut* (‘Smallness’) and *Gadlut* (‘Greatness’) in Lurianic Kabbalah,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 10 (1992): 171–210 (Hebrew). See also idem, “Purifying the Body in the Name of the Soul. The Problem of the Body in Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah,” in *People of the Body*, 117–142. Further discussion can be found in the important work of Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and his Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 13, 166–167. Fine’s work is pioneering in underlining the sociological-historical aspects in the Lurianic School. On the Cordoveran School, see Bracha Sack, *The Kabbalah of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero* (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University Press, 1995) (Hebrew).

¹¹ See Yehuda Liebes, “How the Zohar was written,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 8 (1989): 26 (Hebrew).

symbolized by recession into the motherly womb. Symbols of life and death characterized the entire domains of the Godhood.

Such allusive and enigmatic-symbolic descriptions were not intended to remain on a theosophical or theological level. The physical, or rather *corporeal*, level of humanity and the metaphysical level were inextricably woven together, producing a *Weltanschauung* where the divine spheres, heaven and hell, angels, divine revelations, magical and/or malevolent forces, and human soul-cum-body remain in close contact, and where past and present all seem to stand in an increasing dialogue that defies time constraints.¹² Typical of this mentality is the theoretical occupation of major sixteenth- and seventeenth-century kabbalistic figures with transmigration of the soul (*Gilgulim*, *Gilgul Neshamah*). Transmigration had direct and concrete implications on personal and collective lives. Ḥayyim Vital presented himself as the personification of major figures of the Jewish past (including Moses), and hence the impersonation of Jewish religion and divine will. This theme is only a partial component in the dialogue between the divine and the human, taking place through dreams, revelations, possession and its cure, celestial guides (*Maggidim*), prophecies, magical aids, and spiritual voyages to study in heavenly schools—all profoundly characterized by corporeal parameters.

Yet the importance of the Safed tradition is not only in its bold and innovative theosophical-theoretical character, but also in the capacity and determination of its propagators to introduce it into the practical plane, accessible to the wider circles of the early modern Jewish population. One way of spreading and popularizing the kabbalistic positions was via new images and ideas about the body. The body had become an arena reflecting the main issues of religious-pietistic activity, mostly the increasing occupation with sin, guilt and penitence. The book composed by Elijah de Vidas, *Reshit Ḥokhmah*, an ethical guide and one of the most popular products of sixteenth-century Safed, clearly stated

¹² *Sefer Toledot HaAri* [Exempla of Isaac Luria], ed. Meir Benayahu (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1967), 160, 167, 189, 232, 235, 238, 251–258; Ḥayyim Vital, *Sefer HaHezionot* [Book of Revelations], ed. Aharon Zeev Eshkoli (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1954), 27 §24, 100 §25, 109 §39, 134 §25, 135 §3, 137 §6, 149 §15, 168 §31, 237 §11–12; Azkari, *Milei de-Shmaya*, 117, 151, 155–159, 174, 179–181, 185; Idem, *Sefer Ḥavedim*, 68, 211; Moses Cordovero, *Tomer Devorah* [The Palm of Deborah] (Wickliffe, OH: Ohel Desktop Publishing, 1999), 163–166, 185–187, 191–202, 205–210; Elijah b. Moses De Vidas, *Reshit Ḥokhmah* [Foundation of Sagacity] (Sattmer, 1942), 23b–24b, 29b, 57b, 62a, 63a, 71b, 140b, 151b, 168b, 201b, 231b, 235b, 238a, 260a, 266a.

that it is both the soul and the bodily organs that testify (in front of God and/or heavenly court) about man's sins, since sins are inscribed and written on the body.¹³ "Writing" was indeed a suitable metaphor since contemporary kabbalistic figures used to "read" and reveal the secret sins of other persons through the signs on their face, or more particularly on the forehead. Even hidden thoughts or night dreams leave some decipherable tracks on the human body. Mystical activity endangered the body, as recounted several times by Ḥayyim Vital, in exposing his personal experiences of bodily mutilations following improper meditative activity, and followed by the therapeutic act of his master Isaac Luria in stretching his body over the body of his sick disciple.¹⁴ One known and recommended meditative practice was the "virtual" letter-writing on the human body.¹⁵ The menace to the body became more immediate as sin and its effects were painted in corporeal perspective, as a kind of physical infiltration of a "real presence," changing the essence and nature of the body.¹⁶

Almost every bodily function—sleeping, dreaming, eating—became a theme in the kabbalistic discourse in relation to their halakhic and mystic significance and, consequently, their control. The function most identified and symptomatic of bodily and earthly life ("life of the flesh"), and hence subjected to the most comprehensive and detailed discussion and to change was sexuality.¹⁷ Two recent works of Moshe Idel and Elliot Wolfson have discussed in detail the central role of sexual metaphors in kabbalistic thought beginning with the early Middle Ages until the Early Modern Period.¹⁸ Though disagreeing on some important points,¹⁹ they share two major issues. The first one is the centrality of sexual and erotic metaphors and debates along the history of Jewish mysticism, including earlier rabbinic thought. Idel has even

¹³ De Vidas, *Reshit Ḥokhmah*, 29b, 168a.

¹⁴ Vital, *Sefer HaHezionot*, 27 § 24, 237 § 11–12. See also *Sefer Toledot HaAri*, 189, 325.

¹⁵ Azkari, *Milei de-Shmaya*, 174, 181, 185.

¹⁶ Azkari, *Milei de-Shmaya*, 151. On the conception that sin is incised in the body bones, even after death, see De Vidas, *Reshit Ḥokhmah*, 29b, 168a.

¹⁷ David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: Basicbooks, 1992), chapter V, "Sexuality and Spirituality in the Kabbalah," 101–120.

¹⁸ Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005); Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

¹⁹ The disagreements regard, for example, the positive attitude towards sexuality and the body in general, the position of men in relation to women, the ascetic character of kabbalistic morality.

characterized this basically positive attitude to marriage, procreation and sexual activity as the “Culture of Eros.” The interest in Eros leads to the idea of isomorphism between human and divine sexuality. Marital life and sexual activity is not only legitimized and sanctified, but acquires theurgical dimensions. Man has the capacity to influence the relationships, intended in the double sense, between the masculine and feminine aspects of Divinity, and even to become involved as a third partner, by the erotic attachment of the *Zaddik*—the righteous Kabbalist—with the divine feminine, the *Shekhinah*. Idel states that “[m]any of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists, following some earlier types of Jewish thought, biblical and rabbinic, were concerned with Eros in contexts that are much wider than their individual experiences of delight, and even of personal and national immortality: the metabolism [i.e., interchange—R.W.] between the human and divine realms.”²⁰ As the Kabbalists are primarily interested in intensifying the religious life practices (*Mitzvot*), they are interested in changing the nature of human sexuality and in regulating and keeping it within halakhic norms. Yet both Idel and Wolfson state from the outset that they neither relate the particular kabbalistic theosophy to its historical context nor attribute its change from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period to interaction with the non-Jewish surroundings.²¹ The spread of these ideas in the vast Jewish population through the literary genres known as “Moral Ethics” (*Sifrut Musar*) finds little space in these comprehensive works.

Guiding sexual and/or erotic behavior was part and parcel of talmudic regulations.²² Yet the Talmud lacks any structured and concrete instructions regarding sexual behavior. Most of the normative regula-

²⁰ Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 243.

²¹ Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 5–6: “I shall leave the social and cultural critique to other writers on the topic whose crystallized worldviews allows them a more pronounced, though often simplistic, attitude to the past ... My presentation below deals more with prescriptive statements found in the writings of Jewish authors who attempted to shape the behavior of others, rather than with sociological or anthropological observation. In other words, in the following I shall deal more with theoretical articulations, which are not corroborated by any facts, though also not negated by fact as we know them.” For further aspects and elaboration, see also *ibid.*, 59, 118, 125, 148, 154, 203, 217, 224; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 79: “How ideology and social realities intermingle is unquestionably an important matter, but one that requires a different sort of inquiry from what is embraced in this book.” See also *ibid.*, 81, 110, 307–310.

²² Michael L. Satlow, *Tasting the Dish: Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality* (Atlanta, GE: Scholars Press, 1995).

tions are related to personal stories and/or midrashic hermeneutic of the Bible. No distinct tract is dedicated to this issue. The result is not always coherent, and contains many lacunae, which were increasingly filled in later generations. The Middle Ages preserved few (very few!) samples of more systematic instructions in this regard, such as the literature of Ashkenazi Pietists (*Hasidei Ashkenaz*), *The Letter on Sanctity* (*Iggeret HaKodesh*) attributed to Nachmanides, or *The Gate of Sanctity* (*Sha'ar HaKodesh*) composed by Abraham b. David of Posquière (Rabad). A common feature of these tracts is their presentation of the regulation of sexual life as a precondition to individual sanctity (*Kedushah*), reserved to only a select few. No wonder that they originated and remained in the small and esoteric groups for which these instructions were intended.

A quantitative and qualitative leap of verbalization about erotic issues and sexual morality was seen during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was manifested by the publication of extensive literature in which the sexual issue was systematically discussed in detailed and meticulous manner, as well as related to wider cultural context. Such tracts were, each in its own way, related to persons with kabbalistic orientations. Sexual sins—in acts and in thoughts—were the incarnations of sin and religious deviation in general. They incessantly occupy the personal and mystic diaries of the major kabbalist figures in Safed. The hagiographical biography of Isaac Luria attributes a central weight to the double-faced potentiality of erotic energy, as a threat to sanctity, as much as a springboard to the hidden confines of Divinity.²³ The erotic dimensions of Torah study and divine secrets were competing with “real” family and sexual life, as much as the Torah was personified or reified more concretely by the *Shekhinah*, the feminine aspect of Divinity representing God’s presence in earthly life. The symbol has acquired a very real and sensual force, powerful enough to create a rough competition between the *Shekhinah* and the real flesh-and-blood wife married to a pietist male:

The Torah [symbol of the *Shekhinah*] is the woman given to you by God, for your pleasure and benefit, she would guide you by day to save you from tribulations and support you, and by night she would guard your body and soul from demonic forces ... And the second wife is man’s

²³ *Sefer Toledot HaAri*, 160, 197. For a general context see the fascinating discussion in Yehuda Liebes, “‘Two Young Roes of a Doe’: The Secret Sermon of Isaac Luria before his Death,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 10 (1992): 113–169 (Hebrew). See also the important perspective presented in Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos*, 168, 174, 196–205, 310–312, 352–355.

enemy, [a woman] of flesh and blood, of whom the prophet [Micah 7:6] said that man's enemies are coming from his own house ... and God has ordained to love her, but the main love is directed to the woman of youth [*Shekhinah*], from the day his father taught him Torah, she remains in intimacy with him and guards him. Therefore a man should strain to support her more than [supporting] the second wife, [providing her] with ... sexual activity/satisfaction, to remain in vicinity with her all week long, and rise during midnight²⁴ which is the proper time for sexual copulation. And even during Saturday [when he stays with his corporeal wife] and performs the commandment of procreation, his intention would be to procreate a son, [begotten] from the first woman.²⁵

The imposition of new norms and regulation on the sexual comportment and on family life was an inevitable consequence of this.

Reducing the gap between heaven and earth was a two-way process. It encouraged the “sanctification” of many new aspects in concrete life, which could reflect parallel processes in the divine spheres; on the inverse direction, it charged theological concepts with material parameters. The most conspicuous change in this context was the rise of the visual aspect in Jewish religious life during the Early Modern Period. It was expressed in various ways, such as the eroticization and visualization of the *Shekhinah* figure, the plastic descriptions in public preaching, the intensive use of dreams/revelations/celestial journeys, and the meditative techniques based on guided imagination, i.e., visual imagination.

The end of bodily existence was very present as well. Death attracted much attention as a symbol of the precariousness and nullity of material life, and as a passage to after-life domains. Plastic descriptions of hell and heaven and the interim sphere (the Jewish *Limbo*? A renovated version of *Purgatory*?)²⁶ were intensively presented by an increasing number of tracts and sermons. The passage from life to death, or death in general, attracted wider interest, as testified by meticulous descriptions and novel rulings in regard to preparation to death, the proper conduct during the moment of death, the “geography” and architectural structure of heaven/hell, and mostly by the intimate and mutual relation between the living and the dead. The rise of a Jewish

²⁴ In order to perform the “Ritual of Restoration during Midnight” (*Tikkun Ḥazot*).

²⁵ Azkari, *Sefer Haredim*, 211. A similar assertion can be found in Cordovero, *Tomer Devorah*, 191–202.

²⁶ Giuseppe Veltri, *Gegenwart der Tradition. Studien zur jüdischen Literatur und Kulturgeschichte* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, 69) (Leiden: Brill 2002), 195–211.

ars bene moriendi in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was heavily suffused with corporeal dimensions.²⁷

Radiation of the new models of “sanctity” or “saintly comportment” owed much to the spread of the figure of the Jewish saints (*Kedoshim*). Certainly the historical roots of the Jewish saintly person goes back to Late Antiquity and had some interesting ramifications during the Middle Ages, especially in Ashkenazi communities.²⁸ Yet, it should be emphasized that as a figure serving both as a bridge to revelations of arcane and divine secrets (*Sitrei Torah*, *Sodot HaTorah*), innovator of rituals and religious customs, a model of religious and pietistic commitment, guarantor of vicinity and intimacy with Divinity (often described as sexual copulation), an addressee to personal requests for penitential guidance, involvement in confraternal activity and public religious activity (such as preaching), or performer of magic and miracle acts—the Jewish saint is a new and a revolutionizing phenomenon of the sixteenth century. The cult of saints and the appearance of new hagiographic literature are clear indications to its importance.²⁹ Emblematic in this context are the wide hagiographic myths woven around the figure of Isaac Luria, the founding father of this religious current. According to the hagiographic literature from the late sixteenth century onward—presenting his constructed image—Luria is primarily a “public” saint, whose sayings and activities are performed in the presence of his disciples—constantly requiring clarifications about his deeds and sayings—and of larger circles. His activity is public, being occupied with addressing other people, instructing them, offering penitential guidance, or even in his celestial journeys.³⁰

²⁷ See, for example, the shuddering description in Elijah HaCohen, *Sefer Shevet Musar* [Rod of Morality] (Jerusalem: Makhon Or HaSefer, 1978), chapter 13, 19. On the occupation with death in early modern Jewish society, see Avriel Bar-Levav, “Ritualisation of Jewish Life and Death in the Early Modern Period,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 47 (2002): 69–82.

²⁸ On saints in general in Jewish tradition, see Jean Baumgarten, *Récits hagiographiques juifs* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001). Regarding the Ashkenazi tradition, see Lucia Raspe, “Jewish Saints in Medieval Ashkenaz—A Contradiction in Terms,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 31 (2004): 354–369. Raspe discusses mainly the literary phenomenon of Hagiography of German pietists (*Hasidei Ashkenaz*), but refrains from debating the social implication of this literature. Unfortunately I was unable to consult her *Jüdische Hagiographie im mittelalterlichen Aschkenas* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

²⁹ *Sefer Toledot HaAri*, 13–37, 41–67, 93–110.

³⁰ *Sefer Toledot HaAri*, 238. For the general context, see Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos*, especially 150–259. See also Jonathan Garb, “The cult of the Saints in Lurianic Kabbalah” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 98, 2 (2008): 203–229, discussing the theological aspects of Luria as saint.

The kabbalistic saint served as a model for shaping individual and collective behavior. The intention of kabbalistic circles to change body and bodily behavior is not confined to what we would designate today as the “religious” domain. The distinction between “lay” and “religious” only began to crystallize in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and is certainly very much different from ours. Ḥayyim Vital recalls in his mystic diary and in his mystic summa *The Book of Gates* (*Sefer HaShe'arim*) that prior to his death his master Isaac Luria instructed him about several things, among which were “discourteous stepping/walking, pride, diminution of food [consumption], intention of prayer, [blessing of] “return our judges,” blessing *HaNehenin*, salt on the table, not to drink water after [eating] food, beware of the honor of your companions.”³¹ Instructions regarding prayers stood next to references to social behavior and hierarchy, or others of mundane and prosaic character—walking, dietary habits, consumption of food—all related to the body. Sixteenth-century Kabbalah fulfilled a major role, which still awaits further investigation, of refining social manners, internalizing codes of social etiquette and adopting body language that reflected civility and courtliness.³² Again, the book *Reshit Hokhmah* furnishes a fine sample:

More concerning the honor of synagogue, not to spit inside if he can, and if he is unable since the habit is too rooted, better spit modestly under [hidden by] his garments and rub [the spittle] with his feet, and during Sabbath he should cover [the spittle] with his feet and not rub ... best is to have a special cloth to spit his spittle so that he would not show it in synagogue's air.³³

This is one of the first evidences of the use in Jewish society of handkerchief, as a sign of polite or civilized comportment, especially in synagogue, and as a sign for respect shown to divine presence.

Bodily gestures and comportment in general were deemed to reflect, as in current European etiquette manuals, the inner intentions and motions of the soul. The inner/outer aspects of human body and soul

³¹ The last expression “lizaher bi-kevod ḥaverim” might also be translated as “beware of the honor of other confraternity members.”

³² See for the moment, Roni Weinstein, “The Seventeenth-Century Kabbalist Abraham Yagel-Galico on Women, Family and Civilizing Process,” in *Festschrift in Honor of Roberto Bonfil*, ed. Elisheva Baumgarten, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin and Roni Weinstein (forthcoming).

³³ The citation is from De Vidas, *Reshit Hokhmah*, 47a. On the new life style of Sephardi Diaspora, see Yosef Kaplan, *From New Christians to New Jews* (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 2003), passim (Hebrew).

served as an important lever in early modern pedagogic literature and school praxis, in an attempt to mould the individual by controlling his body language. A similar attitude is found in the concluding four chapters of *Reshit Hokhmah* dedicated to four distinct modes of good manners (*Derekh Erez*, better translated as “civility” in this context?) of religious scholars, of adult men, of women, and of children.

Two seemingly opposing attitudes of the human body characterize the kabbalistic literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One encourages the rejection of the body and describes bodily needs in negative terms, at times in undecidedly derogatory and contemptuous metaphors; deprivation of basic bodily needs—sleep, food, sexuality, self-esteem—is charged with high religious values. Parallel to the ascetic attitude, at times expressed by the same personalities, is the consideration of human body in its vitality and joy as the key instrument to reaching vicinity and intimacy with God (*Devekut*) or even *unio mystica*.³⁴ Both attitudes share the implicit notion of the increasing role of body, bodily comportment, and corporeal needs in the intensified religious discussion in the Jewish society starting from the mid-sixteenth century. Verbalization of the body—either orally or in print—is an important channel to discuss and to restructure other issues of importance. We should always keep in mind that early modern notions of body might be very different from our own, since the separation of body and mind, or the model of body as machine or geometrical-mathematical structure had not penetrated Jewish culture.

The Jewish-Italian Case Study

An article of Jacques Gélis about the role of body in religious life in counter-reformation Europe dedicates a section to “the Protestant body” in contradistinction to “the Catholic body.”³⁵ In a similar mode

³⁴ De Vidas, *Reshit Hokhmah*, 63a. As mentioned previously, the central role asceticism is a point of contention between Wolfson and Idel. Wolfson considers the kabbalistic thought as basically ascetic. The sexual domain is only legitimized to the extent that passion and enjoyment of the sexual act are excluded in favor of meditative intentions during the sexual act. Idel distinguishes between various currents within the kabbalistic domain, and attributes to the dominant one, i.e., the theosophical-theurgical, a basic positive attitude to sexual activity, family life, and procreation, since all kabbalistic figures followed halakhic rules and pursued family life. Further, the legitimacy of human sexuality is projected into the divine sphere.

³⁵ See Gélis, “Le corps, l’Eglise et le sacré,” 103–104.

we could ask if there is any sense in speaking of “the Jewish body” in early modern Europe, as distinctive from the “Christian body,” by the same parameters presented by Gélis? Could transformations of the body be detected, and if so to what historical factors can they be related? The cultural presentations/metaphors of the body are a good starting point. Until the mid-sixteenth century the dominant discourse in Jewish-Italian communities about the body was derived from both the medieval philosophical traditions of Aristotelian character and from the medieval medical concepts from Greek origins.³⁶ The body is not an isolated entity but standing in close relation of affinity and “sympathy” with the surrounding influences of stars—according to current astrological concepts—and with the four natural elements, and with the body-social. The four humors, and their balance as the basis for human sanity, are current in Jewish medicine as well. The body reflects and contains on a micro level the whole cosmos, from divine to material. Yet the most conspicuous element in philosophical tracts is the antagonism and struggle between the “body” and the “soul” (alongside other terminologies used).

Typical of this tradition is the book *Glory of David* (*Tehillah le-David*) by David b. Judah Messer Leon (c. 1460–1535).³⁷ Following the deep imprint left by Maimonides on Jewish thought, the process of becoming a “Philosopher” is preconditioned by a life-long preparation of arduous study, paralleling and increasing the vicinity to God. It is an elitist conception by choice, which excludes most of other members of the Jewish collective (*ibid.*, p. 2b: “few are those philosophizing, in the sense that the Righteous is the *axis mundi*”).³⁸ This exclusion is reflected

³⁶ Mirko D. Grmek and Jolé Agrimi, ed., *Storia del Pensiero medico occidentale*, Vol. I—“Antichità e medioevo” (Roma–Bari: Laterza, 1993–1998). On Jewish medieval medical conceptions, see Ron Barkai, *A History of Jewish Gynaecological Texts in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

³⁷ David b. Judah Messer Leon, *Tehillah le-David* [Glory to David] (Constantinople: Print of Joseph b. Isaac Ya’abez: 1576), esp. 1b–3a, 4b, 5b, 16b, 23a, 25a, 36b, 38a, 39b, 52a, 54a, 66a–b, 67b, 77a, 84b, 88b–90a. On this figure, see Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds: The Life and Thought of Rabbi David ben Judah Messer Leon* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991). See also Joseph b. David Ibn Yahya, *Derekh Hayyim* [Path of Life], MSS Oxford—C. Roth Collection 401 [Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem (Henceforward IMHM) #15451], esp. 11b, 13a, 26b–27a, 28b–29b, 30a, 32a–33a, 35b, 40a–b, 50b, 54b.

³⁸ Joseph b. David Ibn Yahya, *Derekh Hayyim* [Path of Life], MSS Oxford—C. Roth Collection 401, 32a, 13a—during the revelation at Mount Sinai Moses was delivering a double message, one to the elite, the other to the masses. See also Johanan Alemanno, *Hayyei Olam* [The Eternal Life], MSS Mantua—The Jewish Community 21 [IMHM

on personal level by the positive evaluation of the “soul”—the spiritual aspect of human life—on the account of devaluation and contempt to the “body”—the physical needs and their derivatives, such as wealth, status, and honor.³⁹ Man, born empty and devoid of spiritual value, is “filled” only by acquiring “spiritual forms” (*Zurot Ruḥaniot*, a term borrowed from neo-platonic philosophy and astral magic). He can later project these achievements, as an artist/craftsman can execute a work of art by materializing his mental ideas (*ibid.*, pp. 4b, 7a, 36b, 38b). Such an unavoidable attitude considered the body as an obstacle to the spiritual path, whose menacing power should be minimized. The spiritual domain exists for a long time, whereas the corporeal domain is temporary (*ibid.*, p. 2b), therefore the body in the Jewish philosophical tradition is a non-presence. It is a target of ascetic exercises, self-torturing (*ibid.*, p. 84b, “he should habituate the body to consume the food that decreases the body heat, and to ascetic acts and beatings”), and an exclusion. Every significant event in the personal (and collective) advancement along the spiritual path is characterized by the dominance of the mind and the disappearance/diminution/enfeebling of the body. Emblematic of this mentality is the divine revelation on Mount Sinai when God conferred the Torah on the People of Israel (*ibid.*, p. 39b: “when the mental aspects strengthened and the corporeal enfeebled”). Typical is the description of Moses, the lawgiver and the leading human figure in this formative event in Jewish culture, as freed from bodily needs, such as sleep and food during forty days on Mount Sinai “ascending in virtues and mental achievements” (*ibid.*, p. 25a).

Elitist as this philosophical theme was, its concepts did not remain confined to abstract discourse. They carried plain social and cultural-religious consequences. They are meticulously enumerated in a tract composed by Mattathias Alatrino (Città di Castello, 1564).⁴⁰ The need

#80r], 4a, 6b, 62b, 64b; Emmanuel of Rome, *Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (Naples, 1487), 60.

³⁹ Joseph b. David Ibn Yaḥya, *Derekh Ḥayyim*, MSS Oxford—C. Roth Collection 401, pp. 11b, 26b–27a, 28b–29b, 30a, 35b, 50b, 54b; Sermons from the Fifteenth Century, MSS Parma—Biblioteca Palatina, De Rossi 2373 (1140) [IMHM #13238], 3b, 9b, 50a, 52a; Obadiah Sforno, *Commentary on Sayings of the Fathers*, ed. Zeev Gottlieb (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1983), 365 (commentary on Avot 3,1); *idem*, *Or Anmim* [Light of Gentiles] (Jerusalem: n.p., 1984), 94, 99, 105; Emmanuel of Rome, *Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, 27, 35, 72, 77, 87–88, 90, 109, 113, 145, 151, 176, 178.

⁴⁰ Mattathias b. Judah Alatrino, *Commentary to ‘Behinat Olam’*, MSS Oxford—Bodleian Library, Heb. e.15 BPC 2757 [IMHM #22719].

for an ascetic life has been mentioned previously. It is related to the presentation of the body as a huge prison (*ibid.*, p. 35b). One should add next to this theme the significant contribution of philosophical writings to misogynic Jewish discourse.⁴¹ The “Woman” represents the material aspects of life, especially due to her lustful and unstable character in general and her unbridled sexuality in particular.⁴² It is incumbent on the husband to instruct his wife to serve him as the body should serve the soul (*ibid.*, 14b, 30b). The philosophical position in Italy expanded this sensibility to various age phases, and their required adaptations of each life phase to the study curriculum (*ibid.*, p. 37a). Of special attention are the juvenile years—mainly those preceding marriage—as prone to bodily lasciviousness and in need of control by adults.⁴³ Lastly, two factors that would become more significant in late sixteenth century and later, the occupation with “evil inclinations” (*Yézer HaRa*), rooted in bodily temper, and with penitence (*ibid.*, p. 37b).

The philosophical school has a long history in Jewish-Italian communities. It was active in the late thirteenth, the fourteenth to fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries. Famous figures—such as Johanan Alemanno and Emmanuele Romano—composed well structured tracts, or biblical hermeneutics, while others of lesser fame left drafts of public preaching. Due to the longevity of this school, its adherents were required to prove elasticity and capacity for adaptation and response to changing cultural circumstances. Some of them even reached new conclusions, not always in accordance with the “classical” Aristotelian framework. Such is the case of Judah Moscato in his famous and influential sermon collection *The Dispersions of Judah* (*Nefuzot Yehudah*).⁴⁴ This

⁴¹ Alemanno, *Hayyei Olam*, MSS Mantua—The Jewish Community 21, 23a–b, 25a–b, 29b, 49b–54b. The misogynic attitude appears in many of Alemanno’s writings; Sermons from the Fifteenth Century, MSS Parma—Biblioteca Palatina, De Rossi 2373 (1140), 58a; David of Rocca Martina, *Sefer Zekhut Adam*, MSS Parma—Biblioteca Palatina Cod. Parm. 2567 [IMHM #13529], 2a, 6a, 15b; Obadiah Sforno, *Commentary on Sayings of the Fathers*, 360–361 (commentary on Avot 2,8); Emmanuel of Rome, *Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, 1, 60, 90, 110, 124, 173; Abraham Farissol, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, ed. Simchah HaLevi Bamberger, *Kovez Al Yad* N.S. 10 (12): 49.

⁴² An idea that goes back to Greek thought, see the platonic dialogue Timaios 91b.

⁴³ Other references to the various corporeal characters according to age phases, see Alemanno, *Hayyei Olam*, MSS Mantua—The Jewish Community 21, 49b–54b, 61b; Jacob b. David Provenzali, *Commentary on Song of Songs She’ar Yishuv*, Constantinople 1578, 3a; Abraham Farissol, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, 67, 69.

⁴⁴ Judah Moscato, *Nefuzot Yehudah* [The Dispersions of Judah] (Warsaw, 1871). The book was only printed once during the sixteenth century (Venice: Zuan Bragadin,

book is fundamental for understanding the cultural agenda at the close of the sixteenth century. Every issue of importance and the “hot” zones of contentions in Jewish communities and within its elite, or the contemporary responses to novel non-Jewish historical circumstances, are reflected in this comprehensive book. The premises of discussion—the corporeal presence of soul/spirit/psyche in the organs, bristling desires, sensitivity to age phases, the bodily basis of personal characters, ascetic activity—are all known from the past. They stand next to new themes; the body is not an object only to be enfeebled and become un-present/nonexistent. Bodily inclinations—and “Material” (*Homer*) in general—could be corrected and/or sublimated.⁴⁵ It is a process of passage from laicity to “Sanctity” (*Kedushah*):⁴⁶ “Each man should care to perfect his body and his soul and climb the scales of perfection until the body itself would rise to spiritual levels ... when the lust of a man in anger is invigorating it, [the lust] should shift to spiritual level to worship his God Creator in purity and sanctity.”⁴⁷ The vital bodily forces, evil by their nature, should be surrendered and used “in sanctity” (*be-Kedushah*). Such sermons had concrete reverberations in Jewish communities, if we keep in mind that Moscato dedicated some of his sermons to the education of young men and women and to pedagogical innovations suffused with pietism and stricter discipline.

The change in relation to the body was not confined to cultural images and/or representations, but extended to social praxis. The direction of change, very much like in non-Jewish urban society in Italy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was the intention to shape the human body and bodily behavior in a more refined and controlled manner in regard to daily functions—such as walking, talking (and silence!), eating, dressing, behavior in company—and the accompanying sentiments of timidity, shame, and restraint. The adoption of such a model in Jewish-Italian context could be found in Gedaliah ben

1589). On the importance of this book in the homiletic tradition in Italy, see Joseph Dan, *Hebrew Ethical and Homiletical Literature (The Middle Ages and Early Modern Period)* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1975), 191–197 (Hebrew).

⁴⁵ This is the double sense of the verb used (*letakken*). The kabbalistic sense of this act, especially in the Lurianic school, would be later discussed.

⁴⁶ This citation relates to the growing importance of Sanctity in contemporary Jewish discourse. See *Reshit Hokhmah*, dedicating an entire section to Sanctity [*Sha'ar Kedushah*], and Vital's Gates of Sanctity [*Sha'arei Kedushah*].

⁴⁷ Judah Moscato, *Nefuzot Yehudah*, sermon 27, 66a.

Joseph ibn Yahya's tract *The Book for The Erudite*⁴⁸ (*Sefer HaMaskil*), constructed as a dialogue between good and evil inclinations (*Yezer HaTov*, *Yezer HaRa*):

Social manners [*Derekh Erez*], *creanza* (!) in Italian. I would only specify some norms how to respect every man and [norms appertaining to] every matter even the smallest ... not to speak in front a superior unless called to ... in festivity do not be the first one to eat nor to stretch your hand to the food ... do not stretch your hand in front of your companion, do not bite the food and leave the remains in front of him [the person sitting next] ... put your hand on your mouth while belching and yawning. [The lord of the house] should not use excessive discipline inside the house, to give from the food he consumes to the rest of the house members, a guest should not bring another guest, not to enter another house unexpectedly, a guest should not inquire about the host's secrets nor look upon his women or property so as not to become suspect ... to notify others of his illness so that others would not contract his disease, not to lock the guests in a room so that they would not be able to go to the toilet, not to ask two other persons what they were talking about, two persons eating from a bowl should wait for one another, not to talk while eating so as not to expose the food in his mouth or to discharge something repulsive, do not look at people while they eat lest they might be shamed, to be modest about his cup [drinking habits], pocket [spending money] and anger, not to touch anything with filthy fingers and certainly not any food ... should other remain standing to honor you your words should be short, not to be honored by something that might cause his mate a disgrace.⁴⁹

Even the instructions to preachers, how to improve their *actio* (the performative aspect of public sermonizing) were echoed in the Jewish context. In relation to the growing occupation with post-Humanist rhetorical literature, Jacob Zahalon composed *Or HaDarshanim* (Light of Preachers), an entire book of guidance dedicated solely to preaching, in which he included advisory chapters about the voice, bodily movements, preparation preceding the preaching, the corporeal sanity of the preacher, and the conduct after the sermon's conclusion.⁵⁰ Yet most of etiquette literature or social etiquette concerning the shaping of the body were not directed to anonymous readers, but to a well defined

⁴⁸ The title could also be translated as "The Erudite Book."

⁴⁹ Gedaliah ben Joseph ibn Yahya, *Sefer HaMaskil* [Book of the Erudite], MSS London—British Library Add. 27001, Margulioth Catalogue 934/4 [IMHM #5668], 135b.

⁵⁰ On this tract, see Henry Adler Sosland, *A Guide for Preachers on Composing and Delivering Sermons: The Or Ha-Darshanim of Jacob Zahalon: A Seventeenth-Century Italian Preacher's Manual* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1987), 5–97.

component of the Jewish population, namely young persons during the years preceding the marriage. Such is the case in a seventeenth-century “moral guide” by Judah b. Isaac Halevi, presented as befitting the contemporary social context, and easy to follow and read:

Searching the books of my late father I found this tract, small in quantity, large in quality, all faded in its letters ... instructions to guide a man in religious and earthly issues, in fine moralities and negotiations, not to be fulfilled in ascetic and laborious mode, but [containing] regulations everyone could follow ... and I have copied and edited them and divided it to thirty parts, so that any reader could complete its reading at least once a month, so that he [the potential reader] would consider following these rules during the daily reading ... [the manuscript was] copied for the sake of the lad David son of Moses Portaleone of Mantua.⁵¹

The thirty chapters contain various aspects of bodily deportment, such as the prohibition against rising naked from bed, conduct in the toilet, moderate eating, critique of erotic love, table manners, the conduct of three persons walking together, sexual temptations, the sacralization of daily activities (including eating and sexuality).⁵² In another tract copied and/or composed⁵³ for another juvenile, the legitimacy and motivation for similar instructions are laid bare: “Comport yourself in gravity and respect/honor, avoid the company of those of no-weight, cease to hang about at streets and the joy/recklessness of juveniles ... and remain constantly in the company of grave ones [or: those persons of weight] and sages.”⁵⁴ Certain bodily modes or styles of comportment directly reflect personal virtues, conforming to social demands and regulations. In this case “heavy”—that is slow and well-performed mode—or “grave” movement is an indication of seriousness and respect and a passage from unbridled juvenile years to maturity. But the linkage goes further than being a mere sign. It refers to a deep pedagogic lever, referring to the intimate link between the “internal” and the “external.” In the Jewish-Italian context as well the body speaks by identifiable and decipherable corporeal semiotic system. The internal virtues, the intention, and the emotions of others are exposed

⁵¹ Judah b. Isaac HaLevi, *Moral Tract*, MSS Oxford—C. Roth Collection 405 [IMHM #15453], 1b, 83b.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3b, 4a, 5a, 9a, 10b, 11b, 13b, 15b, 38b, 48a.

⁵³ The verb “to copy” (*le-ha’atik*) carries in contemporary Hebrew both senses.

⁵⁴ *Book of Doctrine*, MSS Budapest—National Academy of Sciences, Kaufmann Collection A.266 [IMHM 14712], p. 21. See also *ibid.*, 10, 409, where the compiler asserts that the tract is intended for young men.

by their deportment. This mental frame was accepted as natural in Jewish milieu as well, as in the works of Mordecai Dato, a leading Italian Kabbalist and well attuned to contemporary non-Jewish culture:

It is written “I was shamed and disgraced, carrying the ignominy of my youth,” the shame is internal, inside man’s heart, and the disgrace is external and exposed to others by the face’s reddishness due to the heart’s shame. Both of them are needed [for true penitence], yet shame precedes the disgrace as the thought [precedes] the act.⁵⁵

This link can work both ways, as a sign of the internal through the external and visible, and as a pedagogic lever to reconstruct and influence the internal by the external body language.

The author of the tract, mentioned previously, to be read monthly, used a well known literary device of presuming to find an old manuscript in his father’s property, as an assertion of its value and antiquity. In regard to antiquity he was certainly right, since the “civility process” has a long history in the Jewish context—still to be explored—going back to the mishnaic and talmudic period.⁵⁶ Yet this tradition remained practically unknown, being confined to a tiny segment of the population, in manuscript and oral form. During the Middle Ages several tracts were written in a Jewish context, revivifying this tradition, and endowing it with new elements from Muslim, Catholic and Byzantine traditions. Only during the Early Modern Period did this civilizing trend start to spread and become part of the pedagogic curriculum in Jewish-Italian communities. No longer merely a list of rules to be followed, “good manners” were related to other cultural factors, such as pedagogic innovations, social hierarchy, juvenile sub-culture, pietistic movements, and the spread of Kabbalah.

⁵⁵ Mordechai Dato, *Derekh Emunah* [Path of Belief], MSS Cincinnati—Hebrew Union College 631 [IMHM #21962], p. 2a. For other detailed references to bodily signs of arrogance, see Azariah Figo, *Sefer Binah Le’Ittim* [Shrewdness for proper Times] (Jerusalem: Makhon Lev Sameah, 1989), Vol. I, 10, 50, 120–121; Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto [Ramchal], *Mesillat Yesharim* [Pathway for the Strict] (Jerusalem: Makhon Ofek, 2001), 108–110. On the civilizing process in the Jewish-Italian context, see Roni Weinstein, “Feminine Religiosity in Jewish-Italian Context during the Early Modern Period: Preliminary Observations,” in: *Atti del IX Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Italia Judaica: Donne nella storia d’Italia*, Lucca, June 2005, (Florence: Giuntina, 2007), 147–170; idem, “The Seventeenth-Century Kabbalist Abraham Yagel-Galico on Women, Family and Civilizing Process,” in *Festschrift in Honor of Roberto Bonfil*, ed. Elisheva Baumgarten, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin and Roni Weinstein (forthcoming).

⁵⁶ *The Treatises Derek Erez*, *Masseket Derek Erez Pirke Ben Azzi Tosefta Derek Erez*, ed. Michael Higger (New York: Debe Rabanan, 1935).

Both tracts “copied” for the sake of young boys contained rules such as bodily gravity and table manners, alongside instructions concerning sexual morality, personal virtues and acts of penitence and kabbalistic reparations (*Tikkunim*).⁵⁷ The pedagogical presupposition animating these tracts is the intimate link between the shaping of correct external behavior according to social expectations and the personal characters and virtues. Such an attitude is common to Jewish and Catholic guiding tracts dealing with the education of the younger generation.⁵⁸ Jewish tutors composed for their disciples small tracts, using the isomorphism internal/external and connecting it to fundamental issues that contemporary Jewish communities confronted.⁵⁹ The same words appearing in the Jewish tracts could fit well with non-Jewish compositions, such as *De liberis recte instituendis* composed by the cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto (1477–1547), in which he related between morality, reasoning and moderation, measured (“grave”) movements, low voice and slow speaking. The Counter-Reformation set the education of youth as a major topic in its agenda. The old monastic and humanistic traditions were adapted to a sixteenth and seventeenth century context. Modesty, piety, and “Christian Civility” were capillary components in shaping a good Catholic and a good citizen. Unlike in previous centuries, the Church had several ways by which to spread and put into practice this message, such as catechism schools, printed books, massive public preaching, confession, and schooling system. A deep change necessitated harsh education and tighter control over the young, for which teachers and parents were to cooperate and offer mutual assistance. According to Church pedagogues, it implied physical disciplining of children, the signs of corporeal gestures and social behavior. Gravity—in external behavior—was

⁵⁷ *Book of Doctrine*, MSS Budapest—National Academy of Sciences, Kaufmann Collection A.266, pp. 21, 412; Judah b. Isaac HaLevi, Moral Tract, MSS Oxford—C. Roth Collection 405, pp. 2b–3a, 6a, 22b–24b, 31b, 38b–39a, 48a, 71a–73a, 81a.

⁵⁸ The secondary literature on this theme is vast. For brevity’s sake I will refer only to Ottavia Niccoli, “Education et discipline: les bonnes manières des enfants dans l’Italie de la Contre-Réforme,” in *La ville et la cour. Des bonnes et des mauvaises manières*, ed. Daniela Romagnoli (Paris; Fayard, 1995), 185–218; Werner Gundersheimer, “Norms and Forms of Behavior in Late Sixteenth-Century Ferrara,” in *Educare il corpo, educare la parola nella trattatistica del Rinascimento*, ed. Giorgio Patrizi and Amedeo Quondam (Roma: Bulzoni Editore 1998), 111–121. On the importance of body language in Italy, see Peter Burke, “The language of gesture in early modern Italy,” *A Cultural History of Gesture*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), 71–83.

⁵⁹ Roni Weinstein, “What did little Samuel read in his Notebook. Jewish Education in Italy during the Catholic Reformation Period,” *Italia* 13–15 (2001): 131–168 (Hebrew).

a tool to develop “modesty”—i.e., humility, restraints, and harsh self-judgment. The emotions were also to be schooled in this way; restraint would prevent the heart and feelings from erupting in an uncontrolled manner.

In the Jewish context the “agents of change” were predominantly persons related to kabbalistic traditions or even renowned local Kabbalists.⁶⁰ Mordecai Dato, mentioned previously in relation to external and internal expressions of shame, discussed in the same tract the issues of abstention from “titillating pleasures in the imagination” and ascetic practices (described as “self-sanctification”) even in regard to permitted things.⁶¹ Sexuality and sexual morality became emblematic in the attempt to control and channel bodily needs,⁶² as shown by the two tracts composed by adults to their grandchildren and other young potential readers.⁶³ Sexuality and erotic behavior should be conducted in a “judicial and orderly manner” (*kaSeder ve-kaMishpat*), should be regulated as a mode of self-sanctification and sanctifying God, and should certainly not be for self-gratification. Discussions about sexuality are not an isolated phenomenon, but a part of growing occupation with sin and penitence and the need to offer concrete means of self-purification, and—according to Lurianic traditions—of healing the wounds of Divinity itself. God and man are, as never before, intimated by rituals of “reparations” (*Tikkunim*), intensified substantially during the seventeenth century. These innovative rituals provide a theurgical bridge between Divinity on one hand and the increasing need for penitential activity on the other. The tract, suggesting a monthly reading, constructs a parallel bridge between social norms and civilizing process on the one hand and “penitential reparations” (*Tikkunei Teshuvah*) on the other hand.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ See also the general thesis suggested by Roberto Bonfil, “Change in the Cultural Patterns of a Jewish Society in Crisis” (see note 2).

⁶¹ Mordechai Dato, *Derekh Emunah*, MSS Cincinnati—Hebrew Union College 631, 3a, as well as 2b, 5b.

⁶² I am currently completing comprehensive research on sexuality and control of the young in Jewish-Italian communities during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Kabbalistically oriented figures played a major role in enforcing the new mentality of restraints and discipline.

⁶³ *Book of Doctrine*, MSS Budapest—National Academy of Sciences, Kaufmann Collection A.266, 21, 412; Judah b. Isaac HaLevi, *Moral Tract*, MSS Oxford—C. Roth Collection 405, 3b, 10b, 22b–24b, 31b, 71a–73a.

⁶⁴ Judah b. Isaac HaLevi, *Moral Tract*, MSS Oxford—C. Roth Collection 405, 81a–82b, a list of sins and their parallel penitential acts.

The potentiality of a body sanctified and filled with divine presence is certainly related to the growing corporeal parameters in the theological kabbalistic discourse mentioned previously. If the sanctificatory attitude to the body is the bright side of the moon, the dark side is an obsessive occupation with sin and evil, emanating from the same body. Here again, innovation arises from the manipulation and re-elaboration of old motives. The body and soul are not distinct entities but two modes of looking on the enigmatic being, which is human life. Every “mental” occurrence has a parallel change on the corporeal level. The three mental forces of *Nefesh-Ruah-Neshamah* have all distinct and well-defined positions in the body: liver, heart, and brain. Sin and evil inclinations (*Yēzer Ra*) are derived from perfectly normal bodily functions; hence their weight in the bodily arena and individual comportment is a matter of free choice. Yet their presence gradually became more menacing and problematic in the mind of seventeenth-century Jewish thinkers in Italy. *Yēzer HaRa* in the *Tracts on Penitence* (*Sefer Ma’amarim me-Inyan HaTeshuvah*) composed by Eliezer Nahman Foa is very corporeal and sensual.⁶⁵ The body is exposed to the regard of a Panopticon-like God. The divine eye is not hindered by physical tissues, capable of entering deep into the human soul, in a similar way that a possessive spirit entering a body could see and tell about other people as if behind an opaque wall. Evil is born with man and lodges in one of the heart’s chambers, “always looking and lurking to enter the chamber inhabited by the good inclinations.” It leaves its marks on all body members; it consumes them as a worm consumes the fruit from within. The physical members testify, in front of God and celestial court, on human sins. Sin could even pass on to next generation (“leave his mark on his descendants”). The descriptions in Foa’s tracts seem to endow evil inclinations with independent personality, a tricky and cunning personality. The advices he furnishes in regard to combating him are not the “classical” ones of Jewish culture, at least in Italian context. One such advice is to conquer the *Yēzer HaRa*, not to kill him, to use counter

⁶⁵ Eliezer Nahman Foa, *Sefer Ma’amarim me-Inyan HaTeshuvah* [Tracts on Penitence], ed. Avigdor Glandauer and Zvi Zeev Lieberman (London: n.p., 1993), 1–44. See also Raphael b. Gabriel of Norsì, *Sefer Oraḥ Ḥayyim* [Book of Proper Life Mode] (Zhitomir: Print of Schapira Brothers, 1858), 4–9, 21–29, 40, 47, 57, 59–60; Moshe Ḥayyim Luzzatto, *Mesillat Yesharim*, 73, 97, 98—sin and poison invading the body, and defilement [*Tumah*] as physical presence; Gedaliah ben Joseph ibn Yahya, *Sefer HaMaskil*, MSS London—British Library Add. 27001, 109b–110a, 116a, 131a—the body enjoys the sin, evil is installed in specific body members.

stratagems and not violence, i.e., self-violence, in order to minimize its harm. Confronting evil is, in other words, confronting the body and its needs. As the body is inseparable from existence so is evil, and so is the need to reach a compromise unavoidable. The corporeality of evilness is made present by elaboration of the old conception of sin as disease in ever detailed, materialized, and medical terms. The sermons of Azariah Figo, *Wisdom for the proper Times (Binah le'Ittim)*, one of the typical products of Jewish Baroque religiosity, justifies the study and recitation of the mishnaic *Sayings of the Fathers (Massekhet Avot)* between the first and last days of Passover

for the sake of keeping good health, as most people during this period [the Jewish Passover] are accustomed at the beginning of spring to cleanse their bodies by evacuations and blood letting, since boiling of blood heat is increasing [at this time of the year], and for the sake of mental health which contributes greatly to the corporeal sanity and the mingling of humors, we accustom ourselves to study these wholesome moral teachings and virtues, which are the real medicine.⁶⁶

The physical purifying of the body, by blood expurgation, is conducted during spring and renovation of the world, which is the time of religious festivity, simultaneously encouraging Jewish individuals to self-repentance and the Study of Torah. In several of his sermons Figo elaborates in detail the analogy between sickness of the body, sinful behavior and bodily ailments.⁶⁷

Sin was also described as defilement of the body, and hence as contact with the demonic forces. As many of his contemporaries in Italy—both Jews and Catholics—Foa is occupied with the influence of the demonic domain on the human life, and its infiltration into the most profound and intimate recesses of the soul and in character and behavior. The precision used to describe this dark kingdom or the three shifts of angels changing during every night, is indicative of early modern fascination with evil in general. Most present of this devilish domain is naturally “The Angel of Death” (*Mal'akh HaMavet*), the impersonation of the immanence of death in human life and the actual moment of passing away. As in the Catholic context, the impact of the visualization of death and demonic forces is intended to increase fears and insecurity of this worldly existence.

An Italian Kabbalist, Aaron Berechiah Modena, was the author of one of the most comprehensive Jewish compendiums about death

⁶⁶ Azariah Figo, *Sefer Binah Le'Ittim*, Vol. II, 87, sermon 34.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, sermons 6, 8, 10, 34, 43, 46, 52, 61, 67, 73.

during the seventeenth century: *The Passage of Jabbok (Ma'avar Yabbok)*.⁶⁸ It is an encyclopedic book both in its extent and the variety of themes touched. It is a classical *ars bene moriendi* book in the Jewish milieu, accompanying the about-to-die in his last phases. It describes as well the passage to the after-world, the preparations of the body for burial, the mourning process of the living, their intimate relationship with the world of the dead, the religious significance of various customs, especially the kabbalistic-theurgic influence on Divinity, and the fearful and contaminating contact with the demonic and magical domain. Yet death, paradoxically the most corporeal event in life, is the point of reference to the discussion of various themes. Hardly any theme of importance in seventeenth-century cultural and religious discourse, both old and new, is lacking in *Ma'avar Yabbok*: sin and repentance, pregnancy and birth, the new role of confession, sexual practices, the fear of the feminine demonic figure *Lilith* in regard to gender intimacy, ascetic acts, the demonic domain and its deep involvement in quotidian life, the contact with the feminine aspect of Divinity (the *Shekhinah*), the world of after-life (heaven, hell, and purgatory), astrological beliefs and practices, spiritual techniques and meditations, food consumption, and synagogue liturgy. It is the body, in its process of decay and disappearance that provides the focus of all of these crucial themes for religious and cultural changes during the seventeenth-century communities in Italy. The book is certainly innovative, but the composer presents himself as a spokesman of an entire public. This assertion is justified by repeated statements that his work was ordered by confraternities (*Havurot*) occupied with death rituals as well as by local communities.⁶⁹

Not only dramatic events—such as death and passage to after-life domains—were to be reshaped according to kabbalistic conceptions and practices. Daily aspects, such as sleep and eating habits, of relatively minor importance in public discourse in Italy until now, attracted more attention. Night was re-conquered to make it a part of religious

⁶⁸ On Aaron Berechiah Modena, see Avriel Bar-Levav, “Rabbi Aaron Berechiah Modena and Rabbi Naftali HaCohen Katz, Founding Fathers of Books of the Dead and Books of the Sick,” *Asufot* 9 (1995): 189–197 (Hebrew).

⁶⁹ Aaron Berechiah Modena, *Sefer Ma'avar Yabbok* [The Passage of Jabbok] (Jerusalem: Ahavat Shalom Edition, 1996), introduction of the author, 22–23, section “Siftei Zedek” chapter 7, section “Attar Anan Ketoret” chapters 4 and 6, section “Helek Korban Ta’anit” chapter 2, section “Minḥat Aharon” chapter 7, author’s epilogue, 455–456.

activity. It marks a noticeable shift from medieval mentality, considering the night hours as relating to demonic forces. Special confraternities were dedicated to special kabbalistic rituals of reparations (*Tikkunim*) intended to restore the lost balance and intimacy between the feminine and masculine aspects of Divinity. The most famous type of such activity was called “The Awakeners of Dawn” (*Me’irei HaShahar*). Several of the leading Italian kabbalistic figures were personally involved in confraternal activity and composed special tracts for their sake. The most well-known among these small tracts is the one composed by Aaron Berechiah Modena of a homonymous title *Me’irei HaShahar*, to which he repeatedly refers in his more influential book *Ma’avar Yabbok*.⁷⁰ The passage from awakened state to sleep is similar in character and consequences to the passage from life to death, in regard to defilement of the body and the contact with malevolent forces. The positive aspect is the opportunity provided by the sleeping state to study divine secrets and approach God, while bodily forces are dormant. Yet the overall attitude to sleep is negative and requires ascetic abstention (“Little sleep, little nap, little idleness of lying in pleasures and vanities of time”). Very much like instructions given by Catholic spiritual guides—the most famous are the ones of Jean Gerson—Berechiah Modena advises sleeping with hands covered by gloves and with the sexual organs covered by underwear to prevent sexual temptation, and possible masturbation.⁷¹ The dreams during sleeping hours carry further weight, since man is considered responsible for their content, especially those of an erotic character.⁷² The ritual implications of these changes are further elaborated by Rabbi Pinḥas Baruch Monselice (Ferrara, mid-seventeenth century), again a person with strong kabbalistic affiliations. Monselice composed a booklet dedicated entirely to ritualization of the moments preceding sleep. It comprises a short prayer of pardon and forgiveness to others, another one against any harm neither by demonic potencies nor by witchcraft performed by men and women, further prayer for encouraging dreams of positive content, and finally the conclusion “and then will you lay calmly and fearless since your sleep would delight you.”⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid., section “Minḥat Aharon” chapter 18.

⁷¹ Ibid., section “Korban Ta’anit” chapter 2.

⁷² Eliezer Naḥman Foa, *Sefer Ma’amarim mi-Inyyan HaTeshuvah*, 16. See also *ibid.*, 17—on three shifts of demonic forces active during night hours.

⁷³ Pinḥas Baruch b. Pelatiah Monselice, *Magen Hayyim* [Shield of Life], MSS St. Petersburg—Institute of Oriental Studies A021 [IMHM #52285], 2b, 3b, 4a–b, 5a.

Food consumption is meticulously regulated in Jewish Halakhah. Yet medieval Kabbalah and later Lurianic pietism endowed it with further dimensions of importance in religious life.⁷⁴ The inclusion of food and eating habits in kabbalistic discourse in Italy still needs much elaboration. Suffice in this context the reference to (again!) the book *Ma'avar Yabbok*, where the author encourages abstaining from meat during regular days, and supports his stand by asserting that carnivorous animals acquire a cruel and vicious character that passes on to their consumers. The action of eating should be accompanied by mental meditations (*Kavvanot*), and be intended to feed the spirit with holy elements contained in the food. There always lurks a danger of turning this simple daily need into dangerous action, strengthening the demonic spheres.⁷⁵ This innovatory trend relates to the growing interest in sexuality—the similarity between food consumption and eroticism is a common place in medieval culture—and the interest in table manners as a component in Jewish-Italian civilizational guide books.

Undoubtedly the most bodily of human life in early modern Jewish culture is sexuality. Sexual desire is not only the dominant of bodily desires but archetypal to all carnality and immersion in worldly life. Yet most of the tracts, composed in manuscript form and in print, address a well-defined potential reading-public: juvenile men and women (mostly men) during their pre-marriage years, or the time period shortly following the start of the official and normative sexual life, during the period of interiorizing the halakhic norms.⁷⁶ The sexual/erotic discourse in early modern Jewish-Italian communities is suffused with kabbalistic terminology and concepts and at the same time has a decidedly practical orientation. Typical in this respect are the letters composed (and printed for the first time during the life-time of the author) by Rabbi

⁷⁴ On the medieval and early modern kabbalistic attitudes in regard to food, see Joel Hecker, *Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals: Eating and Embodiment in Medieval Kabbalah* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005); Ronit Meroz, "Selection from Ephraim Penzies: Luria's Sermon in Jerusalem and the *Kavvanah* in Taking Food," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 10 (1992): 211–257. For a general discussion of Jewish-Italian food habits, see Ariel Toaff, *Mangiare alla giudia: la cucina ebraica in Italia dal Rinascimento all'età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000).

⁷⁵ Aaron Berechiah Modena, *Sefer Ma'avar Yabbok*, section "Sifte Emet" chapter 16, section "Sifte Renanot" chapters 1 and 22.

⁷⁶ *Book of Doctrine*, MSS Budapest—National Academy of Sciences, Kaufmann Collection A.266, 10, 409; Judah b. Isaac HaLevi, *Moral Tract*, MSS Oxford—C. Roth Collection 405, 83b.

Moses Zacuto, a leading seventeenth-century Kabbalist.⁷⁷ Zacuto dedicates several letters to this issue, but of special interest are the letters composed when one of his beloved disciples is about to marry. These letters accompany the marriage process and actually provide a kabbalistic manual of normative sexuality, normative in two senses since performed within marriage and according to new kabbalistic perspectives. It specifies the proper time for copulation (beyond the ones mentioned in the Talmud), the intentions and meditations/thoughts during the sexual act, the preparation of the marriage room, describes the intimacy and modesty between the couple, and provides instructions regarding emotions and bodily control (“not to heat oneself too much”). The regulations originally composed in esoteric kabbalistic circles were later spread by tracts to be read and digested by young men before their marriage, as the tract *The Glory of Youth (Tiferet Bahurim)* by Pinḥas Baruch Monselice, mentioned previously in regard to ritualizing sleep. It is a guiding tract intended for unmarried young men, and it deals with various aspects of marriage life, yet focusing on sexuality, as the index of themes testifies:

- Chapter one about the obligation of any man pertaining to the Jewish nation to take a wife
- Chapter two ... to find a proper family and to make a match with her
- Chapter three about the prohibition to copulate with his future bride prior to making the act of betrothal and conferring a marriage writ (*Ketubbah*)
- Chapter four about the location of the wedding bed
- Chapter five about the investigation that the groom conducts, asking his wife if she has immersed herself in water to purify herself ...
- Chapter six about the food-abstention of the groom and the bride during the wedding day
- Chapter seven about the wedding feast ...
- Chapter eight about the masculine mental intention/meditation (*Kavanah*) of thought, speaking and acting during the sexual act
- Chapter nine about masculine modesty and shyness during copulation
- Chapter ten about the obligation of ceasing the sexual act after seeing virginity blood
- Chapter eleven about the proper modes of copulating with his wife, incumbent upon the man
- Chapter twelve about blessing God after seeing virginity blood
- Chapter thirteen about diminishing sexual activity in general

⁷⁷ *Letters of Moses Zacuto*, ed. Mordechai Attiya (Jerusalem: Yeshivat HaḤayyim ve-HaShalom, 1999), 22, 31, 68, 74–75, 81, 89, 121–124, 127–128, 130–133. On various aspects of Zacuto’s activities, see the special issue of *Pe’amim* 96 (2003) (Hebrew).

- Chapter fourteen about the masculine obligation of “visiting”⁷⁸ his wife after her ritual immersion and before traveling away from home
- Chapter fifteen about the obligations, incumbent upon the women, that her will and thought should cling to her husband during copulation
- Chapter sixteen about the need to engage with his wife modestly, not in front of any living creature, not even animals
- Chapter seventeen about the need to feel shame during the sexual act, even with his own wife
- Chapter eighteen about cautiousness to keep away from a menstruating woman
- Chapter nineteen to abstain from sexual activity during famine or other tribulations befalling the public
- Chapter twenty to cherish his wife more than his body
- Chapter twenty-one about the masculine obligation to supervise his children and guide them in the fear of God
- Chapter twenty-two about the need of every man to consider his coming death.⁷⁹

The testimonies mentioned thus far are predominantly produced by a cultural elite, and reflecting their perspectives, including on body, or better say the “civilized body.” This aspect of forming the body in Jewish context stood in complicated and intense relationship with the “magical body.” The analysis of magical beliefs and practices, their role in the religious tradition, and the common cultural substratum with non-Jewish surroundings, has hardly been started in Jewish-Italian context. Most of the important work conducted in this domain relates to ideas and concepts of magic in the cultural elite and not to deeply rooted beliefs and praxis among the Jewish population at large. Yet it is quite obvious that during the late sixteenth and into the seventeenth century there is a substantial increase in writings on these themes. Does this reflect a real expansion in magical practices within local communities? Was it an aspect suppressed until the Early Modern Period which erupted once the auto-censorship mechanisms were enfeebled? It would be too early to assert. Yet the legitimacy of magic in early modern society is clear from other cultural contexts and other geographical zones. In Italy it is partly attributed to the growing interest in the body, and most certainly in the “magical body.”⁸⁰ Many magical receipts

⁷⁸ Euphemism for the sexual act.

⁷⁹ MS Oxford, Bodleian Library 1418, Regg. 33 (IMHM #2242), 8a–b. I intend to publish this booklet, and introduce it by a comprehensive foreword.

⁸⁰ On the “magical body” in early modern Italy, see Luisa Accati, “The Spirit of Fornication: Virtue of the Soul and Virtue of the Body in Friuli, 1600–1800,” in *Sex and*

and practices begin to appear in personal documents,⁸¹ or as alternative mode to legitimate certain religious commandments and customs.⁸² The kabbalistic mentality of leveling all aspects of ontology—from Divinity to earthly matter—in a great “Chain of Being” of deep sympathy and similitude, and even the theurgical dialogue between God and man, bestow upon magic a more important presence and legitimacy.⁸³ The close contact with the non-Jewish surroundings is testified by a seventeenth-century responsum, concerning the hesitation to send a young (Jewish) girl, suffering from an ailment ascribed to witchcraft, to be cured by a (Catholic) priest or by a monk.⁸⁴

The “magical body” is put on public stage during well-orchestrated rituals of possession, i.e., the battles against evil spirits entering the bodies of (mainly) women. It is mostly a theatrical scene, deriving its sense and potency from a big crowd of spectators, where the big hero on stage is the human body and its potential bizarre symptoms. As in the Catholic world in Europe the possession is a unique opportunity to spread and legitimize the new religious message. In the Jewish-Italian context the possession cases start to spread mainly after the mid-sixteenth century, and the dominant figures occupied in the healing, i.e., chasing out the possessive spirit, are mainly kabbalistic figures related to Rabbi Moses Zacuto.⁸⁵ Possession and healing techniques

Gender in Historical Perspective, ed. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 110–140; Piero Camporesi, *Il sugo della vita. Simbolismo e magia del sangue* (Milano: Mondadori, 1988).

⁸¹ MSS New-York—Columbia university, bx8.9 [IMHM #32389], no pagination, penultimate page; MSS Oxford—Bodleian Library Mich. 22, Neubauer Catalogue 502/2 [IMHM 19063], 97a.

⁸² Abraham Yagel-Gallico, *Sefer Be'er-Sheva* [The Book Beer-Shevah], MSS Oxford—Bodleian Library, Reggio 11 [IMHM 22120], 43a—kindling candles in the synagogue to combat demonic forces.

⁸³ *A Valley of Vision: The Heavenly Journey of Abraham ben Hananiah Yagel*, ed. with Introduction and Commentary by David B. Ruderman, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 272–275.

⁸⁴ Responsa from the seventeenth century, MSS Moscow—Lenin Institute 1317 [IMHM #48941], 265a–277a. See also Yaakov Boksenboim, *Letters of Jews in Italy: Selected Letters from the Sixteenth Century* (Jerusalem: Yad Yizhak Ben Zvi and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1994), letters 58–59 (Hebrew).

⁸⁵ Roni Weinstein, “Kabbalah and Jewish Exorcism in Seventeenth-Century Italian Jewish Communities: The Case of Rabbi Moses Zacuto,” in *Spirit Possession in Judaism: Cases and Contexts from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Matt Goldish (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 237–256. My analysis is different from the one suggested by Jeffrey H. Chajes, *Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), passim.

are but a thread among others that weave a lively dialogue between heaven and earth, between Divinity and the believer. Magical means theurgical activity, divine revelatory figures (*Maggidim*), premeditated dreams, ecstatic states, meditative prayers, and saintly figures—all relate the potencies of body to sanctified level and personal vicinity and intimacy with God.

Magic and medical practices were difficult to distinguish in early modern Italy. People suffering could resort to a whole repertoire of healing solutions and pass easily from university doctors of erudition to “folk” and oral healers. The situation was no different in the Jewish context, where incense and amulets of kabbalistic origin were considered legitimate therapeutic methods.⁸⁶ The presence of medieval themes, in regard to medicine and the body, persisted all through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the Galenic humoral system, astral influences on the body, the sympathy between the body and other elements (the man as reflection of the cosmos), the gender bias, and healing techniques.⁸⁷ Continuity in such fundamental aspects of culture and life is almost a triviality. What does seem most surprising, and requires further elaboration and analysis, is that such themes kept holding the monopoly in Italy during the seventeenth century as well. The work of David Ruderman presented the vast exposure of Italian Jews to medical-scientific innovations in local universities.⁸⁸ Hundreds of Jewish students from Italy and beyond followed their curriculum, mainly at the renowned university of Padua, during the years of impressive innovation in medicine: new methods of teaching were used; the visual aspect of the body served in the famous anatomical demonstrations and books; mathematical models were introduced and presented the body as a mechanical mechanism; and the microscope helped in the discovery of the cell. This intensive progress was echoed in Jewish documents, mainly by the composition of encyclopedic books dedicated to human health and special diseases (such as Pediatrics),

⁸⁶ Boksenboim, *Letters of Jews in Italy*, letter 275.

⁸⁷ Jacob b. Kalonimos Segal, *Themes for Preaching*, MSS New York—Columbia Univ. X893J151Q [IMHM #23318], 94a; Elijah Nolano, *Commentary on Job*, MSS Oxford—Bodleian Library Reggio 16, Neubauer Catalogue 348 [IMHM 17267], 10b–11a; Abraham Jagel-Gallico, *Bet Ya'ar Levanon* [Medical Encyclopedia], MSS Oxford—Bodleian Librarian, Reggio 9, BPA 1860 [IMHM 22118], passim; Gedalia ben Joseph ibn Yahya, *Shalsholet HaKabbalah* (Jerusalem: HaDorot HaRishonim ve-Korotam, 1968), 178–194, 205–207, 216–220.

⁸⁸ David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

tracts dealing with contemporary plagues, or with others devoting substantial part to medicinal issues. Certainly the innovations were not beyond the reach and knowledge of local Jews.⁸⁹ Yet when coming to make an inventory of the medical repertoire of these tracts it seems as if nothing had changed in the world, and the extent of knowledge has remained the same: the body's humors and vapors provide explanations for diseases and for changes along various phases in life; the affinity/sympathy between different levels of creation is still valid as a heuristic factor; physiognomic readings of health and destiny; the vast citations of Galenic and Hippocratic textbooks; the importance of magical numbers; and so is the recourse to medicine as a factor in theological and moral debates.⁹⁰ The lack of any reference to the anatomical books of Vesalius and others, or to mechanical-mathematical models of body, is a weighty silence. It seems that the dominance of the "magical body" in the Jewish-Italian context becomes an even more significant portent of the future.

Synthesis: "Corporealization" of Jewish-Italian Culture

The adherence to religious praxis ("Commandments," *Mitzvot*) was described by both classical-rabbinic sources and non-Jewish rivals (the Pauline and later on the Patristic concept of "Israel of the Flesh," or "Carnal Israel") as a fundamental feature of Jewish tradition.⁹¹ The particular character of Halakhah (religious law) was expressed in the way it pervaded almost every aspect of daily life, and furnished metic-

⁸⁹ See a seventeenth-century responsum in MSS New York—Jewish Theological Seminary 8201, Rabb. 1372, Acc. 01311 [IMHM #43473], 7a–8b, telling of a man that had to be castrated due to "that famous disease [syphilis]"; Azariah Figo, *Sefer Binah Le'Itim*, sermon 7—refers to eye-glasses and field-glasses.

⁹⁰ Abraham Jagel-Gallico, *Bet Ya'ar Levanon*, MSS Oxford—Bodleian Libraray, Reggio 9, passim; Idem, *Sefer Be'er-Sheva*, MSS Oxford—Bodleian Library, Reggio 11, 4b, 8b, 24a, 30b, 34b, 35b, 41b, 45b–46a, 51a, 85a; Idem, *A Valley of Vision*, 152–153, 272–273, 284–285, 328–330; Idem, *Moshi'a Hosim* [Savior of Those Taking Refuge] (Venice: Print of Zuan De Gara, 1587), 6b; *Sefer HaOlamot Ma'aseh Tuviyyah* [Book of the Worlds, The Deed of Tobiah] (Yasnitz 1710), 55a, 56b; Jacob Zahalon, *Sefer Ozar HaHayyim* [Book of Life's Treasure] (Venice, 1683), 2a, 4b, 93a–b, 95a; Eliezer b. Elijah Ashkenazi The Physician, *Gedolim Ma'aseh Ha-Shem* [Mighty are The Deeds of God] (Jerusalem: Ozar HaSefarim, 1987), 3c, 10b, 11c–d, 11d, 13b, 29a, 29c–d, 30a, 30c–d, 33c, 46a, 58a, 64a.

⁹¹ See Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, "The Problem of the Body for the People of the Book," in *People of the Body: Jews from an Embodied Perspective*, ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz (Albany: State University of New York, 1992), 17–46.

ulous norms of performing the religious commandments. Material performance of commandments was playing the dominant role in religious life: material, or physical, performance rather than an intention or belief. The body could not but hold a central role, as an axis around which the godly orders are manifested. The *Mitzvot* could, therefore, serve as a reliable indicator of any discussion about the role of the body in Jewish life and culture.

The role of religious commandments and their conceptualization in Jewish culture was subject to historical changes. One of the derivatives of the encounter of Jewish communities with Muslim philosophy during the Gaonic period (roughly the seventh to eleventh centuries) was the challenge of coherence and methodology in describing religious heritage in general. Could the diverse religious obligations be organized in an encompassing philosophical frame? Is there, or are there, fundamental principles standing behind the diversity of religious commandments? Naturally, the body could serve as such an organizing axis, not only due to the dominance of the corporeal element in performing major religious obligations and daily religious routines, but also due to the long *midrashic* tradition presenting a parallelism between commandments and bodily organs.⁹² During the Gaonic period, this tradition initiated a new genre of “counting” or specifying in orderly manner the 613 implicit religious commandments, a genre known as *Books of Commandments* (*Sifrei Mitzvot*).⁹³ Surprisingly enough, the body held a minor place in the long tradition of the *Books of Commandments*, ever since the first tract composed by R. Saadiah Gaon (882–942) until the Early Modern Period. The famous examples—such as *Sefer HaHinnukh* (late thirteenth century)—or those composed by major rabbinic figures—such as Maimonides (1138–1204), or Joseph Ḥayyim Azulai (1724–1807)—suggested a thematic ordering hardly related to the human body.

⁹² Abraham Hirsch Rabinowitz, *TaRiG: A Study of the Tradition that the Written Torah contains 613 Mitzvot* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1996), 37–45, 47–70.

⁹³ The list of authors and books dedicated entirely or partially to counting the commandments covers different time periods and geographical zones: Menachem b. Moses HaBavli, Saadia Gaon [Rasag], Maimonides, Nachmanides, *Sefer HaHinnukh* attributed to Aharon HaLevi of Barcelona, Eliezer b. Nathan [Raavan], the books *Semag* and *Semak*, Levi b. Gershon [Ralbag], Moses de Leon, Isaac b. Farḥi, David b. Salomon Vital, Isaac Arovas, Leon Modena [following the Maimonidean count], Nathan Ottolenghi, Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto [Ramchal], David b. Salomon Vital, Moses Ḥagiz, Joseph Ḥayyim Azulai [HaHidah], Moses b. Abraham of Premishla, Abraham Ashkenazi Apottecker.

Only during the mid-sixteenth century did the first book appear in this literary tradition, which placed the human body as the focal point and as the organizing principle: *The Book of The God Fearing* (*Sefer Haredim*) composed by Eleazar Azkari (1553–1600),⁹⁴ as declared on the frontispiece: “to interpret and present the commandments according to each limb and according to proper time.” The figure of Azkari and his famous book directly relate to the religious-pietistic fermentation and kabbalistic innovations in sixteenth-century Safed, where Azkari held an important position and was considered a saintly figure alongside other famous and influential persons such as Isaac Luria, Moses Cordovero, Ḥayyim Vital, Joseph Caro, and Elijah De Vidas. His mystical diary was recently published, providing us with a closer look on his intimate and private world, as well as his public activity as preacher, active mystic and dominant figure in two penitential confraternities. The need to influence the religious and moral life of others oscillated with his wish to remain segregated and absorbed in a state of intimate vicinity to God. The occupation, nearly obsessive, with the omnipresence of sin led him to confront the issue of the body and its role in religious life. Azkari and his contemporaries, mainly the school following the Lurianic traditions, were about to leave their deep mark on early modern Jewish culture and religiosity.

The body speaks in a louder voice from the mid-sixteenth century onwards in Jewish-Italian communities. But not only in the physical sense, mentioned previously, of decipherment of an object while leaving it as is. It involves the intention to mould it according to changing circumstances. The objects of divine creation—as Abraham Jagel-Gallico boldly asserts—are stamped with imperfections, and need human elaboration to achieve perfection. Man and his body, as part of nature, need reparation and change. Yet it is not a change motivated by the “Homo Faber” concept of changing the material surroundings, but a religious-cultural and institutional change in the case of Jagel-Gallico.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ The citation appears on the front-page of the first print (Venice: Daniele Zanetti Print, 1606). The book was composed in 1588 (see *ibid.*, 55a). The printing of *Sefer Haredim* was resumed from the late seventeenth century onwards. On Azkari and his religious-mystical positions as reflected in his personal notes, see Eleazar Azkari, *Milei de-Shmaya* [Divine Revelations], ed. Mordechai Pachter (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1991), 7–96; *idem*, “The Life and Personality of Eleazar Azkari, as reflected in his Mystical Diary and *Sefer Haredim*,” *Shalem* 3 (1981): 127–147 (Hebrew).

⁹⁵ Yagel-Gallico, *Moshi'a Hosim*, p. 2a. See also *ibid.*, 11a—the great chain of being,

Jagel-Gallico was not alone in focusing his writings and attention on body. Mordecai Dato, a kabbalistic figure of prominence, endowed the religious commandments (*Mitzvot*) and the internal inclinations both evil and good with very corporeal/bodily parameters.⁹⁶ Joseph ibn Shraga attributed to both body and soul the same importance during the resurrection of the dead, since the body had performed the commandments as well.⁹⁷ The concept, suggested in Safed by Azkari, to divide the commandments according to the bodily organs involved in their performance was echoed in local sources.⁹⁸ The body was put to the forefront of cultural debate and served as one of the leading points of reference.⁹⁹ Culture, in its sensitive and defining points, was embodied.¹⁰⁰ The references to bodily ontology were neither static nor descriptive, but dynamic and related to social interface. An anonymous collection of materials for preachers paraphrased the midrashic sayings that the 613 commandments—composed of 248 positive and 365 negative orders—are parallel to 248 bodily organs and 365 sinews, but added further twelve “servants”: “sight, and hearing, and smell, and talking, and taste, and touch, and walking, and council, and anger, and laughter, and sleeping, and sexual intercourse.”¹⁰¹ These servants are extensions of the body, relating it to social context and social activities such as walking (presenting oneself in front of others), taste (the social aspects of food consumption), talking (the major role attributed to Rhetoric), council (involvement in the social fabric and community life), sexual

“as referred by the Sages of true tradition [Kabbalists].” The book includes many medieval motives about the functioning of the body and its cultural role.

⁹⁶ Mordecai Dato, *Exegesis on the Haftarat ‘Shemen HaMishḥah,’* MSS Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, de Rossi 2534–2535(29) [IMHM 13498–13499], exegesis of Haftarat of Genesis, 5b, 26a, 62a–b, exegesis of Haftarat of Exodus, 2b–3a, 7b, 61a, 78b, exegesis on Haftarat of Leviticus, 16a, 19a–b, exegesis on Haftarat of Numbers, 12a–b, 22b, exegesis on Haftarat of Deuteronomy, 13b–14a, 22a.

⁹⁷ Joseph ibn Shraga, *Responsa on Kabbalistic Issues*, MSS Oxford—Bodleian Library Opp.Add.Qu 40 [IMHM #17404], 133a–134b.

⁹⁸ Azariah Figo, *Sefer Binah Le’Itim*, Vol. II, sermon 46, 118–127; Jagel-Gallico, *A Valley of Vision*, 336–337.

⁹⁹ Collection of Kabbalistic Tracts, MSS Mantua—Comunità Israelitica, Ebr. 162/1 [IMHM #2287], no pagination, Sermons on the Value and Glory of the Human Body; Eliezer b. Elijah Ashkenazi The Physician, *Ma’aseh Ha-Shem*, 3c, 10b, 11d, 13b, 29a–b, 29c–d, 30c, 35c, 64a.

¹⁰⁰ See a responsum of Rabbi David Provenzano on the biblical expression “Counseling Kidneys,” MSS Moscow—Lenin Institute, Ginzburg Collection 1317 [IMHM #48941], 66b–67b.

¹⁰¹ MSS Budapest—National Academy, Kaufman Collection A.243 [IMHM #14556], 140.

intercourse (the erotic domain as part of refining individual comportment), and finally anger and laughter (control of emotions). Needless to say that this addition of twelve servants lacks any textual basis in the original Midrash and reflects the modernizing of the original text in modern context.

The corporalization of culture had concrete repercussions in various domains. It affected the religious commandments by forming tighter (magical?) parallelism between religious acts and bodily organs, and by the sanctification of daily (bodily) religious acts.¹⁰² Preaching—an important act in public religious life in synagogue and confraternities' activities—was adopting the classical Greek-Roman model, including the *actio* component of body language and exterior theatricality.¹⁰³ The shaping of physical behavior was part of a refining (“civilizing”) of social relations, one of the fundamental changes in European society during the Early Modern Period, including the Jewish-Italian communities. Its importance lies also in the fact that in the Italian case—both Jewish and Catholic—it was not confined to small courtly or elitist circles but spread into wider social groups, especially by pedagogical institutions. Further, shaping one's body held a central position in the current cultural model that combined religious and “lay” obligations, preconditioning the formation of a good citizen. The new importance of the body was invading the reading and hermeneutic of the sacred canon; emblematic in this respect is the “erotic” and concrete reading of the Song of Songs by Italian commentators.¹⁰⁴ Unlike the accustomed kabbalistic-symbolic and allegorical-philosophical readings of this sublime poetry as a love relationship between the God of the people of Israel and the soul and body, in Italy it was presented as an erotic encounter between a human couple, including all the detailed references to passions and corporeal acts.

The body in Jewish-Italian culture during the Early Modern Period was a significant front of encounter between kabbalistic innovatory

¹⁰² Jagel-Gallico, *Sefer Be'er-Sheva*, MSS Oxford—Bodleian Library, Reggio 11, 43a.

¹⁰³ Jacob Z'ahalon, *Guidance for Preachers*, MSS Roma—Biblioteca Casanatense 3074 [IMHM #86], 3a, 7b, 8a–b, 9a, 9b.

¹⁰⁴ Isaac b. Abraham Alatrino, *Kenaf Renanim, Commentary on Song of Songs*, MSS Budapest—Kaufman Collection A.25 [IMHM 2827], 5–6, 13–15, 19–21, 25–26, 29, 35, 38; Shemariah The Cretan from Negroponte, *Commentary on Song of Songs*, MSS Paris—Bibliothèque Nationale Heb. 897 [IMHM #26853], 29b, 34a–b, 37a, 38b, 41a, 43b, 48a, 52. On the “erotization” of Song of Songs in relation to juvenile courtship prior to marriage, see Weinstein, *Marriage Rituals Italian Style*, chapter V: “The Marriage Rituals as seen by the Young,” 311–350.

conceptions on the one hand and Catholic counter-reformatory and Baroque religiosity on the other hand.¹⁰⁵ The figure of God, according to Zoharic conceptions and later their wide elaborations in sixteenth-century Safed in the Lurianic and Cordoveran schools, was presented through bold anthropomorphic metaphors. Its significance lies not so much in the theosophical revolutionary stand, as much as in the “translations” of these concepts into social praxis in ever wider circles. This was performed by various channels: moral and custom literature (*Sifrut Musar*, *Sifrut Minhagin*), public preaching, confraternal activity, ritual innovations, cult of saints, and occupation with sin and guilt and their effect on the after world (*Olam HaBa*). The body was central in this missionary activity since it stood at the focus of them all, and hence was subject to demands of change and reshaping. Most obvious and measurable was the change with regard to sexuality and erotic behaviors. The other front was the aspect of Baroque religiosity labeled by Jacques Gélis “Christocentrism,” i.e., focusing on the human figure of Christ in its various aspects—such as his passion, suffering in general, the sacred heart, the wounds (“stigmata”), and childhood of Christ, the visual aspects of religious sentiments and praxis. And again, the means and institutions of spreading Catholic Baroque religiosity were various. The affinity between these two processes is unmistakable, and it could lead us to a general question which is certainly beyond the scope of this article: Did early modern Kabbalah enable the absorption of major religious theological and daily practices of the Catholic religion, and later made the implicit Catholic content available to wider Jewish circles? This bold thesis is not unreasonable if we consider the importance of bodily aspect in Jewish-Italian case study and its cultural ramifications.

The inter-religious encounter was conducted predominantly on a religious level. This excluded, in the Jewish case, the introduction of a medical-scientific level. Unlike the medieval and Renaissance periods, during which the Jewish communities showed high sensitivity to contemporary medical innovations, the early modern Italian documents maintain almost complete silence regarding the medical scientific

¹⁰⁵ This encounter should be viewed in wider context of dialogue between Jewish and Catholic communities. On such encounters of dialogue, see Roberto Bonfil, “Preaching as Mediation between Elite and Popular Cultures: The Case of Judah Del Bene,” in *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto*, ed. David B. Ruderman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 67–88; idem, “Rabbis, Jesuits and Riddles: A Glance at the Cultural World of R. Moses Zacuto,” *Italia* 13–16 (2001): 169–189 (Hebrew); Weinstein, “What did little Samuel read in his Notebook.”

advancements achieved in Italy. This silence is all the more exceptional due to the growing interest in publishing medical encyclopedias, and the fact that hundreds of students of Jewish origin studied medicine at the University of Padua. Again, the significance of this reserve regarding the “new science” as a symptomatic for the future development of Jewish culture and its distinct path to modernity is beyond the scope of my discussion.

As much as the mechanical and mathematical models were excluded from Jewish discourse on the body, the unitary medieval model remained intact. Various contemporary documents, and of various literary genres, are practically unanimous on the opinion that the body and mind are one unity. The modern duality of the Cartesian type has not yet left traces in Jewish-Italian culture. The whole discourse of the body is mostly following the well known medieval (Jewish) tradition. The novelty lies in its elaboration and interpretation. For example, the body is described—according the philosophical tradition—as an obstacle and threat to human perfection and religious growth. It requires, then, ascetic discipline. A parallel current endows the body with positive value, as a crucial arena of sanctity and as a channel to vicinity and intimacy with God. The mystical encounter with God, in its various levels of intensity, is described in increasingly erotic metaphors.¹⁰⁶

The discourse on the body was conducted at several levels mentioned previously: kabbalistic-theological, magical, medical, pietistic, sexual comportment, refinement of the body, emotions. They enabled, as the Foucault thesis suggested, to tighten control on individuals and collectives within the Jewish-Italian communities, by setting clearer models of comportment. Control was not asserted only by institutional

¹⁰⁶ Collection of Kabbalistic Tracts, MSS Mantua—Comunità Israelitica, Ebr. 162/1, no pagination. Another motive of importance is the erotic desire for the Torah. This should be understood in two ways: the study of the Torah as an erotic experience, and the Torah as configuration of the *Shekhinah*. See, for example, De Vidas, *Reshit Hokhmah*, 63a: “He who desires so much the Torah that during day and night he would think none of earthly things but only of her [the Torah], certainly he would achieve high spiritual level in his soul and would not need any ascetic acts nor fasting, since vicinity [to God] depends on the desire and love of the Torah, as a lover desires his beloved, as in the determinacy to perform Midnight Reparation with lust.” In order to measure the extent of change, compare to the kabbalistic tract of David Messer Leon, *Magen David* [Shield of David], MSS London—Montefiore Library 290 [IMHM #7328], passim. On kabbalistic descriptions of the vicinity of man with Divinity in erotic metaphors, see Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, passim; idem, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

and direct pressure. No less significant would be the internalization of a new *habitus*—to borrow a term from Bourdieu—and dispositions of body forms. The external signs were “read” as a sign and mirror of the internal. But the gaze inside man was but a start to infiltrating it according to cultural-collective norms. Hence the growing debate on consciousness and emotions in the Jewish-Italian context, and the increasing interest in autobiographical writing. Confronting the normalized body was the “marginal body” of monsters and eccentric productions of nature, such as the Siamese twins born in the Venetian ghetto, and the theatrical show of their bodies in various communities.¹⁰⁷

The occupation with the body and the dominance, say, of Kabbalah in this regard, were certainly not confined to early modern Italian communities. They reached the entire Jewish world and left cultural traces that are noticeable even today. It was mostly attributed to the ability to provide answers in prosaic levels of quotidian life including the body—education of the young, health and illness, cleaning habits, house management, ritual pollution and purity, gender relations, fears of the demonic world—and relate them to classical sayings in the Jewish tradition and to wider theological issues. Such modes of debate were echoed in Eastern Europe as well as in the Sephardic Diaspora in Turkey and the eastern basin of the Mediterranean.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Ariel Toaff, *Mostri Giudei. L'immaginario ebraico dal Medioevo alla prima età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996), 163–181, esp. 163–164. On the non-Jewish milieu, see Ottavia Niccoli, “‘Menstruum quasi Monstruum’: Monstrous Births and Menstrual Taboo in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective*, ed. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 1–25.

¹⁰⁸ Zvi Hirsch Kaidanover, *Kav HaYashar* [Measure of Honesty] (Frankfurt: Waust Print, 1705); Elijah HaKohen, *Sefer Shevet Musar* [Rod of Morality] (Jerusalem: Makhon Or HaSefer, 1978).

JEWISH BODIES AND RENAISSANCE
MELANCHOLY: CULTURE AND THE CITY
IN ITALY AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

ELEAZAR GUTWIRTH

Menina e moça me levaram de casa de minha mai para
muito longe ...

Menina e moça, Ferrara 1553¹

this soul ... when it descends to dwell in the nebulous
realms—the lowly and dark body—... desires to say:
would that I were in joy again as in the days of old
(Ps. 43:4) ... always circling in my sphere before the
place where my tent was in the beginning ... this is the
advice: to see himself as a stranger in a strange land
[till] he returns to his Lord who sent him to do his work
... and near it is placed [the verse which says] as a sign
(Prov. 27:8:) “like a bird that strays far from its nest is a
man far from his home” ... and this means the bird of
the soul as the sages said in secret ... for when the bird
wanders from her nest, she desires to go back and moves
to return.

Meir Ibn Gabbai²

I

In various genres of medieval and Renaissance writings, the concepts
of body and soul were often paired with a third idea, namely that of
exile.³ With medicine as the privileged area of discourse on the body,

¹ Antonio Gallego Morell, *Bernardim Ribeiro y su novela “Menina e moça”* (Madrid: Bermejo, 1960) or Helder Macedo, *Do significado oculto da Menina e moça* (Lisbon: Moraes, 1977).

² *Avodat Ha-Kodesh* (Jerusalem: Lewin-Epstein, 1973), Prologue.

³ Amongst numerous possible examples, see Randolph Starn, *Contrary Commonwealth: The Theme of Exile in Medieval and Renaissance Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Angelo Bartlett Giamatti, *Exile and Change in Renaissance Liter-*

Amatus Lusitanus⁴ writing of the 1540s–1560s presents us, to be sure, with medical texts on the body. Nevertheless, he also provides us with a wealth of writings on subjects which are not usually thought to concern the body. Amatus Lusitanus' concern with exile, his attention to—and views on—individuals who, like himself, are far from their lands, perhaps particularly from the Iberian Peninsula, may be found throughout his work. Such concerns could provide one type of coherence to Amatus' life work which Carmoly—in the mid-nineteenth century and his followers after him—approached rather as a kind of miscellany of useful tidbits and lovely anecdotes. Our interest here is with the texts which disturb the facile oppositions not only between body and soul, but also between *techne* and mainstream cultural-intellectual history, and between the putative Orient and Occident in Renaissance Jewish history. The Jews of Salonika were, as will be shown, a frequent concern of Amatus Lusitanus. The notion of a facile and hermetic dichotomy between them and the Renaissance Jews of Italy is not supported by the evidence adduced here. Nor is the putative dichotomy of body and soul particularly useful if we choose the field of concepts surrounding melancholy as the targets of our investigation.

The dedication of the seventh volume of Amatus Lusitanus' *Centuriae* is addressed to Gedella Yahia and signed in Salonika in August 1561.⁵ That is to say that it appears to contain cases prior to that date and

ature (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Christine Shaw, *The Politics of Exile in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴ As is well known, his name João Rodrigues de Castelo Branco is frequently rendered out of sequence, misspelt or misprinted. The dates are usually given as 1511–1568. For his birth in Castelo Branco, his studies at Salamanca, his roots and routes in the 1530s and 1540s (Antwerp, Ferrara, Ancona, Ragusa, Salonika, etc.), his public assertion that he had a Jewish brother, and other aspects of his thought, see Eleazar Gutwirth, "Amatus Lusitanus and the Locations of Sixteenth Century Cultures," in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy, Jewish Culture and Contexts*, ed. David Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 216–238 and the studies mentioned there.

⁵ I refer to volumes of the *Centuriae* first in Capital Roman numerals and then to the specific cure by number. The bibliography of the editions seems to be a subject which has not yet been exhausted. There are still apparently unrecorded items while others are recorded but were inaccessible to Friedenwald. Friedenwald's bibliography of the *Centuriae*, beginning with the first edition of the first volume (*Curatium medicinalium Centuria prima multiplici varaque rerum cognitione referta. Praefixa est eiusdem auctoris commentatio in qua docetur quomodo se medicus habere debeat in introitu ad aegrotantem simulque de crisi et diebus decretoriis iis qui artem medicam exercent et quotidie pro salute aegrotorum in collegium descendunt longe utilissima*. Florence, 1551) up to the seventh (Venice, 1566) contains about 16 items. Jose Lopes Dias' mentions about 19 editions of different volumes, formats, etc. See his "O Renascimento em Amato Lusitano e Garcia D'Orta," *Estudos Castelo Branco* (1964):

later than the signature date of the previous volume, 1559. As has been shown elsewhere,⁶ Amatus was an agent of culture interacting with the community within which he was working and the cures are not mere case notes written by a purely clinical observer of bodily ailments. His texts may therefore be read as sources for the culture of his community between 1559–1561.

Although his patients and interlocutors are not exclusively Iberian, it can be argued that *meqorashim*—exiles from the Iberian Peninsula and their descendants—are a prominent presence in this volume. Solomon Seneor, for example, is described as a man worthy of eternal remembrance for his virtuous and heroic deeds. These deeds are not mentioned and attention is drawn to this silence. He is, however, described as wealthy, liberal and philanthropic with the poor. At the time he was about 48 years old (cure VII/6). In cure 10, Amatus mentions an Abraham Baton (Biton?), a wealthy merchant. Cure 11 concerns Isaac Lombroso. Cure 12 is about Samaya from Constantinople, a tax collector in Xeres, and an eleven-year-old boy named Abraham Pinto. Cure 19 concerns the sister of Immanuel Habib. Cure 22 mentions Samuel Albaharim, an honorable man from the Algarve, the wife of Mordekhai Cavalleri and that of Benjamin Calderon. Cure 4, dated 1560, mentions the grandson of Ibn Portas and the father in law of Jacob Navarro. The question of exile is therefore not only philosophical and literary but also reflects history, that is, the expulsion and its aftermath. The onomastics suggest not only a Jewish and Iberian provenance but at times, perhaps, more precise (e.g. New Castilian) origins.

Nor is the presence of melancholy in Amatus' texts a purely conceptual concern. Bilious complexion is not infrequent amongst the patients: in cure 15, Salomon Machorro, 40 years old, is described as being of black-biled temperament, attacked by fever in autumn. This had visible physical signs. Joseph Sason, in cure 52, is described as more bilious than anybody else. Abraham Ezra (cure VII/69), despite his name, was from a town in Valachia on the Danube; he was forty years old when treated in Salonika and is described as having bilious melancholic blood. He had an unusual melancholy and sadness. Melancholy appears in the Salonikan practice as elsewhere. Cure VII/37 has a rubric which states that it concerns a certain type of melancholy.

29, n. 52. See also more recently the list in Firmino Crespo, *Amato Lusitano* (Lisbon, 1987) to which I am greatly indebted.

⁶ Gutwirth, "Amatus Lusitanus," 216–238.

The patient is the wife of a rabbi named Sanctes. She is described as extremely honest and respectable, someone who talked little and was sober in her eating habits. At the age of forty she went through a phase of extreme sadness, she began to exhibit strange symptoms, talked continuously and ate ravenously, could not sleep and had pains in the stomach. When in her insomnia, she spoke about matters which were not usually comprehended by others. Amatus focuses on the combination of melancholy and canine appetite caused by *atrabilis*. He invokes Galen's *De symptomatum causis* and *De usu partium* and criticizes Avicenna and his followers. A young man named Athias had a fever and was periodically attacked by paroxysms on Sabbath mornings. He abstained from eating and drinking. Amatus specifies that this occurred on Sabbath eve. His fever is said to have originated in his melancholic humor (cure VII/75).

The cultural and intellectual life of Salonika in the late 1550s is implied in this last volume of Amatus' *magnum opus*, although the bodily, medical dimension is the most prominent and noticeable aspect on a first encounter, as one would expect given the genre.

That the cures reflect the history and culture may be shown by the cases of Doctor Afia in cure 24 and Gedella [ibn] Yaḥia in the Dedication. They are significant for us because we associate these individuals with a noteworthy project of Venetian printing a few years after 1561: *Los Dialogos de amor de Mestre Leon Abarvanel medico y filosofo excelente ... en Venetia MDLXVIII ...* by Gedella Yaḥia.⁷ Afia is described not only as a doctor (of the body) but also as a peripatetic philosopher. This is resonant in a description of the author of a treatise on the soul (*Opiniones ...*) printed together with that same Venetian edition of the Spanish translation (*Los Dialogos ...*). For us, cure 24 is of further interest because—as a dialogue between Amatus and Afia—it seems to be an answer to the question of cultural/intellectual life amongst the Iberian Jewish exiles in the Ottoman Empire or to the question: what were their conversations about? To understand the significance of such inquiries one need only recall and contrast the importance attached to other circles of readers/readings of Leon Hebreo's *Dialogues* (Maurice Scève and Pontus de Tyard in Lyon or the Inca Garcilaso in Montilla)⁸ with the case of the one—mentioned above—in Venice

⁷ James Nelson Novoa, "An aljamiado version of Judah Abravanel's *Dialoghi d'amore*," *Materia Giudaica* 8, 2 (2003): 311–327.

⁸ Pontus de Tyard (1521—September 23, 1605), member of the Pleiade, and Mau-

c. 1568. To be sure, the literary quality of sixteenth-century dialogues (like that of so many other types of sources) cannot be denied. The *fortuna* of the dialogic form in the Iberian peninsula is very rich indeed. Scholars of this form have asserted that it surpassed its Italian or French equivalents. More recently it has been argued that some Jewish writings exhibit a similar tendency.⁹ Even more relevant is the realization of Amatus' investments in literary creativity in his *Curationes*—or, as he would say—his attempts not to tire the reader. And yet the elements of decorum and verisimilitude also need to be taken into account when reading a Renaissance writer.

The dialogue between Amatus and Afia in cure 24 begins by setting certain clear parameters. Afia refers, with some contempt, to certain teachers in Salamanca who composed verses on a medical subject. Common memories of common education (Salamanca) and belonging (to the Iberian peninsula) sustain the dialogue/conversation in Salonika as they would not in Salamanca itself. Similarly clear is the association of verse (i.e., poetry, literature, culture) and medicine. They did not see medicine as a purely technical endeavor outside the mainstream of intellectual/cultural life.

The subject of cure 24 is itself resonant as it disturbs the body/soul oppositions. It concerns the seat or origins of laughter. Their common horizons of reference, their invocation of previous authorities include Pliny's *Natural History*, "the Greeks," Hippocrates, *De sacro morbo*, *De popularibus morbis*, Aristotle, "books on the opinions of Hippocrates and Plato," Galen's *Methodus medendi*, and, as culmination, the German Philip Melanchthon and the Valencian Luis Vives.

What is at stake in this Iberian Jewish conversation in sixteenth-century Salonika is the issue of the difference between humans and animals. This is present in Amatus' sources but it would not be a foreign idea to his Salonikan Hispano-Jewish contemporaries. The topic is not absent from Hebrew texts. It may suffice to recall a text—

rice Scève (1500–1562) are linked to the transmission of the work of the Lisbon Jewish author in France where two translations into French appeared in 1551 in Lyon. The point here concerns the quality, frequency and intensity of the scholarly attention to the reading circles of the French reception or to the famous transmission of the Lisbon's work by the Inca Garcilaso. New edition: *Léon Hébreu Dialogues d'Amour. Traduction de Pontus Tyard (1551)*, ed. Tristan Dagron and Saverio Ansaldi (Paris: Vrin, 2006).

⁹ Eleazar Gutwirth, "The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Jewish Historiography," in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein (London: Peter Halban, 1988), 141–161.

translated into Hebrew by a scholar from Lucena—by an author from the mid-tenth century (c. 955/6). Isaac Israeli's disciple, Dunash ibn Tamim, writes in his *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*¹⁰ that laughter is special (*segullah*) to humans. In the dialogue in cure 24, Amatus develops ideas about anatomy (e.g., discussing the phrenas or diaphragm, the seventh transversal) but these are related to affect. Thus, for example, Afia exclaims that he doesn't know about the importance of the diaphragm except in cases where one is overcome by sudden satisfaction or sadness. This is likewise of some interest because the project of the Venetian edition (by unknown printers)¹¹ involved Afia's treatise on the soul (*Opiniones* ...). In Amatus' text we see that by the early 1560s, Afia was already interested in these questions. It is quite clear, similarly, that Iberian Jewish conversations in Salonika could include these horizons of reference, that is, the newly printed and reprinted classics in the original and/or in translation but also more recent authorities. Amatus, Afia, Almosnino, and others seem to have constituted an intellectual network in Salonika in the 1560s with interests in philosophy and science; a commitment to modern language—e.g., Spanish; a taste for combining literature and science; an interest in relatively recent—i.e., “modern”—authors and their works; and an attraction to publishing by means of the printing press. In order to understand the contours of the network, one may pay attention to some of the surviving evidence.

One member of the network is Daniel ben Perahiah HaKohen. He is strongly tied to the city of Salonika and writes about the fire (presumably of the 4th of Av, 1545) and its effects on him and his library. He edited several texts, the first being the *She'erit Yosef* of Joseph ben Shem Tov Joshua, showing his commitment to the ancient Jewish tradition (e.g., by publishing the work of Nahshon ben Zadok, known as *Iggul* (Cycle) *di R. Nahshon*). This text shows interest in the study of astronomy and the calendar—*Ibbur* (intercalation in the lunar Jewish calendar)¹²—and also, more particularly, interest in the Sephardi

¹⁰ *Sefer Yeẓirah ha-meyuhas le-Avraham avinu: im perush ... Abusahal Dunash Ben Tamim hu Rabbi Yizhak ha-Yisre'eli*, ed. Menasseh Grossberg (London, 1902), 65: “ha-zehoq she-hi segullah la-adam.” See also Georges Vajda, *Le commentaire sur le “Livre de la création” de Dūnāš ben Tāmīm de Kairouan*. Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée par Paul B. Fenton (Leuven: Peeters, 2002).

¹¹ See the discussion by James Nelson Novoa, “An aljamiado version.”

¹² The kabbalistic *ibbur* is not relevant here. For the historical significance, see Eleazar Gutwirth, “Fechas judías y fechas cristianas,” *El Olivo* 8, 19 (1984): 21–30.

masters of that tradition. As the frontispiece states, the treatise contains verses, both metered and rhymed. This is not an unusual feature of scientific texts in the Sephardi tradition. Daniel ben Peraḥiah interrupts the text frequently with his own comments and glosses in Hebrew. A second work edited by ben Peraḥiah is again characteristic of the multiplicity of cultural components we noticed in Amatus and other members of this Salonikan Jewish network of the second half of the sixteenth century. It is an *aljamiado* text.¹³ As the Prologue states, it is transcribed by Daniel ben Peraḥiah from a translation into Spanish by the Iberian R. Joseph Vizino of the Iberian Abraham Zacut's *Luhot U-bi'uram* ("Tables and their Commentaries"). Daniel ben Peraḥiah describes his own work as a transcription from "Christian" characters to Hebrew characters and, rather than the modern name for the language, he uses a precise formulation: "bela'az leshon sefardi." The transcription was done "letter by letter," according to Daniel ben Peraḥiah. Nevertheless, he added comments and examples, creating a different work which is not identical with the *Luhot* of Zacut and which he calls the *Be'ur Ha-Luhot* ("Commentary on the 'Tables'"). The *Be'ur* contains twenty-three chapters. The Salonika octavo edition was printed by Joseph ben Isaak Ya'avez—a resonant name amongst the Iberian exiles—begun on the 15th of Shevat 328 (1567) and finished by Nissan. It extends to 30 folios or sixty pages of *aljamiado* text. The interest of Hispanophone readers in that work is shown by the publication through the printing press, but may be proven also by the dissemination of the work in manuscript form.¹⁴ Such a well documented diffusion leads us to think that, despite the lack of general attention, the work may be considered no less characteristic of the culture of Salonikan Jewry than the more frequently studied ones.

The prologue to the *aljamiado* work is of particular interest. Daniel HaKohen was the son of Peraḥiah HaKohen, the physician. His studies of the science of the stars were, thus, a family affair. This dynastic

¹³ For *aljamiado* literature in the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire, see for example Eleazar Gutwirth "The Hispanicity of Sephardi Jewry: A Genizah Study," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 145, 3–4 (1986): 347–357.

¹⁴ There are various manuscripts of his works: at the Kaufmann Collection, in the former Sassoon Collection (seventeenth century) and at the JTS, MS 8943, MS 2652, MS 1904 and MS 2570. There seem to be copies of the *She'erit Yosef* in existence with the *aljamiado* 23 chapter work wanting.

aspect of scientific study may need to be borne in mind. He began at the age of eighteen with his father. Their subject of study was *ibbur*, and their text was the Iberian Abraham Zacut's *Luhot*. Daniel returned to the same subject later in life with a certain R. Hezekiah of whom we know little more than what may be inferred from the phrase "may the Lord avenge him." He would always learn the texts in Hebrew. The *Tables* were studied in a manuscript he owned which had been copied by his grandfather (*zekenî*) Shemuel HaKohen, the physician. Daniel ben Perahiah may also be the author of the verses in the *She'erit Yosef*. During the fire of Salonika (Av 1545), his books went up in fire and only a few survived. Amongst them, the *Tables* of Zacut "were lost to me," although he saw them later in the hands of one of the dwellers of his city along with a book of natural *quaestiones* (*She'elot Tiwi'ot*). He could not "bring them to my mother's house and into the chamber of her that conceived me." After the fire and the loss of the manuscript, he returned to the study of Zacut. This time, he had as a fellow reader Aaron Afia, member of the *megorashim* community. The connection between Afia and Daniel (which allows us to include him in the intellectual network) is not in doubt. He refers to Afia in terms allusive of the Song of Songs, Chapter 3: (By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not ... It was but a little that I passed from them, but) *I found him whom my soul loveth: (I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me)*. When he found Afia, he chose to learn Zacut's *Tables* for the third time in his company. But this time he studied the text in the vernacular (again the precise formulation of the original text is enlightening, particularly to those who are aware of the long standing question of language nomenclature: *be-la'age safah u-be-lashon aheret asher lo nisiti bahem*) so as not to forget that which he had already learnt. According to the prologue, it was only after re-learning the text with Afia, that he transcribed Vizino's translation into Spanish using Hebrew characters. The multiplicity of cultural/linguistic factors in this work in Hebrew characters is perfectly evident if we pay attention to the opening of the book in the original. The work begins "Los canones delas tablas de Zacut en romance la-da'at ha-zemihah ve-ha 12 batim."

It seems therefore that attempts to see members of this circle in terms of excessive individualism, isolation, as pure "exception," are unconvincing. As has been shown, the practices of conversation, dialogue,

and joint study are clear in the evidence. They support, rather, the concept of “network” as applied to these Jewish groups.¹⁵

Afia himself seems to have helped in the study of Abraham Zacut’s *Tables* and in Almosnino’s Hebrew translation of Juan Sacrobosco’s *El Tratado de la Esphera* (“Treatise on the Sphere”).¹⁶ Whatever the case, the manuscript [JTS 9081] of Moses ben Barukh Almosnino’s *Bet Eloqim*—an astronomical work which draws on Georg Purbach’s *Theorica planetarium*¹⁷—contains work by Afia at the end. Again we find that the network is united by various common features, including its interest in reading and writing in a modern language and within it, they share the interest in and access to semantic areas of technical terminology whether astronomical, mathematical or botanical. The above may serve to reconstruct some components of this Salonikan

¹⁵ For the concept of network in Iberian Jewish history, see for example Eleazar Gutwirth, “Jewish- Converso Relations in XVth c. Segovia,” *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division B (Jerusalem: World Congress of Jewish Studies, 1982), 49–53; idem, “Elementos étnicos e históricos en las relaciones judeo-conversas en Segovia,” *Jews and Conversos*, ed. Yosef Kaplan (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1985), 83–102.

¹⁶ Moritz Steinschneider, *Die Hebräischen Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Berlin, 1893), 645. In connection with Amatus’ friend Afia, we may pay brief attention to the interests of the latter’s friend and collaborator, Almosnino. Moses Almosnino published his *Be’ur Ha-millot ha-zarot* (alongside the much better known *Regimiento de la vida* and *Tratado de los sueños*) in Salonika in 1564, which shows the interest in the modern language of author, printer and public. Its typography and vocalization—amongst other elements—are studied by Pascual Recuero, “Nota para la historia del Ladino,” *MEAH* 34, 2 (1985): 113–167. If we are correct in our emphasis on this circle’s commitment to modern languages, we could find further confirmation for the commitment to modern languages in the case of yet another documented member of the network. In 1567 Nicolo Bevilacqua published the Spanish Petrarchan *Cancionero* of Amatus’ friend, Solomon Usque, in Venice. A recently studied ms. at the Biblioteca Ariostea contains similar, additional evidence of the types of creative interest in modern languages in these circles of Amatus’ friends: Solomon Usque’s laudatory “canzone” addressed to Guidobaldo II Montefeltro (1514–1574), Duke of Urbino. Its Iberian cultural components have been discussed recently by Jordi Canals Pinas, “Una canción inédita de Salomon Usque,” *Sefarad* 64 (2004): 3–25.

¹⁷ See Steinschneider’s views in *Uebersetzungen*, which apparently still inform the descriptions in the catalogues. The (at least) ten MSS of the *Bet Eloqim* which have survived are from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and show, again, how works from this network drew the interest of Jewish intellectuals of the Early Modern Period. The copy preserved in MS Mich 389 at the Bodleian states explicitly that Aaron Afia helped with the Latin around 1546. In it, Almosnino mentions that there had been a “discovery at the end of the West of an inhabited place which the ancients [*ha-rishonim*] never imagined.” In order to refer to this place he uses a combination of the then current Spanish name and Hebrew: “Ha-Indias ha-ḥadashot.”

network of readers which included, as we have shown, Amatus, Afia, Daniel ben Perahiah, Almosnino and others.

Afia's main project, however, is the *Opiniones Sacadas de los mas Auténticos y Antiguos Philósofos que Sobre la Alma Escrivieron, y sus Definiciones* ("Selected Opinions of the most Authentic and Ancient Philosophers on the Soul, and their Definitions"), published in Venice in 1568. The volume, in quarto, used to be ascribed to the press of Francesca Sansovina. Afia's book, *Opiniones*, may, on a first acquaintance, give the impression of a student's crib or notes because of its density and brevity. It contains a discussion, followed by a summary, of the 21 or 22 brief "definitions" of the soul from Democritus to the "Sanctissima Ley." Some of the authorities mentioned are of interest. For example, the text mentions Reuchlin's *De arte cabalistica*, an influence which is not discussed by scholars of the Jewish culture of the Ottoman Empire. The influence of Hebrew texts on Reuchlin is, of course, a very old subject in sixteenth-century history. But the Salonikan Jewish interest in Reuchlin has not yet been exhaustively treated. Afia chooses a significant passage for translation/paraphrase into a modern language; nothing less than the question of metempsychosis, which in the sixteenth century was somewhat less simple than he presents it and may well have some polemical intent:

[fol. 21] (Otra difinicion de Reuclin segun Pitagoras) Reuclin en su Cabala la alma segun Pitagoras es una sustancia divina infusa nel cuerpo umano y por el pecado el se haze como animal bruto y por amedrentar los hombres y los apartar del pecado finge que se pasa de un cuerpo en otro para en el recibir pena y mediante la pena se emendar. Y de aqui vinieron las ficciones poeticas de los hombres que se convierten en animales brutos.

(According to Pythagoras, another definition is Reuchlin's.) In his Cabala, Reuchlin asserts that the soul, according to Pythagoras, is a divine substance infused in the human body, and sin turns it into an animal. And in order to instill fear in men and divert them from sin there is a fiction that it passes from there to receive punishment and through the punishment it makes amends. And from this derive the poetic fictions of the men who are turned into animals.

Here again, the "ficciones poeticas" are not an area of culture which is exclusive to treatises on the soul but extend their reach to other fields. "Poetic fictions" involve literature and culture in general, despite the apparent impression of a purely philosophical intent. The case of metamorphosis is not marginal to mainstream European culture of the Early Modern Period, nor are the *Metamorphoses* unknown in Hebrew.

The mention of Fracastoro¹⁸ is a perfect example of the Salonikan Afia's acquaintance with and interest in the "moderns." In section 14, he refers to Budeo and adds: "y osaron los modernos reprehender a Tulio en la sinificacion deste nonbre." Although it is not surprising that someone with a Sephardic background would mention Temistius, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Avicenna, Al-Ghazali, or Averroes, the explicit mention of Tulio Cicero, as well as of Seneca, Calcidius, Aurelio Agostino and others in a text by a member of the Jewish community of Salonika in the 1560s gives pause for thought. So does the case of Virgil:

[fol. 119, v. 2]: Lo qual Virgilio filosofo platonico noto nel sexto de la Eneida onde dize Nel produzir de las cosas ay un espirito divino interior que sustenta el cielo y la tierra y los largos canpos del agoa y aire y la resplandeciente rueda de la luna y las tiranias estrellas y esta alma ... toda su grandeza y se mescla con aquel gran cuerpo ...

Virgil, the Platonic philosopher, noted this in the sixth of the Aeneid where he says that in creation there is an inner divine spirit which sustains heaven and earth and the long fields of water and air and the shining wheel of the moon and the tyranny of the stars and this soul in ... its grandeur mixes with that great body ...

From another perspective, James Nelson Novoa has recently argued¹⁹ that Afia's work is of interest in Spanish literature against the background of the paucity of philosophical works in the modern language and also because of its lack of dogmatism.

How expressive of the "city's" culture are these conversations? They certainly contrast markedly with the usual images of a culture centered on law, mysticism, and commerce. In order to complete the picture, therefore, one may recall the *Shevet Yehudah*, another work published in the 1550s, a decade before Afia's conversations with Amatus. From our perspective, instead of a parallel world to the Salonikan Jewish community, we are dealing with a network of common minds, who read similar works, are interested in similar issues, and who, in some cases, maintained, as has been shown, documented contacts. To be sure, *Shevet Yehudah* used to be seen as a chronicle, a collection of folklore or a disquisition on exile, etc. While these are all themes in the book,

¹⁸ Hieronymus Fracastorius or Girolamo Fracastoro, born c. 1478 in Verona, died 8 August 1553, Caffi.

¹⁹ Daniel Arón Afia, *Opiniones sacados de los más auténticos y antiguos filósofos que sobre el alma escribieron (s. XVI)*, ed. James Nelson Novoa. URL: <http://parnaseo.uv.es/Lemir/Textos/Afia/Indice.htm> (2005)

it has recently also been read also as a work in the tradition of Hebrew elaborations of the ideal of “dulce et utile,” delighting and instructing.²⁰ This has some consequences for our subject. The point to bear in mind is the basic perception of the centrality of Spain, the Iberian Peninsula, to Jewish history in that book. Equally important is the repeated code switching to *le’azim* in Castilian (caliz, brevia, naranja, bautismo and others) because it gives us a more precise idea of its intended public and its cultural horizons of reference. Thus, attention was drawn to the code switching from Hebrew into the Romance language, e.g., in the case of “monstruos.”²¹ It was not a coincidence or an insignificant detail in a Hebrew text, nor was it a marginal occurrence in a work believed to be occupied mainly with “folklore” and “Galut.” Rather, it has been related to certain contemporary categories of thought shared by author/s, publishers and audience/s alike. From this new perspective, this would be also the case with the mention of the Pythagoreans in that text:

The king said to Tomas: I have issued many warnings, but I believe that the qualities of a person are determined by the hour of his birth. Tomas replied: the Pythagoreans do not think so. They aver that if a man knows the hour of his conception he can know all the events of his life in the womb and if he knows the moment of his birth he can know all the events of his life until he gives up his soul. But they believe that human qualities are determined by custom even though the stars and nature have an influence. The King said: what do the Pythagoreans believe concerning the question of whether the heavens have a voice? They believe in the voice of heavens and that it is very sweet. But they have asked: if their heat reaches us, why does the voice not reach us. It is a reasonable argument.²²

By the 1550s, then, there were various texts addressed to a public of *megorashim* in print/in circulation, which associated the notion of dialogue/conversation with the themes of Pythagoras and his school.

The presence of references to Iberian exiles and Protestant texts, such as Melanchthon, in Salonikan Jewish conversations may also be more significant than thought before. It may be recalled that, as a physician, Amatus treated Protestants [VII/68] and made a point of publicizing the fact. This—no less than the frequently studied cases of

²⁰ Gutwirth, “Expulsion,” 141–161.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Shelomoh ibn Verga, *Sefer Shevet Yehudah*, ed. Azriel Schochat (Jerusalem, 1947), 159, lines 20–23 and notes.

Abraham ben Eleazar Ha-Levi or ibn Migash²³—may need to be taken into account when observing the Ottoman Jewish reactions or attitudes to the Reformation. Their main interest here, however, is as indices of the currency of their texts and ideas in the Ottoman Empire in the 1550s–1560s.

From such perspectives on the cultures of the *megorashim* in the Ottoman Empire, the history of reading becomes significant. One may look briefly at a source whose author, Vives, is explicitly mentioned by Amatus at the end of this particular dialogue. There can be little doubt that the reference is to the *Treatise on the Soul*,²⁴ signed in Bruges 1538 by the converso philosopher from the Valencian Jewish family of Vives, also a reader of Leon Hebreo. The *Treatise* was dedicated to Don Francisco, Duke of Bejar, Count of Belalcazar. Vives had had conversations with the Duke in Brussels. The *Treatise* was divided into three books and the last concerns the passions and contains a chapter on laughter. It is this last book which, Vives affirms, had most interested the Duke because it is the basis of all private and public moral doctrine and is therefore most convenient for someone who has to govern himself and the whole nation.

Vives turns to laughter in Chapter Ten, after having treated art and its delights. From delight follows laughter. Amongst all animals only humans laugh because they have faces while the others' faces are immobile. But the other animals manifest delight, nevertheless, by jumping or by formless cries. The Greeks would call those who rarely laughed *agelasti*, melancholics. Melancholy proceeds from various causes, amongst which is that of having reflected perspicaciously and finding little new in anything. A weak and tender heart will laugh at song, wine, games, etc., but in wise and measured humans, laughter is rare. Men of great understanding usually have a physical constitution tending to black bile.

Amatus' Salonikan conversations with Jews about Pliny were preceded, then, by those of Vives and others about the diaphragm as the seat of laughter. Amatus silenced Vives' references to the laughter of gladiators, to Hannibal, Democritus, and other false laughers.

²³ H.H. Ben Sasson, "Ha Yehudim mul ha-Reformazyah," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 4 (1970): 62–116; Roberto Bonfil, "Gli Ebrei d'Italia e la Riforma: Una questione da riconsiderare," *Nouvelles de la République des lettres* 2 (1996): 47–60.

²⁴ Juan Luis Vives, *Tratado del alma* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1960).

Similarly, Vives' characterization of women, children, rustics, and the ignorant as prone to laughter seems to be rejected by Amatus. Laughter as a theme invites reflections on melancholy, as has been seen clearly in Vives.

The impression that Amatus' and Afia's historical interests and concerns are reflected in this literary dialogue is confirmed by the Venetian project, i.e., the *Opiniones*. Also associated with the *Opiniones* is Gedella Ibn Yaḥia. Amatus shows himself as personally acquainted with Gedella and, like Gedella, is highly interested in their compatriot, the Iberian author Leon Hebreo. That is to say that Gedella's project of publishing, in Venice, the *Dialogos de amor*, a translation into Castilian of Leon Hebreo's work, together with (i.e., in the same volume) the *Opiniones* is not a curiosity or mere anecdote. Rather, it seems to follow naturally from [A] the particular type of relations between members of this Jewish Salonikan network reconstructed above; [B] from its interests in 1559–1561, as reflected in Amatus' writings; and [C] from the attitudes to common cultural memory—including the modern language—in such circles. Needless to say, it also belongs in a well evinced and intensely studied (especially for a later period) framework of [D] relations between Jews in the Ottoman Empire (including Greece) and Italy in general, and, more particularly, in the framework of [E] printing projects in Venice by Salonikan (and other Ottoman) Jews.²⁵

Members of the Iberian Abravanel family (i.e., Leon Hebreo's family) chose the Iberian physician Amatus and entrusted him with their health in Salonika as they had done in Italy. Amatus was also interested in, and informed about, the members of the Iberian-Salonikan Ibn Yaḥia family. Thus, for example, cure 70 (the number/location may well be significant) concerns the 34-year-old wife of Don Gedella ibn Yaḥia, attacked by pleurisy in the sixth month of her pregnancy. Cure 100 deals with the magnificent lady Gracia de Yaḥia; tall, obese, fifty years old, she was treated for fever by four doctors.

The clearest and most important indication of Amatus' links to the ibn Yaḥias and to Gedella in particular, is the text of the Dedication of the last volume of the *Centuriae*. It aligns culture and the city. Amatus begins by asserting that upon arriving in Salonika he had thought of discontinuing his *magnum opus* because of tedium. He contrasts this

²⁵ Meir Benayahu, *Relations Between Greek and Italian Jewry* (Tel Aviv: The Diaspora Research Institute, 1980). (Hebrew)

with the variety and abundance of Salonika's population. He links sixteenth-century Salonika with ancient Greece and asserts that it suffers from diseases as did its ancient counterpart. The Salonikan experience is thus presented not in terms of "problem" or "integration" or "ingathering of exiles," but rather from the perspective of the revival of interest in ancient Greece and Rome, whose texts, for example, he had cited throughout the preceding six hundred cures. Somewhat reminiscent of the tradition of laudations of cities in brief prose units (e.g., Orations), his is a discourse of elevation. Amatus asserts that the complexity of Greek illnesses has given rise to its extraordinary physicians. The illnesses are compared to other difficulties or challenges which give rise to greater skill. To this effect, he adduces the case of birds in areas with less light, the poles, which are prized above others. He draws on the Latin poetry of Manilius (i.e., Manilius Marcus, the first-century poet) and Virgil to prove his point. Physicians in Greece have to be illustrious, as was the case with Hippocrates. He decided to dedicate the cures to Gedella Yaḥia because he is a sage and a preeminent orator endowed with acute intelligence. In addition, Yaḥia is renowned for his hospitality to any who were persecuted or itinerant, no matter what their religious confession. In this he emulates his father, Moses Yaḥia, who, in the recent plague (1559²⁶), spent thousands of ducats to help treat the poor and bury them. Gedella had been present at some of Amatus' cures, such as those of Solomon Seneor, his relative. This seventh volume of the *Centuriae* begins with a prologue dedication to Yaḥia and the cure/treatment of Gedella ibn Yaḥia's sister, ends with that of his mother, and, at the resonant number (cure) 70, deals with the same Iberian family.

If we bear the adduced texts in mind, Amatus' relations with the family seem to be firmly established. These are not purely bodily or clinical relations, as has been shown from the same texts. Of interest is his assertion that he hopes that Gedella will find in the cures reasons for laughter and weeping, corresponding to the human condition. This is how Amatus describes his own work.

To find reasons for laughter and weeping has been, since at least Aristotle's *Poetics*, a motivation for creation which transcends clinical medicine.²⁶ The link with affect/literature/mainstream culture is clear.

²⁶ See Ernst Robert Curtius, "Jest and Earnest in Medieval Literature," in his *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), 417–435; and Angel María García Gómez, *The Legend of*

It is Amatus himself, therefore, who draws attention to the textual, literary quality of his enterprise. He searches in Salonika for the unexpected analogy—ancient and modern physicians, Hippocrates and Amatus, physicians as polar birds—, for the right quotation from Virgil or other school texts. He is the arbiter who values universalism, oratory, and intelligence no less than philanthropy. Above all, it is he who constructs the opposition between *tedium* and Salonika. As *tedium* (and *fastidium*) is a concept which affects most arts and creativity itself, the implications are not obscure. The Salonikan physician presents himself not only as an authority on the body but also as authority, or arbiter, on the arts and culture. The mind/body dichotomy has—once again—been disturbed by Amatus.

II

Like most of the members of the network and like his interlocutors, Amatus was, and presented himself as being, an exile from the Iberian Peninsula. He also writes as a product of its academic institutions. But is it possible to discover a precedent for Amatus, that is, an Iberian late medieval perspective which could explicitly link soul and body; i.e., such different fields as arts and medicine?

The concept of melancholy offers precisely such a link. Although unstudied in reference to Amatus or in reference to the culture of Ottoman Jewish communities,²⁷ its significance has long ago been realized for other cultures/languages and become a well-worn theme. Leaving aside the general, well-known, and seminal work on Dürer

the Laughing Philosopher and its Presence in Spanish Literature (1500–1700) (Córdoba: Universidad de Córdoba, 1984); Thomas Rütten, *Demokrit—lachender Philosoph und sanguinischer Melancholiker. Eine pseudohippokratische Geschichte* (Leiden: Brill, 1992) shows how the Stoic-cynical tradition of “Philosophus ridens” and the medical concept of “Typus melancholicus sanguinicus” come to amalgamate into the early modern Humanist literary and iconographical tradition of “Democritus ridens melancholicus.”

Aristotle’s discussion of tragedy and comedy in the *Poetics* rests on the concept of mimesis and for him mimesis is fundamental to our nature as human beings.

We also find in *Parts of the Animals*, Book 3, X, that man alone is affected by tickling, which is due firstly to the delicacy of his skin, and secondly to his being the only animal that laughs. For to be tickling, which is to be set in laughter, the laughter being produced such a motion as mentioned of the region of the armpit. Yet again an area which does not support oppositions between body and soul.

²⁷ For a possible exception, see Marcel Bataillon, *Varia lección de clásicos españoles* (Madrid: Gredos, 1964).

by Panofsky and Saxl,²⁸ that of their close followers or the discussions it has generated, one may recall that the attention to precise Iberian texts on melancholy and arts—not only visual, such as engravings, but also others, such as poetry and prose, i.e., literature—is also a well-known subject of discussions which could be traced back to at least the 1930s. This is the case, to take a random example, of the area of the study of sixteenth-century ideas on melancholy as a key concept in Quixote scholarship. This leads to interest in possible precedents or antecedents of the Quixote—that is to say that it leads to an interest in writers on melancholy before December 1604, sixteenth-century writers, such as Huarte de San Juan,²⁹ only one (possibly converso) of numerous Iberian, or, rather (as has become clear in recent decades), Atlantic writers on such subjects in the sixteenth century.³⁰ Scholars of the apparently unrelated field of Quixote *Quellenforschung* have thus documented an intense sixteenth-century Iberian involvement with the ideas we are studying here.

²⁸ Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Dürers "Melancholia I": Eine quellen- und typengeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Leipzig-Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1923) (= *Studien der Bibliothek Warburg*, 2); Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art* (London: Nelson, 1964).

²⁹ Leaving Croce aside, we note Mauricio de Iriarte, *Dr Juan Huarte de San Juan und sein Examen de Ingenios. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der differentiellen Psychologie* (Münster: Aschendorffscher Verlag, 1938) (= *Spanische Forschungen der Goerresgesellschaft*, 2:4); idem, *El Doctor Huarte de San Juan y su Examen de Ingenios*, 2nd edition (Madrid: CSIC, 1948), 311 ff.; Otis H. Green, "El Ingenioso Hidalgo," *Hispanic Review* 25 (1975): 174–193; Aurora Egidio, "La Memoria y el Quijote," *Cervantes* 11, 1 (1991): 3–44.

³⁰ Recent publications have discussed the effect of reading Cervantes on Freud; his Viennese Spanish letters of the 1880s (where he identifies with characters from Cervantes) and the implications of this life-long contact with Cervantes for both the modern study of the psyche and that of Cervantes. For us it would be added confirmation, if any were needed, that the voluminous field of Quixote studies, and within it, particularly that of the sixteenth-century Iberian writers on melancholy, is not an incomprehensible scholarly indulgence but responds to the intrinsic relevance of melancholy to the Quixote and to sixteenth-century texts. E.C. Riley, "Cervantes, Freud, and Psychoanalytic Narrative Theory," *Modern Language Review* 88 (1993): 1–14; Heinz Stanesco, "Unbekannte Briefe des jungen Sigmund Freud an einen rumänischen Freund," *Zeitschrift des Schriftstellerverbandes des RVR* 16 (1965): 12–29; and idem, "Young Freud's Letters to His Rumanian Friend, Silberstein," *Israel Annals of Psychiatry and Related Disciplines* 9 (1971): 195–207; E.C. Riley, "'Cipión' Writes to 'Berganza' in the Freudian Academia Española," *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* 14, 1 (1994): 3–18. On Cervantes and melancholy, see, for example, Teresa Scott Soufas, *Melancholy and the Secular Mind in Spanish Golden Age Literature* (Columbia-London: University of Missouri Press, 1990) and the bibliography there.

Amatus' connections with the Abravanel, Afia, ibn Yahias, and others included awareness and explicit mention of a common, late medieval, Iberian provenance. This means that they frequently wrote about and traced their origins to Castilian exiles in Portugal. In addition to all of the elements of the modern critical corpus on "Western" melancholy and culture just mentioned, one may, therefore, examine less commonly read late medieval writings as well. In late medieval Castile, the contacts with texts in Arabic in Castilian medical writings have been proven on the basis of translations (sometimes anonymous) and also, more recently, through philological/linguistic analyses of the medical lexicon in Castilian medical texts of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In fifteenth-century Castile, medical texts in Arabic were being translated into the Romance vernacular and these were sometimes anonymous works whose study is quite recent. But sometimes the contact with Arabic occurs in works of known fifteenth and sixteenth-century authors of medical texts in Castilian—e.g., Alonso de Chirino, Lopez de Villalobos, Diego el Covo, Fernandez Alvarez, and Diego Alvarez Chanca.³¹ Once this has been taken into consideration, we may examine the possibility of antecedents to the figure of the physician as authority on the arts/culture. That is to say, someone who classifies and creates typologies in painting or other visual arts, in music, literature or history.

Ibn al-Jatib may not have been an exceptional writer on medicine, but he was certainly prolific and may be taken as characteristic of the general perceptions of the relations between medicine, the arts and history in his time. Rather than a peculiar source he may be seen as an exponent of late medieval, fourteenth-century ideas in Iberia. His contacts with the Romance vernacular language may reinforce this view. In his writings he explains Romance words through recourse to Arabic. The book, which is of interest here, was written between 1368–

³¹ Ma. Teresa Herrera draws attention to the field of the languages of science in a concrete case, namely that of Johannes of Ketham's *Compendium* and its Castilian translation, where one of the main factors is the "carencia de un vocabulario tecnico en castellano" in the fifteenth century. See her "Anomalias en las traducciones medievales," in *Thesavramata philologica Iosepho Orozio oblata*, ed. Ma. Rosa Herrera, S. Garcia-Jalon and M.A. Marcos Casquero (Salamanca, 1995), 313–370.

See amongst numerous studies by Ma. C. Vazquez, "Dos capitulos ginecologicos arabes y castellano," *Asclepio* 33 (1981): 183–241 or "Los textos medicos arabes fuente de los medievales castellanos," *Al Qantara* (1981): 345–364. See also C. Vazquez de Benito and Ma. Teresa Herrera, *Los arabismos de los textos medicos castellanos* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 1989), x–xii.

1371 when this Andalusian author was in exile in Morocco. It is entitled *Book of the Care of Health During the Seasons of the Year* by Muhammad b. Abdallah b. al-Jatib (*Kitāb al-wusul li-hifz al-sihha fi-l-fusul*).³² The basic notion is that different complexions need different health regimes and that these change according to the seasons. Regimes include—rather than prescriptions for the cure of a particular organ or ailment—a general “hygiene” of the body, to be sure, but also of the mind or soul. Thus we are not surprised to see the physician writing about fields which do not, to the present-day reader, concern a medical consultant. The relations between “spiritual” and corporal are here taken for granted. Literature, music, and history are as legitimate a concern for the physician as the workings of the intestine. Ibn al-Jatib prescribes, for example, the type of colors upon which the patient should concentrate. The main divisions are those of the complexions—balanced, sanguine, yellow-biled, or black-biled.

To achieve a closer sense of this regulation of non-physical aspects of human activity, we might look at how Ibn al-Jatib views different areas of the arts, sciences, literature, and the field of history and places them according to his view of their character and its influence or effect on the psyche. In addition, a kind of control group is provided by the patients whose treatment does not include the prescription of, say, history.

The balanced body in spring should engage in dinners or symposia with artisans or, even better, with ingenious table companions. They should engage in pleasant conversations about topics associated with the law and divine sciences. They should avoid polemical and sad subjects. As exercises in elocution, they should recite poetry of a gnomic or encomiastic type. As table companions, he should choose artisans whose work is not accompanied by movements, such as scribes or tailors. He should avoid excessive joys and spices or fatty foods. In the autumn, the patient should concentrate on red colors. The evening gatherings should be accompanied by musical instruments which are not melancholic. Themes of emulation and courage and poetry are to be preferred. In spring, he who is sanguine should attend evening gatherings where he can listen to sermons on fear or poetry on death, which induces weeping, and catastrophic news and sad tales, because all this conducts the pneuma inwards so that the blood does not extend, propagate or agitate. Poetry should be erotic or descriptive.

³² Lisan al-Din b. al-Jatib, *Kitāb al-wusul li-hifz al-sihha fi-l-fusul*, ed. M. Concepcion Vázquez de Benito (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1984).

It is quite clear that Ibn al-Jatib believes that he can regulate the basic choice of fields of focus or concentration in the arts and sciences. Within these fields he understands the different import of different subdivisions—the particular colors in the visual, the particular instruments in the aural-music, the particular genres in poetry. If physical complexion is related to these notions of the aptness of intellectual endeavours, the physician decides who should engage in history and who should not. According to this, he therefore does not advise history as a proper subject for the balanced patient nor for the sanguine or phlegmatic.

Other patients have different needs. In the second principle of the practical part of the book of the care for health during the seasons of the year there is a section, the fifth, which is relevant here. It concerns the regimen for the black-biled complexion during the different seasons of the year. During springtime, it is recommended that the patients contemplate waters, white-colored things, and colorful flowers. Equally recommendable are harmonious sounds, the rabel, the sitar, and foreign drums. Evening gatherings or symposia should be frequented, at which conversations are on literary and historical subjects. In summer, black-biled individuals should have conversations which do not alter moods such as trivial chats, or little stories or on literature and history, soft melodies and the murmur of waters, trees or doves. In winter, the black-biled should concentrate on experimental sciences, always in the form of questions and answers. They should visit bookbinders. The black-biled in autumn should hold conversations which do not alter the mood: anecdotes about women, love entanglements, futilities, jocular stories, erotic poetry and reflections on God. In music, soft and prolonged women's voices in song are preferred.

The Arabized medicine of late medieval Iberia, then, could include such efforts as classifications of cultural products and activities and critical evaluations and recommendations concerning culture according to their aptness for specific individuals. As has been shown, these efforts encourage practices of classification and evaluation of the arts which at times are very detailed indeed. Amatus' ties to Iberian culture in general and that of Iberian medical ideas in particular are explicit throughout his work. Now we can understand somewhat more precisely the particular implications of this for Salonikan Jewish culture. In Salonika, they become more topical because of the preponderance of Iberian Jewish exiles amongst Amatus' circle and his interlocutors.

III

To understand such features of Salonikan Jewish culture, we may look for further aspects of its provenance. Indeed, the attention to melancholy we have shown in *Amatus'* seventh volume is not exclusive to Salonika, nor is it restricted to men, *pace* Vives. *Amatus* frequently diagnosed melancholy in female patients. In cure 86 of the fifth volume of his *Centuriae*, he deals with the case of Dona Luna, wife of the magnificent Leo Abravanel, who was sad and melancholic when her menstruation was suppressed. *Amatus* advises starch in the food. Cure V/87 concerns a woman of Pesaro who was the wife of a man who used to bring serpents to Ancona for *teriacas* and pills. She was of a dark complexion. When she was pregnant she suffered from a melancholic ailment; lack of menstruation caused melancholy. The female Jewish patient's melancholy is, in this case, mentioned without generalizations as to Jews and melancholy.

But when dealing with the death of the daughter of Leon Hebreo, the Iberian author of the influential Renaissance book, *Dialogues of Love*, *Amatus* writes that Leon Hebreo used to teach many the Holy Language. He continues and expatiates on her natural temper. He sees her as representing a cold ailment. In someone who is Jewish, as is this patient, this is explained in terms of the cold humors of the Jews, which depend on their diet. The Jews eat food which induces melancholy, flatulence, and a cold-producing action. That is why Jews have a propensity to colic.

That is to say that we are offered a naturalist, rather than a supernatural explanation of supposedly Jewish characteristics. The attempts to explain supposed Jewish character or history by appealing to naturalistic factors has been found by research on Jewish texts that were read in those years as well. Thus, for example, the critique of Christian/Jewish diet is also present in Hebrew texts such as the *Shevet Yehudah*.³³ In addition, *Amatus* is writing after the publicity for the claims about Judah Abravanel's conversion ("dippoi fatto christiano") in the 1541 and 1545 Venetian editions of the *Dialoghi* by "figliuoli di Aldo"³⁴ ("The sons of Aldo").

³³ Eleazar Gutwirth, "Gender, History and the Mediaeval Judaeo-Christian Polemic," in *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Jews and Christians*, ed. Ora Limor (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996), 257–278.

³⁴ Andres Soria Olmedo, *Los Dialoghi D'amore De Leon Hebreo: Aspectos Literarios y Culturales* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1984), 15.

The affinities between these medical writings and other writings by Jews and *judeoconvertos* of the period are attested in other cases too. Thus, for example, in Italy, in those years and in the same volume (V/88) he writes that, although he is a friend of Silvano of Paris, who criticizes Vesalius, he believes that truth—rather than partisanship or “nationality/ethnicity”—should be primordial and therefore sides with Vesalius.³⁵ Such sentiments are echoed by Amatus in Salonika in the above-mentioned “Dedication” to Yaḥia where he emphasizes that the philanthropy was above partisanship, ethnicity or nationality.

In cure IV/54 he writes about flatulent melancholy which the Arabs call “myrachial.” His patient took the advice of a member of an Order who in his hypocritical fashion asserted that for the love of St. Francis he could cure everything and everybody. The patient died. Amatus continues to describe the friar as an apostate who was imprisoned in Ancona and who was the protégé of another, whose father had made three Messiahs in Portugal and Italy, which is why he was rightly condemned to be burnt. The case story about melancholy then is, again, related in the text to recent history and to his own views. This again could be seen in light of Iberian attitudes toward the friars as either heroes or antiheroes of stories. In approaching our next example, the case study of the Jewish historian/antiquarian Azaria de’ Rossi, therefore, one should be wary of the common practice since Carmoly³⁶ of decontextualizing it and using Amatus as a kind of vade mecum for miscellaneous facts. The case studies were neither written nor published as fragments detached from their larger literary and cultural frame. Amatus had a personality and an authorial persona which mediated the data.

³⁵ Although Amatus seems to produce a particular twist, the Vesalian controversy in general is not restricted to Amatus, of course. On the general controversy see, for example, Horst W. Janson, “Titian’s Laocoön Caricature and the Vesalian-Galenist Controversy,” in *16 Studies*, ed. Horst W. Janson (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1974); A. Corsano, “Lo strumentalismo logico di I. Zabarella”, *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* 41 (1962): 507–517.

³⁶ To be sure, such practices of decontextualization derive from older sources. Thomas Browne writes in his *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* III.xxii (London, 1646), 179–182, for example, about Amatus in his discussion of the ostrich without attempting to construct a coherent profile of Amatus’ thought. See also, for example, E. Carmoly, “Toledot he-ḥakham Don Itzhak Abravanel ve-divre yeme banav u-vene banav nin ve-neḥdo,” *Ozar Nehmad* 2 (1857): 47–65.

IV

Amatus' cure of the historian and antiquarian Azaria de' Rossi occurs in the *Fourth Centuria*, cure 42. This means that the case occurred before 13 February 1553, the date when he signs the Introduction to the completed book. It occurs after cure 23, which mentions 22 December 1552 as the date of death of a patient. And yet the cure refers to treatments which take several months. That is to say, they attest to prolonged contacts and conversations between Amatus and de' Rossi. The neighboring cases seem to be from Ancona. The case is developed in writing at unusual length by Amatus. Friedenwald noted inaccuracies or historical impossibilities in the case study which he called errors.³⁷ Secret³⁸ drew attention to further errors in the translation of Friedenwald (where "Iesus" is identified with "Jesuits") and mentions the possibility of typographers' errors. Elsewhere Secret implies some doubts as to Amatus' famous assertion on *De coeli harmonia* (a work putatively written by Leon Hebreo for Pico). No such doubts are expressed for, say, Widmanstetter's assertion about hearing lessons on Kabbalah from Samuel Abravanel in 1532.³⁹ Another possibility is that rather than approach Amatus selectively as a vade mecum and find him wanting, one could approach his work as narratives, with all the implications of the term.

As has been demonstrated, Amatus invests creatively in style so that the cures are not always simple case notes but exhibit some literary ambition. This general approach may be reconfirmed here. Amatus says that he not only gave de' Rossi a verbal prescription but also a written reply. This has a disturbing quality. If this is a particular case because the cure is "written," what is the status of the rest of the 699 cures? Are they oral? Are they re-elaborations in writing of oral communications or are they re-elaborations of notes? If the latter, then are the literary elements not part of this process of "re-elaboration"? All

³⁷ Harry Friedenwald, "Two Jewish Physicians in the Sixteenth Century: The Doctor Amatus Lusitanus, The Patient Azariah dei Rossi," *The Jews in Medicine* (Baltimore, 1944); Joshua O. Leibowitz, "A Probable Case of Peptic Ulcer as Described by Amatus Lusitanus (1556)," *Bulletin History of Medicine* 27, 3 (1953): 212–216; Jacob Seide, "The Two Diabetics of Amatus Lusitanus," *Imprensa medica* 19 (1955): 1–6.

³⁸ François Secret, *La Kabbala cristiana del Renacimiento*, trans. Ignacio Gómez de Liaño y Tomás Pollán (Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, 1979), 126, n. 24; *The Light of the Eyes of Azariah de' Rossi: An English translation with introduction and notes*, ed. and trans. Joanna Weinberg (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xv.

³⁹ Secret, *Kabbala*, 101, for both Widmanstetter and for the doubts: "si hemos de creer ..." or: "como quiera que sea."

of these (unasked) questions are raised because Amatus calls attention to the writerly quality of the de' Rossi case study. The literary element obtrudes further into the medical text in the opening which frames the piece. The opening of the cure is non-medical: a meeting with two friends in a bookshop. What are the possible resonances in the Iberian cultural traditions which Amatus (as well as his interlocutors and so many members of his network) claims as his own? Two unnoticed aspects may be examined here: history and literature.

There is no need to recall in detail the multitude of archival documents on Jewish *pergamíneros* and bookbinders in late medieval Spain here.⁴⁰ But in order to understand the cultural background of Amatus Lusitanus, who presents himself as a descendant of a family of fifteenth-century Castilian Jews and certainly as Iberian, some attention may be paid to historical circumstances and evidence.

On 9 November 1383, the chapter of the cathedral of Salamanca rents a house at Desafiadero street. The street is specified as the street “en que mora Reyna la judia *librera*” (“where the Jewish *librera*, Reyna, dwells.”).⁴¹ On 24 March 1404, the dean and chapter refer to the rent owed by “Yacob *librero*.”⁴² On 5 April 1417, a canon refers to Desafiadero street and specifies further “casas ... en que solia morar Abrahan *librero*” (“the houses where Abrahan the *librero* used to live.”).⁴³ In 1481 there are two documents which refer to a house, near the Calle mayor de la juderia as “casas en que buiua el judio *librero*” (“houses where the Jewish *librero* used to live”).⁴⁴

In Avila, the archival documents refer to don Çulema de Lerma, whose house, c. 1454, was in the corner of the plaça near the Calle de las Mantequeras. He was a *librero*.⁴⁵ In Valladolid, c. 1492, we

⁴⁰ Josep Maria Madurell i Marimon, “Encuadernadores y libreros barceloneses judíos y conversos,” *Sefarad* 21/22/23 (1961/1962/1963), 300–338, 345–372, and 74–103. Elyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 49, believed that “higher studies did not have ... fixed patterns ... especially so in Spain at the beginning of the eleventh century. Scholars would meet in ... bookshops; they would discuss topics of literary concern and would debate new ideas propounded by one scholar or another; they would also listen to poetry recitations.”

⁴¹ Carlos Carrete Parrondo, *Fontes iudaeorum regni castellae*, I (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1981), [henceforward FIRC] #255.

⁴² *Ibid.*, #269.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, #310.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* #344 and #345.

⁴⁵ Fritz Baer, *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Schocken, 1936), 433.

find Mose, the *librero*.⁴⁶ Before the expulsion, there lived in Talavera a Rabbi Abraham who used to preach there. In 1492, he left for North Africa: Alcazarquivir, Arcilla. He later converted to Christianity and returned to Talavera adopting the name Luis Garcia. His profession, according to Leon Tello, was described in the Inquisition file of 1514 as “*librero*.”⁴⁷ Baer drew attention to his testimony. In it, Rabbi Abraham asserted that he had a relative called maestre Enrique, who was physician to the King of Portugal, who wrote to him and included Hebrew citations in his letter.⁴⁸ The role of the printshop/bookshop in Iberian culture in the first half of the sixteenth century may also be recalled. It was a meeting place for cathedral canons of an intellectual bent, academics from the new universities, and also book collectors such as Hernando Colon, who would meticulously consign to a register the exact price paid for purchases, such as manuscripts of Abraham Zacut’s works. They seem to have been foci for *iluminados* and also for Erasmian tendencies. These were not unknown amongst the *judeoconversos*. But the common element between such disparate types was curiosity and thirst for novelties. The booksellers were those who were in contact with their colleagues outside Spain and who were up to date with recent publications. Sometimes Hernando Colon would purchase a book on the very same date of its impression according to the colophon.⁴⁹

The reference to the bookshop in such cultures, although unrecognized by Friedenwald and his school, would thus have historical resonances. Amatus’ explicit—and medically unnecessary—references to book sellers and bookshops have been mentioned in a previous study. The intimate links between Amatus’ documented circle on the one hand, and the print shops and booksellers on the other, is another subject which could be developed extensively elsewhere. Here it may suffice to recall that, according to the evidence, some of the members of his network and his close friends were linked to printing projects—perhaps particularly linked to printing projects in modern languages: Diego Pires, Dona Gracia, Joseph Nassi, Solomon Usque, Afia, and Gedella ibn Yahia.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 426.

⁴⁷ Pilar Leon Tello, *Judios de Toledo*, vol. 2 (Madrid: CSIC, 1979), 1739.

⁴⁸ Baer, *Juden*, 428.

⁴⁹ Marcel Bataillon, *Erasmus y Espana. Estudios sobre la historia espiritual del siglo XVI* (Mexico-Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1966).

As unrecognized as the former is, so is the literary element. But it is also present. The opening of a literary prose text in a bookshop recalls the opening of a prose text by another writer. Like Amatus, he was an Iberian exile in Italy. Like Amatus, he was a reader of both Iberian and Italian writings and literature in the 1540s and 1550s. Like Amatus, he was a member of Dona Gracia's circle. Like Amatus, he also dedicated works to the future Duke of Naxos.

However, Núñez de Reynoso,⁵⁰ unlike Amatus, had no known connections with medicine. His Prologue/Dedication to Dona Gracia's relative, the future Duke of Naxos, is at the beginning of a book which different and differing critics have unanimously identified as containing a character who represents Dona Gracia.⁵¹ The text of this Prologue/Dedication is from about a year before the de' Rossi case, i.e., 24 January 1552, when Reynoso writes his letter of dedication to the future Duke of Naxos. Teijeiro Fuentes has noted this framing in a bookshop in Núñez Reynoso⁵² as lending an air of chance find or discovery to the genesis of the work—as if finding the book was a surprise for the author who, it is to be assumed, was unaware of its existence. Teijeiro explains this as part of a strategy for arousing curiosity. In the same direction is the element of the antiquity of the book, the unexplained lack of

⁵⁰ Constance Hubbard Rose, *Alonso Núñez de Reynoso: The Lament of a Sixteenth-Century Exile* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971).

⁵¹ It reads: "Habiendo en casa de un librero visto entre algunos libros uno que razonamiento de amor se llama me tomo deseo viendo tan buen nombre de leer algo en el; y leyendo una carta que al principio estaba vi que aquel libro habia sido escrito primero en lengua griega y despues en latina y ultimamente en toscana y pasando por delante halle que comenzaba en el quinto libro. El haber sido escrito en tantas lenguas el faltarle los primeros cuatro libros fue causa que mas curiosamente desease entender de que trataba ..." [Teijeiro, 29]

⁵² *Alonso Nunez Reinoso: Los amores de Clarea y Florisea y los trabajos de la sin ventura Isea*, ed. M.A. Teijeiro Fuentes (Caceres: Universidad de Extremadura, 1991); see also *Novelistas anteriores a Cervantes*, ed. Carles Aribau (Madrid, 1876) and the edition by Jose Jimenez Ruiz (Malaga: Universidad de Malaga, 1997). I construct this analogy between Amatus and Núñez de Reynoso because of historical and literary reasons. Nevertheless, the creation of a surprising opening by imagining curious discoveries and obscure origins are not unique to Reynoso. Riquer's explanation of the Cide Hamete Benengeli episode is based on other sixteenth-century works which are not usually linked to Amatus Lusitanus: *Cirongilio de Tracia*; *Belianis de Grecia* and *Las Sergas de Esplandian*. All of these four texts, like Reynoso and like Amatus use "este recurso destinado a interesar al lector e intrigarlo con lo exotico y raro." See Martin de Riquer, *Aproximacion al Quijote* (Pamplona: Salvat, 1970), 66. Here I cannot expatiate on even further, roughly contemporary analogues, such as the "finds" of Murviedro, *Nevu'at ha-yeled*, *Mashre Qitrin*, Balbo and other cases.

the four lost books, its invention and ingenuity. All are part of the atmosphere of curiosity, rarity and surprise constructed in the 1550s. Núñez de Reynoso attempts to raise the interest of the reader. He does this in the introduction/dedication by means of a variation on the time-honored practice of *petitio benevolentiae*, characteristic of a preliminary matter such as introductions. The empirical element is that in 1551 (a few months before Núñez de Reynoso's elaboration of the Italian translation of the Byzantine novel *Clareo*) there appears in Venice the publication of *Dell'amore di Leucippe y Clitophonte nuovamente tradotto dalla lingua greca* by Aquiles Tacio.

Today there is no need to elaborate on the significance of *curiositas*⁵³ in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century writings in general and their possible contrast with older, medieval attitudes. What may need to be recalled is the Iberian traditions of *curiositas* evident in the text which I

⁵³ Klaus Krüger, ed., *Curiositas: Welterfahrung und ästhetische Neugierde in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002). The older views about the idyllic relations between theology and curiosity or scientific observation—of which the conventional icon was God with a compass miniatures in the *Bibles Moralisées* of the thirteenth century (repeatedly used in recent years by John Murdoch, Amos Funkenstein, David C. Lindberg and various others), has recently been challenged. According to Tachau, “Vana curiositas” was the medieval attitude. See Katherine H. Tachau, “God’s compass and ‘Vana Curiositas’: scientific study in the Old French ‘Bible Moralisée,’” *The Art Bulletin* (March 1998): 1–21: “Seen in that early thirteenth-century Parisian context, the depiction of the compass-wielding God in the first image of the Old French Bible moralisée would not have conveyed to its educated or royal viewers any approbation of the scientific study of the material world. Rather, the painting voices first of all the biblical exegetes’ conviction that only God—not astronomers or philosophers—encompasses the entire created order.” She also points out that medieval thinkers were not all enthusiastic about curiosity: “First of all, curiosity can lead to presumption. ... Second, curious scholars can fall into heresy by taking the rational investigation of the mysteries of the faith beyond the limits established by the Church Fathers. Third, curiosity can also have the adverse effect of keeping the scholar from theology altogether by making him too interested in the secular arts and in useless questions about the natural world.” In another sermon, Jacques de Vitry admonished the “many scholars [who] because of curiosity” and [what is] falsely called ‘knowledge’ are corrupted ... Many, indeed, from curious and excessive investigation will fall into heresy, and disputing about the Creator or Creation beyond measure and above the power of their abilities, they will deviate from the truth.” Tachau, *Art Bulletin*, loc cit. For our purposes, this means that the conventional method of decontextualizing medieval French evidence and postulating it as universal, total fact is no longer acceptable. The question of “creation by compass” in medieval Hebrew texts from fifteenth-century Iberia has been recently problematized; see Eleazar Gutwirth, “Face to Face: Realism and Physiognomy in Bonafed’s Poetry,” in *The Spanish Jewish Interaction*, ed. Aviva Doron (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2000), 327–341.

have adduced above (which links curiosity and desire: “mas *curiosamente disease*”) and its relevance to understanding Amatus, de’ Rossi, and others. The concept of friendship and the praise of a friend for his knowledge of novelties and thirst for novelties is introduced at the beginning of Amatus’ case history of de’ Rossi. It reminds us of the question of tedium raised by Amatus in the text of the Prologue/Dedication to the seventh volume of the *Centuriae* mentioned above. There follows a brief discussion of the work of Galatino. This is a curious choice. Since the reputation of Amatus is that of a skeptic or someone who dislikes superstition, it is interesting to see him praise Galatino’s non-skeptic compilation against the Jews or the Hebrews as an excellent work full of erudition. It may be recalled that Galatino includes amongst others a copy or re-edition of the *Iggeret Nehunia ben Hakana* of Pablo de Heredia. This Latin pseudoepigraphon had been dedicated in the 1480s to the second Count of Tendilla, a Mendoza, and purports to be the correspondence between a rabbinical authority associated with mystical/esoteric texts, Nehunia ben HaKana and his “son,” Ha-Kana ben Nehunia, amongst other things. The text, as has been explained elsewhere, has, since Bartolucci, been used for various, different and differing, partial purposes. It has not been seen in its original context.⁵⁴ Whatever the case, it is not a work written in a critical or skeptical mode.

This *Iggeret*, which Galatino includes in his compilation, purports to contain, for example, a contemporary description of Jesus’ schooldays and his behavior in the Galilean classroom.⁵⁵ It is unlikely, therefore, that the allusion is motivated by Amatus’ personal concerns with the history of Christian Kabbalah, the history of Jesus or the religious orders as is commonly assumed without reading the rest of Amatus’ work.

After the discussion on Galatino, Azaria asked Amatus to do him the favor of helping to cure him. Amatus describes him as someone who was then (c. 1552/3) 35 years old, thin, with scabies all over his body, yellow-faced and attacked by a strange heat. The advice was to take thermal waters. Amatus lists ten symptoms. The following may be relevant for us: the historian has a canine appetite day and

⁵⁴ See Eleazar Gutwirth, “The Politics of the Hyphen: Mediating Hispano-Jewish Cultures Today,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 91 (2001): 395–409.

⁵⁵ There is no need to discuss here the question of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* or the *Alphabeta de Ben Sira* except to point to the apparent lack of interest in such questions in discussions of Heredia’s works.

night; his dreams and his thoughts are melancholic; his heart beats irregularly; sometimes he has difficulties in breathing. The historian has long, wakeful, sleepless nights and gets little rest, but sometimes he falls into a very strong deep sleep. During his sleep, the historian suffers anxieties and oppressions, especially when he sleeps on his left side. He has difficulties in waking. He sighs, weeps, and urinates unusually frequently.⁵⁶

Amatus then proceeds to write an excursus on the original cause. Almost all Jews are by nature subject to *atrabilia* (black bile). First of all, because they are subjugated and captive, therefore they are timid and sad, and that is why they are atrabiliar (according to Hippocrates in the *Aphorisms*, if patients persist for a long time in suspicion and sadness, then that is a form of *atrabiles*). After this explanation, Amatus adds that Jews are by nature atrabiliar because they are all very zealous and devoted to the Law of God. Therefore, the Jews are accustomed to consuming foods which are atrabilious, particularly the Jews of Italy who consume ducks, smoked beef, legumes, and a great deal of salted cheese. They also eat meat patties or pies, that is to say, dough incrustated with meat, stews with innards and legumes, lentils, olives, and salted meat.

The importance of this passage may need emphasis. Indeed, it is possible to dismiss it as belonging in an extremely ancient line of relating diet to medicine. The *Shevet Yehudah* text mentioned above shows the currency of this idea within certain similar, well defined cultural parameters: Hebrew readers who are addressed in Spanish in the Ottoman Empire and who are mainly interested in an Iberian-centered view of Jewish history. The case of Rhazes' *Isagogue* serves to show that even the precise items of food (e.g., lentils, and red meat) mentioned by Amatus were already associated with *atrabilia* and melancholy in that old text belonging to the elementary, introductory genre of the *Isagogues*.⁵⁷ What will not be found in Rhazes is the association of Jews with melancholy, particular diet, and particular

⁵⁶ Siraisi has called attention to the tradition of late medieval perceptions in medical texts (e.g., Arnau de Villanova) of the scholar/author/writer as someone who urinates frequently in: Nancy Siraisi, "Anatomizing the Past," *Renaissance Quarterly* 53 (2000): 1–30.

⁵⁷ Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Zakariya Razi, *Libro de la introduccion al arte de la medicina o "Isagoge"*, ed. M.C. Vazquez de Benito (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1979).

“national” divisions between Jews from different origins or countries. Amatus’ particular narrative and representation of diet has no exact precedent in these ancient and medieval traditions. Amatus’ text is only explained in a vague, general manner by appeal to these ancient and medieval medical perspectives, although evidently they are also present among his numerous sources.

Perhaps more relevant, therefore, are the traditions of representation to which he is heir and which go to make up his context. Indeed, texts concerning the Iberian representations of the Jews and Judaizers or Conversos in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, for example, have been studied and shown to have depended heavily (apart from conventional religious ideas) on the basic assumption that food is a central element of identity. It should be made clear that while, evidently, these include some questions of kosher food, they are not circumscribed by them. The food items mentioned in these fifteenth- and sixteenth-century texts are not from the classical permitted/forbidden lists of the frequently translated biblical texts. That is why, despite numerous and repeated philological and text critical efforts, there are items which are still unidentified by philology. They are not a purely lexicographic or philological problem. In many cases the items mentioned in, say, Ruiz/Rodrigo Cota’s texts⁵⁸ (1470s?) described as mysterious in the early twentieth century still remain unidentified today, as do those in *La Lozana Andaluza*, despite numerous editions and philological commentary. The basic steps in these texts as in Amatus (despite differences) are the observation of food habits, the collection of the results of such observations, and finally their inscription into the text and publication.

Amatus continues and reasserts that it is well known that every Hebrew has an atrabilious propensity and Azaria is no exception. All the more so since he is a student of medicine and is devoted to medical matters. He is also physically delicate and his veins are thin; his chest is narrow—all of which attest to an atrabiliar temperament. The origin of his ills lies in the black bile. His dry complexion is attested by the scabies.

His dreams were investigated by Amatus, who repeats that they are of a melancholy nature as are his thoughts. Spiritual habits follow the temperament of the organism as Hippocrates asserts in his book on

⁵⁸ Eleazar Gutwirth, “On the Background to Cota’s Epitalamio Burlesco,” *Romanische Forschungen* 97, 1 (1985): 1–14.

insomnia. Pituitary accumulations cause occasional deep sleep. These come from the anxieties of his heart and the sensations of heaviness and difficulty come from the malignant humor and its heat. Because of these symptoms, he notes in Azaria a difficult vigil, great agitation of body and spirit. This is mitigated by sighs and tears which attenuate the humor. The bile cannot come from the pituitary, as was first testified by Rabbi Moses.

Amatus, having investigated the causes of Azaria's ills turns to the question of how to remedy Azaria. He notes that Azaria lives in a cold and humid place. He is advised to leave that foggy atmosphere of darkness or lack of sun which is common in Mantua and in Ferrara. This demonstrates that the astronomical/astrological component is still present in Amatus' climatology, although it is neither unique nor central to his thought.

Amatus' dietary advice becomes comprehensible, in part, if—unlike received opinion—we bring to bear upon the question the multitude of sources on dietary advice in the Renaissance. But the perspective of the cure goes beyond this and constructs further layers. In someone who, like Amatus, had come from Flanders to Italy, we notice the construction of an Italian diet; we also notice the urban (cf. the allusions to Mantua or Ferrara), geographic perspective. This may be of some significance if we recall the development of new perspectives on representation and diet in the particular period of the second half of the sixteenth century. These lead to the noticeable or even abrupt phenomenon of the Italian reception of Antwerp/Flemish practices of food representation in the case of the visual arts. That is to say, paintings about food by Vincenzo Campi, Bartolomeo Passarotti, and Annibale Carracci, all made in Cremona and Bologna between about 1580 and 1585.⁵⁹ The phenomenon has been related to previous, earlier discussions about the different diets for the high-born and the low-born. This demonstrates that the paintings are the end-product of changes which occur first in the framework of the non-visual, i.e., they first appear as

⁵⁹ For the Christian Italian background, see, for example, Sheila McTighe, "Foods and the body in Italian genre paintings, about 1580: Campi, Passarotti, Carracci," *The Art Bulletin* (June 2004): 301–323; Jan Ceard, "La dietetique dans la medecine de la Renaissance," in *Pratiques et discours alimentaires a la Renaissance*, ed. Jean-Claude Margolin and Robert Sauzet (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1982), 21–36; Ken Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), and for the Iberian Jewish history, Eleazar Gutwirth, "Medieval alimentation: the Hispano-Jewish Evidence (c. 1255–1310)," *Helmantica* 46 (1995): 293–298.

discussions or writings about diet. Amatus predates these cultural developments by decades. He also engages in the representation of food, in the question of aptness, and shares in the movement from Flanders in the 1540s to Italy in the 1550s. Amatus adds to general treatments of Renaissance diet these and other particularities, such as geography, religion, and culture. Finally, some awareness of the traditions of representation (e.g., *Lozana*, *Epitalamio burlesco*) help us understand the construction of particular narratives and the construction of divisions within Jewish diet (e.g., Italian-Jewish). Such attention to context might help us read his cure.

Azaria was given a diet of good juices easy to digest and with little superfluities so as to avoid flatulence and obstruction. The bread should be white and sprinkled with seeds of rye as is the custom to prepare in the *German bakery in Venice*. He was told to avoid mazzot (unleavened bread) as much as possible. If, because of his religion, he could not avoid them during Passover, he should at least prepare them with sugar or eggs, because with these additions they become lighter. The meat should be chickens, capons, goat, veal, and mutton. Jews are accustomed to eat cold meats such as smoked beef, goose, duck and similar cold meats. Azaria should avoid these entirely. He is permitted to consume non-flying pigeons but not quails. Nor should he consume salted cheese nor delicacies made with it. He should avoid those which the *Calabrese* prepare with this cheese which are called “macatrones” or “macaroni.” He was allowed chicken broth with a few aromatic herbs⁶⁰ or spices. Amongst the garden vegetables, he advises endives, chicory, spinach, and lettuce. For fruit, he is recommended grapes, mature figs, *Corinthian* raisins, pistachio, and almonds. Fresh eggs were allowed as long as they were well beaten. Fish are praiseworthy, especially those who live in stony and sandy waters, but not fried in oil. Azaria’s lunch should be larger than his dinner. He was allowed desserts such as pears in syrup, marzipan, sugared pine kernels. Light, white wine diluted in barley water or common cold water may be drunk, but parsimoniously. He should avoid sleeping during the day, particularly in the mornings.

His studies at night should be avoided. They are against nature, for at night the spirits gather to the inner parts, but in those who spend the night studying the spirits have to go outwards because of the violence

⁶⁰ On aromatics, see S. Kottek, “Sur quelques aromates cités dans la Bible et le Talmud,” *Revue de l’Histoire de la Médecine Hébraïque* 104 (1973): 105–108.

and impulse of the study. Studying during the day may be tolerated but only two hours after reflection on light problems. His exercises should be in the morning. He should avoid sadness or anger but should lead a life of contentment, joy and tranquility of spirit because this leads to good health.

Azaria's thinness could not be remedied. They treated him with the greatest solicitude. He was given a bath in waters *from the River Po* with aromatic herbs—chamomile and roses. He would stay in the aromatic bath for almost an hour because it gave him pleasure. The treatment was prolonged, it took about four months. Azaria behaved valiantly during this period.

The point here is evidently not that Amatus has imagined his description of Azaria. Nevertheless, Amatus' mediations should be clear. Amatus had frequently described case histories of melancholy. Once a survey of the relevant texts dispersed throughout the seven hundred cures is carried out, the conclusion is that they are not all identical. In some cases he refers to "national characteristics," in others he does not. The national characteristics are fluid and contradictory: sometimes it is the Iberians who are melancholic, at other times it is the Jews, at other times it is women, or then again, it might be dark complexions which are characterized by melancholy. A concept of nation, which embraces everything from gender to geography or religious practice, is as protean—and ultimately meaningless—as the concepts of *naşion*, *naçao* or *nascio* in Iberian Romance language texts of that particular period. In some cures of melancholy in the *Centuriae*, he expatiates on symptoms, prescriptions, etc. In others he abbreviates. Sometimes he mentions the name of the patient, at other times he does not. That is to say that the inordinate length in the writing of this particular case study is individual rather than generic and cannot be explained by mere mention of *Consilia*.

In addition, there is the possible relevance of melancholy to the historian de' Rossi's development and evolution, and, thus, to that of Jewish historiography. Indeed, in an age in which Renaissance intellectual figures are closely watched and studied and their writings scrutinized for traces of development (change over time) of their views and interests, we notice a certain lacuna in the knowledge about de' Rossi's development. That is to say that the *Me'or Enayim* does not appear as a natural stage in a documented, paced intellectual evolution of the scholar. With hindsight, one could speculate about the possible relation between the particular directions and interests manifested in the early

evidence and the great work of the later years.⁶¹ That it is possible now to speak of early evidence is due to the (relatively late and recent)⁶² discovery/description of a De' Rossi manuscript. This manuscript may, arguably,⁶³ be analogous to a copy book or commonplace notebook, i.e., a method of study/aid to investigation which was in use by de' Rossi as it was in use by other Renaissance intellectuals, e.g., da Vinci or Arias Montano. Perhaps there is room for another view. That is to say that, beyond the unformed interests revealed by the unrelated—almost incongruous—subjects of his readings/copies, de' Rossi was frankly eclectic and had no particular antiquarian interests in his early phase. Even when he was 35 years old, at the time of the meeting with Amatus, he is described more as someone interested in medical matters rather than antiquarian or historical pursuits. These putative medical interests, however, do not seem to have led to a creative written corpus which can be studied today or realistically compared to his interests in other subjects. Of particular interest would be the identification of “night studies” or “light studies,” classifications which both Amatus and Azaria understood. Amatus tried to lead or direct Azaria towards these studies.

Amatus Lusitanus did not work at purely clinical, technical, physical, bodily levels, although he was certainly very interested in these aspects. One of the consistent traits is that of sociability. Curiosity about his patients' intellectual makeup is another, related trait. Renaissance *curiositas* is usually studied in contexts other than the Ottoman Empire. It leads to what might be called practices of encouragement and constructive, creative influence in Italy first and in Salonika later. He praises the polyglossia of a German merchant who is his patient. He praises Leon Hebreo for having taught the Holy Language to many. He praises Solomon Usque for engaging in creative literary practices, translations of Petrarch perhaps. He publicizes his role in encouraging Jacob Mantino to continue his work in the direction of translations of Arabic and Hebrew medical texts into Latin. He introduces and

⁶¹ See Weinberg, *Azariah de' Rossi*, introduction. See also Joanna Weinberg, *Azariah de' Rossi's Observations on the Syriac New Testament: A Critique of the Vulgate by a Sixteenth-century Jew* (London–Turin: The Warburg Institute, 2005).

⁶² Malachi Beth Arie and Moshe Idel “Ma'amar al ha-kez,” *Kivriat Sefer* 54, 1 (1979): 174–194.

⁶³ See my remarks on de' Rossi and his notebooks and the analogy to other exponents of Renaissance scholarship such as Arias Montano in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 83 (1992): 210–216.

publicizes the names of musicians into the printed text of the cures and makes explicit his admiration of them. He advertises his admiration for composers of sermons preached at synagogues, whether in Italy or in the Ottoman Empire. The conclusion seems to be clear: Amatus does not see his function as purely clinical, bodily or technical. His authority and influence are not restricted to his patients' diet, but is also aimed at their non-physical activities.

Conclusion

As has been seen, in the Jewish networks in Italy and the Ottoman Empire mentioned above, the body was not divorced from the soul nor was it seen outside "the city." The concept of melancholy unites various strands of such perspectives. Amatus subverts certain presuppositions about the city in the literature on the sixteenth century. Recent work on sixteenth-century urban cultures has accustomed us to realize that one city need not imply one culture but, rather, that one city might be the context of sometimes clearly discernible diverse trends.⁶⁴ As an arbiter of culture, who leads the directions of his patients and friends, colleagues, and other contacts, Amatus introduces us to horizons of reference which are somewhat hybrid, diverse and differentiated from those offered by the usual legal, and administrative sources. The contours thus reconstructed are not necessarily those of an unusually remedial, litigious, or particularistic culture. Some of the factors are historical: expulsions, itineraries, memories of, or contacts with Iberian culture. Then there are consequences of these: attitudes to the printing press and distribution systems (e.g., printing shop, book shop, circles of printers and editors/typesetters, etc.), to modern languages and literatures, to the renewed interest in ancient and in modern texts. The metaphoric body/mind opposition here has limits.

Exponents of the Iberian tradition, which Amatus and his fellow exiles from Iberia claimed as their own, included thinkers such as Meir ibn Gabbai, the fifteenth-century author. In the epigraph I selected for the opening of this article, he constructs the body as united, by exile, to the soul or "bird" (the age old analogue in numerous cultures to) the poet, the creator of literature, culture, texts. Like the

⁶⁴ Marco Bertozzi, ed., *Alla corte degli Estensi Filosofia arte e cultura a Ferrara nei secoli XV e XVI* (Ferrara: Università degli Studi, 1994).

poet, so too does the bird “sing”; it sings a quotation—a previous text. Melancholy and exile may be linked by common sense. But the poetic/literary link between exile and creation/composition is as ancient as the link between alienation from place and alienation from self (*Tristia*, *Ex Ponto* and numerous others). But alienation from self in the sixteenth-century tradition, which, as we now know, leads to the creation of the “madman,” melancholic Quixote (i.e., sixteenth-century medical ideas in Iberian or Atlantic writers), means also that melancholy madness leads to creativity. Also in the circles of Amatus, one of the most innovative works of the sixteenth century was chosen as worthy of edition and publication. This was the *Hystoria de menina e moça*, selected for investment in 1554 by Abraham Usque (the printer of the *Consolation for the Tribulations of the People of Israel*, Prayerbooks and Bible) in Ferrara in the circles of Amatus and his friends. To be sure, earlier generations noticed only the most obvious elements, in this work which had interested the Iberian Jewish exiles in Italy, such as Petrarchism.⁶⁵ Over the years some have wondered whether it is not more of a challenge to find such a sixteenth-century work which *does not* show elements of Petrarchism. By now, however, it has been made clear that there is in this work a notable attempt to deal creatively with the metaphysics of exile.⁶⁶ It is therefore logical that its opening, indeed its first line, alludes to exile. It is an opening which has been studied⁶⁷ for its notable combination of sounds, i.e., extremely specific linguistic/cultural features. All of these diverse strands form a conceptual cluster which becomes more comprehensible in the cultures which inherited, alongside so many other Aristotelian and pseudo-Aristotelian ideas, the old question in *Problemata*, number 30: “Why is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, politics, or the arts are melancholic?”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Eugenio Asenio, *Estudios Portugueses* (Paris: F.C.G.-C.C.P., 1974).

⁶⁶ See Macedo, *Do significado oculto* (see note 1).

⁶⁷ Gallego Morell, *Bernardim Ribeiro* (see note 1).

⁶⁸ For the *Problemata*, Cicero, Ficino, Montaigne, etc., see M.A. Screech, *Montaigne and Melancholy: The Wisdom of the Essays* (London: Duckworth, 1983).

“DEN IKH BIN TREYFE GEVEZN”:
BODY PERCEPTIONS IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY
JEWISH AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS*

MARIA DIEMLING

Introduction

When Asher haLevi, a Jew from Alsace born in 1598, discovered to his horror that he had a nocturnal emission on the night of Yom Kippur, he woke up his wife in tears and they both wept together. Since he was the only *hazan* present in his community, he had to make sure he was fit for leading the community in prayer and purify himself before sunrise. He looked up the relevant passage in the *Levush*¹ for the amount of water needed and discovered to his relief that a full immersion was not necessary.² He asked God to show mercy towards him for the merits of his righteous forefathers and for the benefit of his innocent children and vowed to do penitence and mend his ways.³

We know about this—in modern eyes rather intimate and private—incident because haLevi mentioned it in autobiographical notes that were discovered by chance in a little bookstall on the banks of the Seine in Paris some hundred years ago.⁴ Why was haLevi so disturbed by the

* This is a revised version of a paper which I presented in August 2005 at the Fourteenth World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. I am grateful to the participants for their comments. I also wish to thank Roni Weinstein for asking pertinent questions after reading an earlier version of this paper.

¹ A halakhic compendium by R. Mordechai Yafe, “Baal Ha-Levushim” (1530–1612).

² *Levush haḥur*, Orah Ḥayyim (Jerusalem: Makhon Ozar haPosekim, 2000), 401, sign 11.

³ M[oses] Ginsburger, ed. and trans., *Die Memoiren des Ascher Levy aus Reichshofen im Elsaß (1598–1635)* (Berlin: Louis Lamm, 1913), 32–33. The German translation is not always accurate and not complete. Page numbers refer to the Hebrew text unless otherwise noted. The original manuscript is in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, MS JNUL 8° 4051.

⁴ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, Vorwort, 5 (German). See on this text (and its possible preservation by a Christian Hebraist for polemical purposes), Michael Stanislawski, *Autobiographical Jews: Essays in Jewish Self-Fashioning* (Seattle-London: University of Washington Press, 2004), 36–37. The most extensive discussion of the author and his mem-

emission of semen and how did he resolve what he perceived as a major problem, still remembered as an important event much later?

It is well acknowledged that the way human beings experience their bodies and interpret their physical sensations, pleasures, and ailments depends on the norms and values of the society in which they live. There is a close link between attitudes shaped by religious beliefs and the understanding of physical experiences.⁵ Kalman P. Bland has noted that religion can be regarded as “a specialized repertory of bodily habits” and he stressed that religious rules constituted in pre-modern times “comprehensive systems for regulating the body.”⁶ Religion dictated how bodies ate and drank, how they worked and how they behaved in worship, how they made love, gave birth, and died.

Howard Eilberg-Schwartz has reminded us that Jewish texts in the pre-modern era were “deeply concerned with the body and bodily processes.” Texts deal with bodily emissions, circumcision, rules for defecation and urination, rules about how to perform sexual intercourse, and so on.⁷ How is the body perceived in non-normative texts written by early modern Jews living in German lands? Perceptions of the body in autobiographical accounts have in the last years attracted much scholarly attention,⁸ but so far Jewish examples of writing about the self have not been explored from the perspective of an anthropology of the body.

In this article I shall examine how a certain set of rules laid out in normative texts shaped the body perception of people who were expected to follow these rules. More specifically, paraphrasing Michel Feher: “What kind of body do early modern Jews endow themselves

oirs is the recent article by Debra Kaplan, “The Self in Social Context: Asher ha-Levi of Reichshofen’s *Sefer Zikhronot*,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 97, 2 (2007): 210–236.

⁵ Lucinda McCray Beier has noted that there was a substantial difference between how rural Puritan cleric Josselin and his contemporary, the secular, rational Londoner Samuel Pepys understood their illnesses. Lucinda McCray Beier, “In Sickness and in Health: A Seventeenth Century Family’s Experience,” in *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 122–123.

⁶ Kalman P. Bland, “Defending, Enjoying, and Regulating the Visual,” in *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages Through the Early Modern Period*, ed. Lawrence Fine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 281–297, here 281.

⁷ Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 2–3. See also the contribution by Jeffrey R. Woolf in this volume.

⁸ For a recent survey of studies exploring the body in early modern autobiographical texts, see Gudrun Piller, *Private Körper. Spuren des Leibes in Selbstzeugnissen des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), 1–13.

with—or attempt to acquire—given the power they attribute to the divine?” As can be clearly seen in normative religious texts, scholars constantly discuss which exercises have to be done in order to “resemble God physically or to commune sensually with him.” What does the body have to do in order to fulfill God’s commandments? And which bodily experiences prevent Jews from “participating in divine perfection”?⁹ To put it more bluntly, can we speak of a specific “Jewish body experience” because Jews as Jews were subjected to a specific set of normative rules that distinguished their self-perception from others who were not expected to follow it? And is there a gap between Halakhah and the actual understanding of one’s body?

Early Modern Autobiographical Writing

Parallel to the surge of interest in “life-writing” (a term used by James Olney),¹⁰ Jewish autobiographical writing has been increasingly explored. This is particularly true for the Early Modern Period where several stimulating studies discuss sources written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Natalie Zemon Davies has studied both Leon Modena¹¹ and Glikl bas Leib;¹² Michael Stanislawski discussed Glikl and Asher ben Eliezer haLevi of Reichshofen in his work on “Autobiographical Jews;”¹³ a recent issue of *The Jewish Quarterly Review* devoted to “Auto/Biography” included important methodological discussions by J.H. Chajes and Marcus Moseley,¹⁴ and the latter has recently published

⁹ Michel Fehler, Ramona Nadaff, and Nadia Tazi, ed., *Fragments for a History of the Human Body* (New York: Zone, 1989), Part one, 13.

¹⁰ James Olney, *Memory & Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), xv.

¹¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, “Fame and Secrecy: Leon Modena’s *Life* as an Early Modern Autobiography,” in *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena’s Life of Judah*, ed. Mark R. Cohen (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 55–70. On Modena, see also David Malkiel, ed., *The Lion Shall Roar: Leon Modena and His World* (Jerusalem: Ben Zevi Institute, 2003) (in English and Hebrew).

¹² Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). On Glikl see also Monika Richarz, ed., *Die Hamburger Kauffrau Glikl: jüdische Existenz in der frühen Neuzeit* (Hamburg: Christians, 2001), and the critical edition of Glikl’s *zikhroynes* by Chava Turniansky, *Glikl. Memoires 1691–1719* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazer Center, 2006) (Yiddish and Hebrew).

¹³ This is the title of Stanislawski, *Autobiographical Jews*.

¹⁴ *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, 1 (2005).

a magisterial study on the “origins of Jewish autobiography.”¹⁵ The interest in various aspects of “Jewish Self-Fashioning” (Stanislawski) in this period is also indicated, for example, by the fact that two autobiographical texts, neither published before the twentieth century, “constitute ... the most extensively edited English translations of early-modern Hebrew texts to have appeared in recent years.”¹⁶

Marcus Moseley has convincingly argued that we can neither group early modern ego-documents, written in different languages, in different places and in different cultural contexts, under the title of Jewish autobiography as a distinctive genre as if they “somehow form[ed] a continuum, a tradition subject to some more or less immanent law of development,”¹⁷ nor classify such examples of “life-writing” as “autobiographies.” He argues that autobiography developed in the wake of the first proper work that deserves this name, Rousseau’s influential *Confessions*, although, perhaps surprisingly, an East European Jew, Solomon Maimon, was one of the first authors to take the lead and write one of the earliest autobiographies “clearly fashioned” after Rousseau’s work.¹⁸ “Autobiographies” written before the Haskalah were only in retrospect regarded as such. It is still justified, however, to regard early modern examples as autobiographical texts, as Moseley conceded: “... a text may be autobiographical—evidence, that is, a measure of self-referentiality, concern for the self—without its being *ipso facto* an ‘autobiography’—a text, that is, that avails itself of specific conventions and strategies for the attainment of a specific and primary goal: literary presentation of the extra-textual self of the author.”¹⁹

I am interested in this “concern for the self” and the exploration of oneself as an individual in these texts insofar as they regard the experience of the body. Gadi Algazi has reminded us that while we can-

¹⁵ Marcus Moseley, *Being for Myself Alone: Origins of Jewish Autobiography* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Moseley, *Being for Myself*, 105, referring to Leon Modena’s *Hayyei Yehudah* and Glikl bas Leib’s *zikhronyes*.

¹⁷ Moseley, *Being for Myself*, 69.

¹⁸ Moseley, *Being for Myself*, 13. Maimon’s *Lebensgeschichte* was first published in 1792. A fully digitized version can be downloaded from <http://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/en/index.html>.

¹⁹ Moseley, *Being for Myself*, 81–82. See also the important observations by J.H. Chajes, “Accounting for the Self: Preliminary Generic-Historical Reflection on Early Modern Jewish Egodocuments,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, 1 (2005): 1–15, on so far rather neglected sources of self-accounting, such as note-books or the circumcision records of *mohalim*.

not expect autobiographical texts to provide us with “faithful images of their authors’ lives,” they are an important source for “the basic cultural models organizing individual trajectories and shaping behavior” and can be regarded as “narrative unfoldings of codified cultural models.”²⁰

The cultural context under discussion is (a long) seventeenth-century Central Europe. I will be focusing mainly on texts written by Asher haLevi of Reichshofen (1598–mid-17th c.), Glikl bas Leib (1645–1724), the autobiographical notes written by an unidentified late seventeenth-century Bohemian Jew, and I will also examine certain aspects in R. Pinḥas Katzenelnbogen’s (1691–1766) *Yesh Manḥilin*. I have deliberately excluded Leon Modena’s *Hayye Yehudah* and Jacob Emden’s *Megillat Sefer*, although those works are extraordinarily articulate on body issues. It seems to me that the cultural gap between Modena, who, born in 1571 in Venice, was well versed in several languages, a skilled dancer, communicated freely with Christians who appreciated his eloquent sermons, had a substantial secular knowledge and was familiar with the culture of the Catholic Counter-Reformation and his more restrained Central European counterparts is too large to speak about the same cultural model. Jacob Emden (1697–1776) may not have been a forerunner of the Haskalah, as he is sometimes regarded, but “one of the last great scholars of the Middle Ages” totally committed to tradition.²¹ However, he does reveal consciousness of the “new” and is, in my opinion, very much a transitional figure on the brink of modernity who displays more awareness of the self than he has been given credit for.²²

While these authors certainly did not belong to the same socio-economic class, Michael Stanislawski described Asher and Glikl as belonging to the “‘silent majority’ of early modern Jewry” who were pious, “deeply committed to their faith, never for once doubting its

²⁰ Gadi Algazi, “Food for Thought: Hieronymus Wolf grapples with the Scholarly Habitus,” in *Egodocuments in History: Autobiographical Writing in its Social Context since the Middle Ages*, ed. Rudolf Dekker (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002), 22–23.

²¹ Jacob J. Schacter, “Rabbi Jacob Emden: Life and Major Works” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1988), chapter 6, 499–662. See also his “History and Memory of the Self: The Autobiography of Rabbi Jacob Emden,” in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach et al. (Hanover, NH-London: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 428–452.

²² Cf. Michael Graetz, “Jüdische Mentalität zwischen Tradition und Moderne: Der autobiographische Text,” in *Judentum zwischen Tradition und Moderne*, ed. Gerd Biegel and Michael Graetz (Heidelberg: Winter, 2002), 123 and 126.

eternal veracity and its requirements that they live entirely bounded and defined by its norms, laws, and strictures.”²³ The tension between their religious and cultural values and their actual experiences as human beings not always able to live up to the norms and expectations of their culture is often expressed when writing about physical experiences and weaknesses. The body is, on the other hand, also involved when aiming to fulfill God’s commandments meticulously. Asher haLevi not only built a study for praying, studying, and to hold his library and a designated oven to bake Mazzot but also a small bathroom to avoid the local “bestial custom,” followed, to his revulsion, by both Christians and Jews, that men and women and Jews and Gentiles bath together. He designated this extra room for bathing on Sabbath eves, ritual purification, and in the event he needed bloodletting.²⁴ It has been argued that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries attitudes toward the body underwent a fundamental change, which was particularly expressed in the religious sphere and in an increasing ritualization and civilization of the body.²⁵ Asher’s anxiety about proper purification puts the body in a central position when aiming at fastidious adherence to religious norms.

What is the audience to which these authors address their reflections? Asher haLevi’s text has a quite confessional character, as will be seen in the examples discussed, but he also fashions himself as a chronicler of contemporary affairs and carefully notes the precise dates of the events he is reporting and provides other information such as the stellar constellations, the weather or the exact ages of the persons discussed. Debra Kaplan has made a compelling argument for the text as a personal memoir, “a legacy for and about his own family.”²⁶ Glikl bas Leib also addresses her memories, started after the death of her first husband, to her children. They could be regarded as an—albeit highly unusual and individualistic—example of an ethical will in the sense that Glikl wants to leave her children a spiritual heritage and is guided by moral principles she wishes to convey.²⁷ Other early modern examples

²³ Stanislawski, *Autobiographical Jews*, 35.

²⁴ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 32.

²⁵ See the contribution by Roni Weinstein in this volume for a concise survey of this development.

²⁶ Kaplan, “The Self in Social Context,” 212–213.

²⁷ Avriel Bar-Levav, “‘When I was Alive’: Jewish Ethical Wills as Ego-Documents,” in *Egodocuments in History: Autobiographical Writing in its Social Context since the Middle Ages*, ed. Rudolf Dekker (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002), 45–59.

of self-writing belong to the genre of “family scrolls” (*megillot*), such as Yom-Tov Lippman Heller’s *Megillat Evah*. Written in prose and focusing on the experience of an individual, such *megillot* served a specific ritual function as text read out on a yearly “family purim” celebration, on which families commemorated and celebrated the deliverance from a calumny such as the release from an unjustified imprisonment of the author of the scroll.²⁸ *Megillat Evah*, however, due to its more formal arrangement and its focus on one specific event, is much more reticent on bodily matters than the sources under discussion.

Life as a Trial

The specific genre influenced the way authors related the events of their life, how they presented and weighted physical experiences and the degree of self-censorship they exerted, providing perhaps more idealized and “normative” presentations of one’s behavior, attitudes and functioning. As Andrew Wear has argued for Puritan diaries in seventeenth-century England, these texts were also written “with an eye towards God.” As the diarist was trying to detect the “evidence of the hand of God as it touched his life,” references to God’s providence “when interpreting one’s life were common.”²⁹

Common to all texts examined is an acute sense of trial and crisis. While the authors do demonstrate pride in their achievements, be it a profitable business transaction or successfully marrying off one’s children to worthy matches, their memories are substantially shaped by their difficult experiences. The human body—and particularly the ailing human body—plays a central part in the experience of crisis.

Leon Modena may have put it most eloquently in his *Hayye Yehudah* which contains on nearly every other page a reference to the suffering and calamities caused by the ailing body, but similar, albeit more

²⁸ Moseley, *Being for Myself*, 152–153.

²⁹ Andrew Wear, “Puritan Perceptions of Illness in Seventeenth Century England,” in *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 59–60. Giuseppe Veltri has informed me that the “evidence of the hand of God as it touched his life” is also a topos in Avraham Portaleone’s thought. See Gianfranco Miletto, *Glauben und Wissen im Zeitalter der Reformation: Der salomonische Tempel bei Abraham ben David Portaleone (1542–1612)* (Berlin–New York: de Gruyter, 2004) and Alessandro Guetta, “Avraham Portaleone, le scientifique repenté,” in *Torah et science: perspectives historiques et théoriques. Études offertes à Charles Touati*, ed. Gad Freudenthal (Paris: Peeters, 2001), 213–227.

restrained, feelings are expressed in our Ashkenazic sources as well. Although the extent to which the respective author deals with physical experiences depends on the specific genre, pregnancy, birth and childbed, illnesses, diseases, and accidents are perceived as life-changing and often life-threatening events. Roy Porter argued in a programmatic article “that for people in the past, illness experiences were far more likely to be charged with life meanings, involving and transforming ideas of self, salvation, destiny, providence, rewards, and punishment. Sickness and sin, health and holiness were intimately linked, and it is worth remembering that the constant proximity of sickness and death was probably a great sustainer of the religious experience.”³⁰

Pregnancy and Birth

Leon Modena wrote about his own difficult birth, the beginning of a testing life, while Jacob Emden famously traced his numerous troubles back to his conception.³¹ The authors under consideration here did not discuss their own birth experience but the births of their children mark important milestones in their lives. Her frequent pregnancies provide Glikl, the mother of fourteen children of whom twelve survived into adulthood, with a life-structure and a clear chronology to her narrative. She recalled being pregnant with her daughter Mattie when she heard the news that her husband’s trusted assistant Mordecai had been shot on a business trip,³² in childbed when the news about the alleged Messiah Sabbatai Zevi reached Hamburg,³³ pregnant with Hannah when her little girl Mattie died,³⁴ pregnant with her son Leib when she and her husband learned the upsetting news about the dishonesty of his business partner Reb Moses, experienced other financial losses while marrying off their son Nathan,³⁵ and pregnant with her son Joseph when her father-in-law died after whom they

³⁰ Roy Porter, “The Patient’s View: Doing Medical History from Below,” *Theory and Society* 14 (1985): 193.

³¹ See Moseley, *Being for Myself*, 116–118, for an interesting analysis on accounts of traumatic births in autobiographical texts.

³² Turniansky, *Glikl*, 148–149. Page numbers refer both to the Yiddish text and its Hebrew translation on the opposite page.

³³ Turniansky, *Glikl*, 150–151.

³⁴ Turniansky, *Glikl*, 234–235.

³⁵ Turniansky, *Glikl*, 302–303.

named the newborn.³⁶ Pregnancy and birth is also the metaphor she uses to describe the disappointed waiting for the false Messiah Sabbatai Zevi. She compared it to the painful and prolonged labor of a pregnant woman who, expecting to be rewarded by her baby for her pain, eventually gives birth to a sound of wind (possibly a reference to Isaiah 26:18).³⁷

Glikl wrote for her children and felt it appropriate to dispense advice in matters important to her. One such an example is based on a personal reminiscence in which she urged her children to humor the cravings of a pregnant woman.

If young, pregnant women at any time, anywhere, see fruit or anything tasty which they fancy, they should not go away but should first sample it, and not listen to their own silly heads which say, "Ay, it cannot harm you!" and go away. For it can, God forbid!, be a matter of life and death to them, as well as to the unborn child, as I found to my cost.³⁸

Glikl admitted that she used to be dismissive of women claiming to have experienced harm by not satisfying their cravings. However, while nine months pregnant, she forgot to buy the medlars (*Vishplin*) she desired while out for an errand and remembered them only when back home but did not give it much thought and went to bed feeling well. Labor began after midnight and her son Joseph was born. The women attending to her noticed that he was covered in brown spots and appeared to be lifeless. The baby's condition did not improve during the next days and he got weaker and weaker. The following Shabbat evening, three days after the birth, Glikl suddenly remembered the medlars and asked the *Shabbes Froy* to hurry into town and get her a few medlars so that she could give them to her ailing child. Glikl's mother thought this to be very foolish, but the Gentile woman went out in the unfriendly weather and returned with the desired fruit.

Everyone knows that medlars, being sourish, are not food for such a young child. I called the nurse to unbind the baby and seat herself with him in front of the oven and squeeze a little of a medlar into his mouth. Although everyone laughed at what they called my foolishness, I insisted on this, and it had to be done. When she squeezed a little of the medlar between the baby's lips, he opened his little mouth and sucked so eagerly,

³⁶ Turniansky, *Glikl*, 340–341.

³⁷ Turniansky, *Glikl*, 152–153.

³⁸ Turniansky, *Glikl*, 340–341. Unless otherwise stated, the English translation follows *The Life of Glückel of Hameln (1646–1724) written by herself*, ed. and trans. Beth-Zion Abrahams (London: East and West Library, 1962), 100.

as though he wanted to swallow it whole, and sucked away all the soft part. Before this he had not opened his mouth wide enough to take a drop of milk or sugar-pap such as one gives to babies. The nurses handed the child to me in bed, to see if he would suck. As soon as he felt the breast, he began to suck with the strength of a three-month babe, and from then till the day of his circumcision there remained no spot on his face or body, save one on his side, as large as a broad lentil.³⁹ The child was fine grown and hale at the time of his circumcision.⁴⁰

This story shows Glikl as confident in her own intuition and even disregarding the advice of her own mother. She does conform to contemporary ideas of indulging the whims of pregnant and puerperal women,⁴¹ although Jewish moral literature was less enthusiastic in the endorsement of peculiar food cravings as one suspected the influence of evil forces on the baby.⁴² Glikl does not make any explicit mention of God and his intentions for the newborn and credits herself for the successful recovery of her baby.

Memories like these also provide us with information on how the birth was organized. Glikl mentioned the women (*meyaldot*) who were being called into the house. The role of the husband is limited to being told the news of the birth. The women who saw her through the birth realized that something was not quite right and Glikl noticed that they put their heads together and secretly discussed the issue. When Glikl insisted to know what was going on, they told her about the anomalies of the newborn's body. Glikl asked for light next to her bed so that she could examine the baby herself. Her mother was not present but stayed with her after the birth. While being respectful of her, Glikl insisted on sending the *Shabbes Goye* for the medlars, against her mother's counsel.

³⁹ In early modern understanding, unsatisfied cravings during the pregnancy could show as birthmarks on the baby, reflecting the specific denied desire. Ulinka Rublack, "Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany," *Past & Present* (1996): 94, note 42.

⁴⁰ Turniansky, *Glikl*, 340–347; Abrahams, *Glückel*, 102–103.

⁴¹ See on the public and private support of the emotional wellbeing of pregnant women in early modern Germany, Rublack, "Pregnancy," 84–110. Rublack notes that a pregnant woman stealing fruit could not be prosecuted (88) and relatives and servants were expected to withdraw discreetly so that a pregnant woman could "indulge in her lust properly without having to be shy or ashamed before anyone." (95)

⁴² Ruth Berger, *Sexualität, Ehe und Familienleben in der jüdischen Moralliteratur (900–1900)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 262. However, Halakhah permits the satisfaction of the cravings of a pregnant woman even if it is forbidden food and even on Yom Kippur: B. Yoma 82a is an acknowledgement that mother and child could be in severe danger if these cravings were not satisfied. Cf. the article by J. Woolf in this volume, 169, note 57, on the more stringent attitudes of Ashkenazi scholars.

Another woman is mentioned here, the so-called *Vartish Froy* (a servant or nurse) who cared for the baby.

When Glikl, still very young at about the age of 15, gave birth for the first time, her mother was also pregnant. “My mother expected her child about the same time, but was pleased that I had had mine first and that she should attend me and the child the first few days.”⁴³ Her mother gave birth eight days later and they shared the same room, lying next to each other, “and had no peace from the people who came running to see the wonder of mother and daughter lying in childbed together.” When Glikl left childbed a week before her mother, she returned to her own room, but her baby was left with her mother, a maid and her mother’s child in the birth room. The maid would fetch Glikl when the baby cried and had to be breastfed.⁴⁴

Her mother seems to have played an important role of providing support in later pregnancies as well. The “female ritual” described by Glikl is very similar to the arrangements in contemporary Christian households. “Childbirth belonged to women” and men were excluded from the event. Birth was a collective female ritual in which several women who clearly expected to be called to the occasion and who possessed experience and knew when things did not go according to plan assisted the mother. The lying-in chamber was a special place, separated from the outside world and distinguished from its ordinary function as family room.⁴⁵

Glikl lost two children, a son who died two weeks after his birth, and her daughter Mattie whose death at the age of three she still mourned many years later. This perhaps surprisingly high survival rate⁴⁶ of both

⁴³ Turniansky, *Glikl*, 132–133; Abrahams, *Glückel*, 39.

⁴⁴ An incident, which at first caused quite some alarm but was soon remembered as a hilarious anecdote, was when Glikl found an empty cradle because the attending maid had confused the babies and Glikl’s mother had been given Glikl’s baby to suckle. Turniansky, *Glikl*, 132–137.

⁴⁵ Adrian Wilson, “Participant or patient? Seventeenth Century Childbirth from the Mother’s Point of View,” in *Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 135. However, it should be noted that Glikl does not mention other roles analyzed by Wilson, such as special drink, serving a ceremonial and social function, or the special status of the midwife. It is not entirely clear from Glikl’s writing if she speaks of midwives in singular or plural (cf. Turniansky, *Glikl*, 310, note 400 and 343, note 587) but it is apparent that several women, “midwife/midwives and women,” were present.

⁴⁶ This is not unusual for the seventeenth century. Yom-Tov Lippman Heller, author of the autobiographical *Megillat Evah*, and his wife Rachel had at least ten children,

mothers and children in the seventeenth century may be due to specific circumstances in German lands. It has been argued that the fact that pregnant women in early modern Germany were entitled to protection and care and lying-in periods of several weeks following birth might help to explain why deaths in childbed were relatively uncommon in Germany up to the eighteenth century.⁴⁷

Glikl and others do not mention if the women called in when the birth was immanent were Jewish or Christian. Some Jews at least seem to have employed a Christian midwife. When things did go wrong, though, she was the first one to be blamed. Pinḥas Katzenelnbogen's first wife died in 1720, following a very difficult birth. After several days in labor, their son was stillborn: "It was obvious that the Gentile midwife harmed her with sorcery, may her name be obliterated, until she died under great suffering ... after a hundred days of sorrow."⁴⁸ We do not have enough information about the actual procedure in this case, but Pinḥas' wife had experienced two difficult childbirths before and this Christian midwife may have been called as a professional because of anticipated problems or perhaps summoned only when it was already too late to save the child and avoid lasting harm to the mother. Be that as it may, as a Gentile she bore the brunt of Pinḥas' anguish and the trust placed in her when she was called in turned into deep suspicion, indicating how fragile the relations between Jews and Christians were in times of tension.

Pinḥas Katzenelnbogen thought a lot about his wife's suffering in childbirth. He knew that not all women had difficult birth experiences, but he accepted that pain during childbirth was due to Eve's sin. He assumed that the zodiac of the woman, the star constellation on the day or the hour of giving birth might have an influence on how the birth went but also accepted a specific physical build as a possible reason. From the *Sefer Toledot Adam* he learned that a small palm indicated difficult childbirth and indeed, the palms of his first wife's hands were so short that her middle finger did not reach the tip of his middle finger

six daughters and four sons, who survived to adulthood. Heller's biographer noted "a healthy birth" approximately every other year from 1598 until 1616. Joseph Davis, *Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller: Portrait of a Seventeenth-Century Rabbi* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 25 and 198.

⁴⁷ See Rublack, "Pregnancy," 97–98 and literature quoted there.

⁴⁸ Pinḥas Katzenelnbogen, *Yesh Manḥilin* (Jerusalem: Hel-Or, 1986), 99, sign 24 (Hebrew).

when they put the palms of their hands together and “from this I knew that she would give birth with pain.”⁴⁹

Did parents have gender-preferences for their offspring? Solomon Maimon mentioned in his late eighteenth-century autobiography an incident he had witnessed in Ḥassidic circles where a young fellow who joined his friends later than usual due to the birth of a daughter, was cruelly thrown on the floor and mercilessly whipped and mocked because his wife had given birth to a daughter.⁵⁰ This comes admittedly from a distinctively anti-Ḥassidic source and Maimon certainly used this incident to stress the irrational nature of this movement. Glikl described the birth of a daughter to her brother-in-law as a “miracle”:

For seventeen years his wife was barren. When his mother-in-law fell ill and was about to die, she summoned her daughter, this Abraham’s wife, and said to her, “My dear daughter, I am in God’s hands and will soon die. If I have one merit before God, I shall beg that you should bear children.” And after her death my sister-in-law Sulka became pregnant and in due time gave birth to a daughter whom she named Sarah, after her mother. Seven years later she bore a son, Samuel.⁵¹

On the other hand, Glikl stated that when she and her mother gave birth to girls within eight days, “there was no envy or reproach between us,” apparently because none of them had given birth to a son, and so there was no reason for jealousy. While her husband is not mentioned at all in the description of her first birth, Glikl described his joy when she gave birth to their second child, their son Nathan, when the first-born daughter Zippor [sic] was two years old. “My husband’s happiness cannot be described; nor the wonderful party to celebrate.”⁵²

Asher haLevi expressed gratitude and joy after the birth of his first two children, but they are some telling differences in how he writes about them. He provided the exact date of each birth and the exact age of his wife and himself on that day. He added formulaic wishes for their future wellbeing according to their gender-specific roles, and includes a poem, which he had composed for each occasion, an acrostic spelling out their respective names, Hindele and Eliezer. The poem written for Hindele does leave no doubt that Asher was moved and delighted by the birth of “a daughter, like the apple of the eye,” but her identity is

⁴⁹ Katzenelnbogen, *Yesh Manḥilin*, 98, sign 24.

⁵⁰ Salomon Maimon, *Autobiography. With an Essay on Maimon’s Philosophy by Hugo Bergman* (London: East and West Library, 1954), 176.

⁵¹ Turniansky, *Glikl*, 118–119; Abrahams, *Glückel*, 34.

⁵² Turniansky, *Glikl*, 138–139; Abrahams, *Glückel*, 40.

defined by other men, her future brother and her future husband. She arrived “instead of the first born,” as a lucky augury to the immanent birth of a son,⁵³ and Asher expressed his hope to marry her off to a worthy man well learned in the Torah.⁵⁴ His son Eliezer was indeed born two years later, singled out by remarkable physical attributes in the hour of his birth because he was “pure and immaculate” (*zakh ve-naki*) and “without any sickly fluids sticking (*d’vikat hetat zohemah*) to him as is the rule with newborns. Everybody who saw and heard this was greatly amazed.” In the poem written for this occasion, Asher said that “his heart had desired and hoped for an heir (*bet meshek*), a worthy descendant and a pious scion.”⁵⁵

Jacob Emden, born in 1697, stated about himself that he was the first son after four girls and his father had “nearly given up hope.”⁵⁶ These examples leave no doubt that the birth of a girl is a reason for joy, particularly if she is the first child or was born after a prolonged period of infertility, but that parents were certainly hoping and praying for a son.

When all went well and mother and child survived the birth and the critical first year, life did not necessarily become less dangerous. Childhood was full of potential danger and early illnesses and sometimes horrific accidents form some of the earliest childhood memories. The hearths in which open fires burned proved particularly hazardous to small children.⁵⁷ Asher haLevi sat between his father and mother on a bench opposite the fire when he was one year old. He fell into the fire where he nearly burnt to death.⁵⁸ He also reports that his cousin, also called Asher haLevi, fell from a high roof into a pit and died, in the presence of his father, from his injuries eight days later at the age of eleven.⁵⁹ When he was three years old, Pinḥas Katzenelbogen’s mother unintentionally dropped an iron bowl on his head and a sharp part entered his brain. Although he recovered from it, the scar could be

⁵³ This hope is expressed in B. Baba Batra 141a where R. Hisda is quoting saying that a first-born daughter is a good sign for future sons.

⁵⁴ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 16.

⁵⁵ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 26.

⁵⁶ David Kahana, ed., *Megillat Sefer* (Warsaw: Schuldberg, 1896), 56.

⁵⁷ Six of the ten children of the seventeenth-century English vicar Ralph Josselin fell into fires or set their clothes alight, luckily without causing serious damage. McCray Beier, “In Sickness and in Health,” 109.

⁵⁸ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 4.

⁵⁹ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 4 and 43.

felt throughout his life.⁶⁰ Even if not all accidents could be avoided, parents worried and tried their best to prevent them. The stream passing next to his house troubled Asher because he feared that his children, who often played next to it, could fall into it.⁶¹

Illness

Writing about the body is often writing about illness in ego-documents. The body is most noticeable when its functions are reduced, when it is ailing and causing discomfort and pain. Our authors write both about their own illnesses as well of those of other people, particularly members of their families.

While Asher haLevi leaves no doubt that the illnesses from which he suffered between 1617 and 1633 were severe, his descriptions are rather brief and unspecific. On Rosh Ḥodesh 377 (1617) while he was in Austerlitz (Moravia), the “bubbling waters” entered his body (*ba’u ha-mayim ha-me’arererim be-kirbi*) and he fell ill with epilepsy (*holei rosh*),⁶² followed by jaundice (*gel sukht*), and then by remittent fever (*qadahat revi’i*).⁶³ He promised to return to his father’s house should God deliver him from his illness and save him. God showed mercy and answered his prayers, and haLevi left Austerlitz on Rosh Ḥodesh Av and returned via Prague to Franconia, being without funds and destitute. The following winter he was a teacher in the village where his father was born and where his family had lived since times immemorial. All the time he suffered from intermittent fever.⁶⁴ On Rosh Ḥodesh Ḥeshvan 382 (1621) haLevi fell ill again and “great heat entered my throat like a boiling kettle.” When this heat steadily increased, physicians in Metz made incisions to the throat. Some years later, in Tammuz 386 (1626) he suffered, apparently again, from constipation (*be’inyan hamezuar*) and he

⁶⁰ Katzelnbogen, *Yesh Manhilin*.

⁶¹ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 26.

⁶² I am not sure about the proper identification of this illness, which Asher haLevi’s translator Ginsburger translates as “falling sickness.” Cf. Johannes Buxtorf, *Synagoga Judaica* (Basel, 1603), § 33 on Jewish illnesses and particularly on “Choli hannophel” for falling sickness (following Anthonius Margaritha’s *Der Gantz Jüdisch Glaub*, Augsburg, 1530).

⁶³ Ginsburger remarked in his annotations that it was called “fourth fever” because the fever attacks followed every four days.

⁶⁴ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 6–7.

was very ill until Yom Kippur 387.⁶⁵ This seems to have been something of a chronic condition for Asher haLevi. In 1633, “due to the sorrow and the troubles of the times,” “my stool entered” (*nikhnas titi*) and caused all kind of discomfort (*sirton*). The application of pressure and the help of his wife eventually relieved him from his suffering.⁶⁶

In these brief accounts, Asher haLevi was careful to provide specific dates for his illnesses and to name them. He was much less forthcoming about the course of disease and treatments sought. He mentioned one pledge made to God should he recover and one surgery carried out by what appears to have been medical professionals but attributed the recovery from each of his ailments to a formulaic praise of “the physician who heals gratuitously.”⁶⁷

Modern scholars no longer try to classify early modern descriptions of illnesses according to contemporary medical terminology. Many descriptions focus on the symptoms and on the internal and external physical sensations that cannot easily translated into a modern term; another problem is the broad range of possible meaning of a specific term used.⁶⁸ We do receive, however, some insight on how illness was perceived, described and experienced. Although illness is a highly individual experience, it reflects cultural values and behavioral patterns pertinent to a particular period and culture.

In the Early Modern Period, physical and physic afflictions were not necessarily regarded as two separate spheres. Illness was often seen as the result of strong emotions, caused by anger or sorrow.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 12.

⁶⁶ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 31.

⁶⁷ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, passim.

⁶⁸ See on this most recently Gudrun Piller, *Private Körper*, 212–225. Cf. also the important methodological observations by Vera Jung and Otto Ulbricht, “Krankheits-erfahrung im Spiegel von Selbstzeugnissen von 1500 bis heute. Ein Tagungsbericht,” *Historische Anthropologie* 1 (2001): 137–148.

⁶⁹ Ulinka Rublack, “Erzählungen vom Geblüt und Herzen. Zu einer Historischen Anthropologie des frühneuzeitlichen Körpers,” *Historische Anthropologie* 2 (2001): 214–232. Ber of Bolechow (1723–1805) who wrote an autobiographical text in the eighteenth century, is particularly clear about the link between the anguish caused by the false imprisonment of his brother for helping a trader who had used bad coins and his health problem:

I was very angry and sad at my brother’s bitter misfortune in being kept in prison for a year. As a result of this trouble and the broken heart it caused me, spots appeared on my chest. An expert doctor, who examined me, told that as the result of the great trouble and anxiety I had experienced my bile had overflowed and given rise to the spots on my skin. The doctor gave me a prescription for

As Barbara Duden has noted, in early modern understanding “the body very vigorously mediated internal agitation, transforming conflicts into movements of the blood” which could be treated with prescriptions.⁷⁰

While the experience of one’s own illness is clearly remembered, it is particularly the illness of children—sometimes leading to death—which upset and troubled our authors, causing sorrow that could also endanger their own lives.

Asher remembered the exact date on which his wife sent a special messenger to where he worked as a children’s teacher to ask him to return home immediately because his daughter was ill. Hindele was covered all over by furuncles (*kamshonim*) and boils (*harulim*), the so-called *roflés*,⁷¹ and he hardly recognized her because her face and body were full of blotches, dots and stripes.⁷² A couple of years later, the same child suffered from rubella (*rid*) and three days later his son Meir came down with convulsions (*gikhit*)⁷³ which lasted more than half an hour, and he also got gravely ill with rubella and a cough that tightened his throat and his navel was swollen. Asher, like the other people who saw the child, expected him to die. His other son, Eliezer, caught rubella a couple of months later, then the same child came down with *roflés* but luckily recovered.⁷⁴ Meir fell ill again and recovered but on the second day of Sukkot, when Asher was away for a circumcision, his pure body was covered by furuncles and boils, the dreaded *roflés*. While he performed a *mizvah* for the son of another man, his own son died nine days after the boils first appeared on his body, at the age of seven months and four days, having lived just 212 days. Asher blamed his own sins for the tragedy and added an elegy he composed himself.

a plaster, which cleansed the bile, and I recovered, especially after my brother came out of prison, as it was clearly ascertained that he did not have any forged money on him. *The Memoirs of Ber of Bolechow (1723–1805)*, trans. M. Vishnitzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922), 60.

⁷⁰ Barbara Duden, *The Woman beneath the Skin: A Doctor’s Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 144–145. See also Gianna Pomata and Nancy G. Siraisi, ed. *Historia: Empiricism and Erudition in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

⁷¹ Possibly, such as “Rotsucht” mentioned in contemporary German sources, a general term for children’s diseases with red skin rash. Cf. Piller, *Private Körper*, 218.

⁷² Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 20.

⁷³ Convulsion, sudden and involuntary contractions of the muscles. Cf. Piller, *Private Körper*, 216.

⁷⁴ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 34.

He received some comfort from the fact that the tiny coffin of his son fit next to the coffin of his father. Another miracle was that he was ordered to rise from the shiva by the local mayor and to see the Duke of Westerburg and therefore escaped troubles with French soldiers in the vicinity.⁷⁵

Asher haLevi does not mention any specific treatments for these illnesses and credits God when the children recovered and blames himself when the son died. In a later incident, his son Eliezer came down with a fever on a Shabbat afternoon. After 14 days, Asher prepared an amulet for him “with the writing on the limb (*ever*)” and Eliezer recovered five days later, although his health was never fully restored as it used to be.⁷⁶ In these brief accounts we have encountered Asher haLevi as a melamed, a mohel, and the writer of amulets. He does not offer any information regarding where he had acquired this skill or if he was asked to prepare amulets for other people as well.

Glikl’s daughter Mattie was three years old when “her hands and feet suddenly swelled.” Unfortunately “many doctors and much medicine” failed to heal her and the little girl died after four weeks of great suffering. The mourning for Mattie affected Glikl, who was pregnant again, strongly and she had difficulties recovering from the birth: “I was dangerously ill and the physicians doubted my recovery and wished to resort to the last, most desperate of remedies. Not thinking I could understand what they were saying, they discussed it with my family.” Glikl told her family that she would not take the suggested medicine (we are not told what it is) and to leave it to God. “If God will help me, He can do so without the medicine. If this is another decision of the Great Lord, what can medicine help?” God did indeed help and five weeks after giving birth she was able to go the synagogue. The moral of the story that Glikl wanted to convey to her children is that “it is necessary to be patient when ill befalls one’s children or fortune and not give way to immoderate grief.” Her husband and she had “mourned indescribably and I feared greatly that I had sinned against the Almighty by mourning too much, not heeding the story of Reb Johanan.” She included the talmudic aggadah of R. Johanan who lost

⁷⁵ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 35.

⁷⁶ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 40. On the use of amulets for medical purposes, see Hermann Pollack, *Jewish Folkways in Germanic Lands (1648–1806): Studies in Aspects of Daily Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 118. On the preparation of amulets, see Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Atheneum, 1979) (first publication: 1939), 143–145.

ten children⁷⁷ and also the example of King David, when his first child from Batsheva died (2 Samuel 12:18).⁷⁸

The idea of sinning against God by mourning one's dead child too much stands in an interesting contrast to the controversial hypothesis articulated first by Philippe Ariès in 1960 ("People could not allow themselves to become too attached to something that was regarded as a probable loss")⁷⁹ and enforced by, among others, Edward Shorter in the 1970s that due to the high rate of infant mortality pre-modern parents remained emotionally detached from their children. Shorter argued that "the high rate of infant loss is not a sufficient explanation for the traditional lack of maternal love *because precisely this lack of care was responsible for the high mortality* (emphasis by Shorter)."⁸⁰ The crucial difference between these assessments and the idea conveyed by Glikl is that between negligence and "indulging in suffering." The just God does not burden his servants with more than they can carry. Enormous suffering might lead to the expectation of a reward, which would make a lack of self-restraint in one's mourning a sin.

There is no doubt that the parents describing their feelings in our sources suffered greatly. Asher haLevi's wife Malkah called him back home urgently when their daughter fell ill and there is an indication that other people came to dispense help and advise as well. He takes the healing of his child into his own hands by writing an amulet. Glikl acknowledged several times that she was inconsolable about the death of her beloved daughter. The language conveys a clear sense of tragedy and mourning. Asher demonstrated emotional closeness to his children in an elegy but also expressed fear of extinction of his lineage. When his first-born daughter Hindele, until then his only child, recovered from a severe illness, Asher thanked God for not having destroyed his seed. Their books can be regarded as "places of memory" for their dead children, a way of reflecting on these deaths and their meaning, and memorials of their short lives for their surviving brothers and sisters.

It would be wrong, however, to assume from this that only Jewish parents cared for their children. The closer scrutiny of sources such as diaries, letters, wills or autobiographical texts, has convinced

⁷⁷ B. Ber. 5a–b.

⁷⁸ Turniansky, *Glikl*, 232–239; Abrahams, *Glückel*, 71–72.

⁷⁹ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. Robert Baldick; with a new introduction by Adam Phillip (London: Pimlico, 1996) (first publication: 1960), 37.

⁸⁰ Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (London: Collins, 1976), 203.

scholars that pre-modern parents had close emotional ties to their offspring in whom they took interest and pride and whose early deaths they mourned. Linda Pollock who critically examined Ariès and other scholars in his wake, stressed the continuity of paternal affection towards their children.⁸¹ One example from our sources, seemingly an example of parental inability and neglect, can be read as a model for how parents were expected to behave towards their children. The author was so bitter about his childhood precisely because his parents did not fulfill their social roles.⁸² Our anonymous author from Bohemia wrote that his mother died when he was four and his older brother seven years old. The following year his father remarried, “a great lady, Freidel, the daughter of R. Meir, the Shoḥet from Vienna.” However, the new wife was overwhelmed by her new role:

The wife of my father was herself still a young child who did not know how to bring us up in cleanliness as is necessary with little boys, nor could she properly care for us when we were sick. We have to thank God and the help of our grandmother Lieble, and her good daughters, that we grew up at all. Even so little Moses, who was only one year old, died.⁸³

An important task of a mother was to care for personal hygiene and tend to the children when they were ill. The author implied that the death of his little (half?) brother was due to neglect and ignorance. He also blamed his father for not providing sufficient care. At the age of nine, his father sent him on his own to Prague to an uncaring and negligent teacher where he was fed inappropriately, which affected his health badly.⁸⁴ His father came to see him several times but did not

⁸¹ Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). See also Albrecht Classen, “Philippe Ariès and the Consequences: History of Childhood, Family Relations and Personal Emotions: Where Do We Stand Today?,” in *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: The Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 1–65.

⁸² See Berger, *Sexualität*, 269–310, for a detailed discussion of infant death and the care and education of children in Jewish moral literature.

⁸³ Alexander Marx, “A Seventeenth-Century Autobiography,” in *Studies in Jewish History and Booklore* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1944), 185.

⁸⁴ Marx, “Autobiography,” 186: “I was full of ulcers, and the meals I ate were very unwholesome for me, for it is the custom in Prague to eat at the midday meal peas and millet with a little butter, which proved very injurious to me. But nobody looked out for me to give me medical treatment.”

notice his poor condition. After having been taken home again, things did not improve:

Thus a long time without my learning anything, until I became a thorn in my own eyes and even more so in the eyes of my father, because I was a boor brought up in dirt without any cleanliness, for the lack of a mother; and I remember that at the age of eleven I ran around barefooted and without trousers, and no one cared. My father then had many little children, for his wife bore him almost every year a son or a daughter. I am sure that if anybody had announced my death to him at that time he would have thought this good news, for he considered me ignorant and good for nothing, so that my existence was a burden to him. My brother was a strong boy who did hard work in the slaughterhouse and made himself otherwise useful, while I was oppressed by all the members of the house; everybody ordered me around.⁸⁵

Parents were not only expected to care for the physical well-being of their children and fed and cloth them properly but also for the mental development of their sons by teaching them how to conduct himself properly, fostering their love of learning and choosing an appropriate teacher according to their abilities.⁸⁶

The Plague

Robert Jütte has pointed out that there is “always one typical sickness which dominates people’s experiences and shapes the collective discourse” and that in the Early Modern Period this illness was the plague.⁸⁷ Although the “Black Death” is commonly regarded as a devastating medieval epidemic, it dominated the Early Modern Period well into the eighteenth century.⁸⁸ The plague (*dever*) was like a curse. When the dreaded word is mentioned, a prophylactic formula such as “May God protect us from it” or “May it be far from us” usually follows.

⁸⁵ Marx, “Autobiography,” 187.

⁸⁶ Pollack, *Jewish Folkways*, 50–84.

⁸⁷ Robert Jütte, “The Social Construction of Illness in the Early Modern Period,” in *The Social Construction of Illness*, ed. Jens Lachmund and Gunnar Stollberg (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1992), 23–38, 24.

⁸⁸ For an interesting discussion of an early modern rendering of a medieval story on persecutions during the Black Death (1348–1350), see Lucia Raspe, “The Black Death in Jewish Sources: A Second Look at *Mayse Nissim*,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 94, 3 (2004): 471–489.

The “days of tears” (*yemei ha-bekhiah*) as Asher haLevi called outbreaks of the plague,⁸⁹ figure quite prominently in autobiographical notes of that time. In Nathan of Hannover’s chronicles of the persecution of Jews in the wake of the Chmielnitzky uprising, the plague is yet another catastrophe to befall the persecuted Jews. The Jews of Brody, having taken refuge in the fortress of Brody, were besieged many days but “[n]evertheless, there was great terror among the defenders because of the plague broke out within. ‘Without shall the sword bereave, and in the chambers, terror.’ (Deut. 32:25) Approximately one thousand Jewish persons died of the plague. Plagues of great proportions broke out in all the other fortresses that were besieged by the enemies.”⁹⁰ Things could get worse, though. In Lublin, more than ten thousands Jews are reported to have died from the plague.

They cast their dead on the cemetery in the darkness of the night, so that their unfriendly neighbors might not notice them and delight when they beheld a new grave. The plague was different from any other plague (God spare us). They were stricken with high fever, as a result of the trying journeys and the fright. Many poor people whom the Gentiles did not permit entry in their homes had to sleep in the streets and they died of starvation and exposure. No man offered aid to his brother, and no father took pity on his child. More than one hundred thousand Jews perished of this disease (may the Lord preserve and save us). And the Jews became impoverished. The balance of silver and gold and garments which they managed to retain, they sold for half their value, silk and other garments, for one third of the value. Books were worthless, for there was no buyer. The Torah lay in a deserted corner, for the Gentiles bought only silver and gold and garments.⁹¹

Nathan of Hannover’s descriptions stress the high number of victims, the fact that difficult external circumstances such as being on the move and stress contribute to it, tensions with non-Jews, social isolation and financial ruin. These elements are also present in two particular vivid descriptions by Glikl and the anonymous Bohemian author.

Glikl was no stranger to the very real dangers of the plague. Her grandfather and several of his children died from the epidemic, leaving Glikl’s grandmother and two unmarried daughters behind, suffering great hardship. They left their house and lived in various temporary lodgings until the danger had passed. Returning to her home, the

⁸⁹ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 5.

⁹⁰ Nathan Hanover, *Abyss of Despair (Yeven Metzulah)* (New Brunswick–London: Transaction Books, 1983), 82. See also his description of the plague in Zamosc, 90.

⁹¹ Hanover, *Abyss of Despair*, 93.

destitute widow found that neighbors had even pulled up the floorboards and stolen her possessions.⁹² Glikl's grandmother had not only lost her husband and several of her children but also faced financial ruin, aggravated by the fact that she still had to marry off two of her daughters. Robert Jütte has noted that the regional German saying "Du willst dir wohl den Dalles holen?" ("Do you want to catch a disease?") includes the Yiddish word "dalles" (poverty), thus indicating the close link between illness and poverty in Jewish consciousness, preserved in a popular phrase.⁹³

In July 1664,⁹⁴ the plague broke out in the Christian quarter in Hamburg and soon spread to a few Jewish houses. Most Jewish families moved to Altona in order to stay safe and the Christian creditors rushed to Jewish pawnbrokers to redeem their pledges. Despite the obvious dangers of infection, Glikl's family had to let them redeem their pledges and then decided to move to Hameln to Ḥayyim's family. On route to Hameln they stopped for Sukkot at their relatives' house where a seemingly innocent incident caused great trouble and worry to the family. When undressing her four-year old daughter Zippor, Glikl noticed her sensibility to touch and discovered a boil under her arm. Since Ḥayyim had recently been treated by a barber-surgeon for a similar boil, Glikl sent the maid to the synagogue to ask Ḥayyim for the name and address of the barber. This errand did not remain unnoticed and soon the rumor of an outbreak of the plague spread. An old Polish woman stepped in, presented herself as a healer (*rofanit*) and offered to have a look at the boil herself. Despite Glikl's protestations that the child was quite well and "running about the street and eating a roll" and just had a sore head before they left Hamburg, which she anointed and "the fluid from the head has, doubtless, led to this boil," the Polish woman insisted that this was indeed the plague. Ḥayyim's brothers and their families were concerned to keep this secret from the Christian authorities because they feared that great troubles would come upon the Jews if the Duke heard of it. They then decided to send the maid and the girl, dressed as beggars, to a little village in the vicinity under the pretence that they could not be accommodated by the local Jewish community due to many other visitors during the

⁹² Turniansky, *Glikl*, 64–67; Abrahams, *Glückel*, 17.

⁹³ Jütte, "The Social Construction of Illness," 27.

⁹⁴ On the problems of proper chronology, see Turniansky, *Glikl*, 18–19 (preface) and 156–157, note 84.

holiday of Sukkot. They hired the Polish woman and a Polish visitor who insisted on a generous payment before they left. Since it was a question of life and death, they received their money despite the holiday and left Hamelin, to the heartbreak of the weeping parents. Ḥayyim joined other men when they brought food to the village but he had to be restrained by force from reaching out to the little girl who ran towards him. They left the food on the grass where it was picked up by the maid and her company. The Polish woman applied plaster and salve to the boil and it healed quickly but the child was only allowed to return after Simḥat Torah, to the immense relief of her parents. When Glikl's family eventually returned to Hamburg, they found their friends in good health although business had suffered during this period.⁹⁵

Our anonymous Bohemian author left an even more dramatic account of the plague in Bohemia in 1618. In Prague alone, some 80,000 thousands people were said to have died from the epidemic. His report confirms the prevention strategies employed by Glikl's family although this time the plague was real. He tells of Jews moving from the towns to villages to escape the danger and the need for strict quarantine in case of infection. He also mentions the very real fear of troubles with the Christian authorities if cases were detected among the Jews. When the author came down with clear symptoms of the plague ("For three days and nights I had high fever, and was near death. Then a swelling which burned like fire broke out behind my ear on the neck."), his family decided not to follow the explicit orders of the Count, with whom his father was in friendly relations, to join the small quarantine set up in the forest in case of infection because they feared that their Christian neighbors would kill them in the forest and burgle the house left behind. What follows is a story of secrecy and quite dangerous deceit, given the very real dangers of infection. The boy was hidden in the garret with his grandfather who was to become his caretaker. After a couple of days the old man had to leave the village because neighbors had seen him with another person going for business to villages where the plague was raging and feared infection. The grandfather could not risk going into hiding as a search of the house would have detected the sick child and he left very publicly, leaving the child behind to fend for himself. "But God took pity on my suffering, seeing that there was no one to attend me, and sent me full recovery, and what was particularly

⁹⁵ Turniansky, *Glikl*, 156–175; Abrahams, *Glückel*, 48–59.

fortunate, the abscess did not open again when there was no one to take care of me, but it went down daily by the grace of God.” God’s care was helped by the application of a specially prepared plaster “from the white of an egg with a little alum, about the size of a nut. Both of these had to be stirred quickly and carefully in a little kettle until it turned solid.” However, new danger lurked from Gentile neighbors who had become suspicious when they noticed the missing child and suspected that the Jews had secretly buried him when he died from the plague. The only problem was that although the fever had gone, “the place of the swelling was burning like fire, and my whole face was red.” His father told him to conceal the redness by a piece of cloth and to pretend having returned from studies outside the village. The child had to play with other children and even to climb a tree so that all passers-by would see him. The neighbors were quite easily fooled and put to shame but the situation remained tricky. Once the boy teased a Christian man who had his hands on his cheeks, suffering from a bad toothache, saying that he looked like he suffered from the plague. The man replied that “you have the plague yourself; remove that cloth from your neck, and the swelling will be seen underneath.” Over time, things normalized and the boy grew stronger and returned to having meals with his family. Although the plague was by no means over, the villagers had become weary of taking precautions and many people, Jews and Gentiles alike, died from it.

In some villages all the male population died out, and only a few women were left. No one was there to take charge of the dead, who could not be buried, for it was winter and the earth was as hard as marble, and there was heavy snowfalls in those parts; so they only covered them with snow, and often wolves came and ate the corpses, and sometimes dogs scratched the snow off the bodies.⁹⁶

The measurements taken in the case of the plague were fleeing the endangered areas,⁹⁷ strict isolation of suspected infections (“If someone fell sick in one of the villages, he was driven out of his house with all his belongings, and had to go into the forest”) and the application of

⁹⁶ Marx, “Autobiography,” 187–192.

⁹⁷ The Christian discourse of the late Middle Ages and the Reformation (Luther published a treatise on this) if it was permitted to flee death or if faith would vindicate the existential threat, is not reflected in these Jewish sources. Heinrich Dormeier, “Die Flucht vor der Pest als religiöses Problem,” in *Laienfrömmigkeit im späten Mittelalter. Formen, Funktionen, politisch-soziale Zusammenhänge*, ed. Klaus Schreiner (München: Oldenbourg, 1992), 331–397.

plasters. Glikl relies on a local barber-surgeon but the Polish woman (who may have blown up the case in order to make some money) who claims to be healer, applies some plasters on the girl's boil as well. Our Bohemian author was treated by local expertise, "the brother of my father's wife, R. Samson of Kamnitz, who told my father how to prepare a plaster."

Glikl appears, at least in hindsight, confident to identify the symptoms of the plague correctly. She knew that not every boil, even on suspicious places such as the lymph nodes, is a symptom of the plague.⁹⁸

Nathan of Hannover's somber acknowledgement of the breakdown of family solidarity in the wake of the plague ("No man offered aid to his brother, and no father took pity on his child") is not confirmed by our sources. The grandfather willingly obliges to care for his infected grandson and Asher haLevi even, "out of compassion," took an old woman into his house and cared for her, although he seems relieved that she eventually died in somebody else's house and not in his.⁹⁹

However, such a dreadful epidemic reminded people very clearly of their alliances. Clear boundaries separated Jews and Christians, and each side appears to be fearful of infection caused by the other. Glikl's family risked infection by their Christian creditors for business, while the Bohemian family risked infection of their Christian neighbors by not isolating their boy properly. Nathan of Hannover stressed that Jews buried their dead in the night in order to avoid the rejoicing of Gentiles that yet another Jew had succumbed to the epidemic.

Pain is expressed as a sensibility to touch in the case which turned out to be false alarm and as a sensation that "burned like fire." However, the emotional pain seems to have hurt more than the physical sensation. Glikl's weeping husband had to be prevented by force from touching his quarantined daughter happily running towards him when he brought food. One gets the sense that the separation from his family members who left him on his own in the loft of the house after the grandfather had to leave and the calculated but heartless treatment in parading him around exercised by his father hurt the Bohemian author more than any physical suffering.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Otto Ulbricht, *Die leidige Seuche. Pest-Fälle in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004), 35, notes that people were quite able to diagnose the plague as they knew the symptoms and possible variants.

⁹⁹ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 38.

¹⁰⁰ On pain as part of the experience of the plague, see Otto Ulbricht, "Pester-

Interestingly enough, neither Glikl nor the Bohemian Jew understood the outbreak of the plague as God's punishment for collective sin. As Lucinda McGray Beier has noted, the seventeenth-century English vicar Josselin interpreted the sudden and inexplicable outbreak and the collective nature of epidemics as punishment for collective sin which deprived him of "his usual weapon against disease: righteous behavior and prayer. Even in his capacity as vicar he could not control his neighbor's thoughts and actions. ... How fearful, to have to depend upon the relative virtue of all on one's fellow townspeople!"¹⁰¹ The two Jewish responses discussed above were less self-righteous and rather more practical and mainly concerned with care for their offspring and their property. Unsettling as it may have been, in hindsight the incident proved relatively harmless and probably became an often-told family anecdote and God's invention proved unnecessary. Glikl—again—saw herself justified in her sober assessment of the case but she fully acknowledges that it was due to God's mercy that nobody in her close family circle had died. In a highly individualistic understanding the Bohemian author attributed his recovery "against the laws of nature" fully to the mercy of God, taking pity on a child left behind with no one to care for him. Asher haLevi who mentioned several outbreaks of the epidemic interprets the plague in traditional terms. The plague began spreading across the villages in Nissan 385 (1625) and "due to our sins" hundreds and thousands died. During Purim 386 (1626) the epidemic increased in Reichshofen and the "death stood at my window and surrounded me from all sides." He attributed God for showing mercy to the rest of his people and to prevent the disaster coming over their houses.¹⁰² When the plague returned to Reichshofen in 1628/29, more than 100 people died and nearly 50 houses were contaminated but thanks to God "no dog sharpened its tongue against any of the children of Israel."¹⁰³ When the plague finally reached the house in which he was living at the time (Oberbronn, 1633) and five died and eight fell ill, Asher blamed his sins for the sorrow caused.¹⁰⁴ The phrase "because of our sins" does not imply resigned fatalism, it reflects "the

fahrung: 'Das Sterben' und der Schmerz in der Frühen Neuzeit," *Medizin, Gesellschaft und Geschichte* 15 (1996): 9–35.

¹⁰¹ McCray Beier, "In Sickness and in Health," 126.

¹⁰² Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 13.

¹⁰³ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 22.

¹⁰⁴ Ginsburger, *Memoiren*, 38.

responsibility one should take for his or her troubles, because God is just.”¹⁰⁵ To avoid catastrophes such as the plague, one had to try even harder to be a better Jew.

The Polluted Body: Keri and Niddah

Is there anything particular Jewish about the examples discussed so far? Did Jews experience their bodies differently because they were subjected to a different set of religious laws than their Christian neighbors? As we have seen, seventeenth-century Jews suffered from their bodies as other people; they saw a direct link between health and illness to God; they feared the same epidemics and applied the same plasters and potions. They cared for their loved ones when they were ill and mourned them when they died. There is, however, one field where we can speak about a specific Jewish understanding of the body and this is pollution.

Asher haLevi whose anguished reminiscence of the discovery of an involuntary emission of semen in the night of Yom Kippur introduced this article, actually experienced another incident of *keri* two years later. He is not the only man to mention it in his autobiographical reflections, though. Pinḥas Katzenelbogen was saved from it on the night of Yom Kippur by a friend who called his name and told him to get up. He immediately got up, trembling and shaking, realizing that he had just been saved from impurity and a major sin on this holiest day of awe. Katzenelbogen gratefully thanked God for looking out for him and protecting him from such a grave sin.¹⁰⁶

There were several precautions men could take in order to prevent an incident of *keri* happening in that night. Isaiah Horowitz recommended in his *Shenei Luḥot haBerit* the recitation of the first four psalms before going to bed. They contain 306 words and 4 songs, which adds up to 310, the numerical value of *keri*. “In this night we resemble angels and therefore must prevent any pollution, particularly *keri*.” He further advised not to wrap oneself with warming blankets and duvets “because this strengthens sexual desire.” Best would be not to cover the feet at all.¹⁰⁷ Other commentators recommend refraining from certain

¹⁰⁵ Bar-Levav, “‘When I was Alive,’” 58, note 21.

¹⁰⁶ Katzenelbogen, *Yesh Manḥilin*, 78, sign 9.

¹⁰⁷ Isaiah Horowitz, *Shenei Luḥot haBerit* (Amsterdam, 1698), I, §229a (Hebrew).

food, particularly dairy food or dishes made of milk,¹⁰⁸ possibly due to the milky color of semen.

What was a man to do if *keri* happened after all? Any “unnecessary” washing and particularly washing for one’s pleasure is prohibited on Yom Kippur. Asher haLevi looked the correct amount of water up in a halakhic compendium. Other commentators advise on the correct penitence, such as the specific prayers said “with the full intention and best under tears,”¹⁰⁹ charity and fasting.

Asher showed great halakhical awareness after the event. He looked up the relevant passage to make sure to subject his body to the correct regime after it had involuntarily sinned. Another important aspect of this episode is the fear of immanent death. He knew the talmudic discussion in b. Yom 88a and although he was aware of the opinion expressed by R. Naḥman bar Isaac, who views this as a positive sign, R. Ishmael’s teaching that struck fear into Asher’s mind says that one who sees *keri* on Yom Kippur should worry all year long lest his prayers go unanswered. This implies that *keri* on Yom Kippur is a sign of death in the year to follow. The admonition of Isaiah Horowitz not to cover one’s feet may not only be about cooling one’s desire but also refer directly to Samael who is interpreted as the Angel of Death, Satan, the Prosecutor or the Evil Inclination in Jewish tradition. In *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, Samael is quoted as saying to God, “you have a unique nation, which is like the ministering angels in heaven. Just as the angels have bare feet, so the Jews have bare feet on Yom Kippur.”¹¹⁰ In order to avoid the Angel of Death, every effort had to be made to avoid pollution.

Two of the most touching scenes in early modern Jewish autobiographical writing are deathbed scenes. Leone Modena describes how his young and beautiful fiancée Esther fell ill before they could get married. Her health deteriorated from day to day, “[y]et her heart was like that of a lion, and she was not afraid.” On the day she died, she asked for Leone and embraced and kissed him. She said,

I know that this is bold behavior, but God knows that during the one year of our engagement we did not touch each other even with our little fingers. Now, at the time of death, the rights of the dying are mine. I was

¹⁰⁸ Quoted by Pollock, *Jewish Folkways*, 172. See also Katzenelbogen, *Yesh Manḥilin*, 95, sign 21, and 96, sign 22, on protection from *keri* by practical Kabbalah.

¹⁰⁹ Nathanel Weil, *Korban Natanel* (Karlsruhe, 1755), Yom Kippurim, § 21 (Hebrew).

¹¹⁰ *Pirke de R. Eliezer*, § 46 (Hebrew).

not allowed to become your wife, but what can I do, for thus it is decreed in heaven. May God's will be done.¹¹¹

The young woman, very well aware that she was going to die soon, claims for herself the “right of transgression,” she transgresses physical boundaries and reaches out to the body of the man whom she had hoped to marry.¹¹²

Glikl also sat at the bedside of her dying lover but she was not permitted to touch him, although they were married. Ḥayyim, Glikl's husband, had tripped over a stone and fallen so badly that he was severely wounded. The efforts of Glikl and the family to improve his condition were to no avail:

At the close of Sabbath there was no one but I and Abraham Lopez [Sephardi, a barber-surgeon as well as a physician]; he wanted no one else. At midnight Lopez sent for the surgeon [*brukh shneyder*] because he thought the wound was now ready for cutting. But when the surgeon came he saw immediately that there was no hope, and went away again. Then I said to him [to Ḥayyim]: “My dear, may I touch him?” (I was then unclean [*treyfē*]). He answered: “God forbid, my child: it won't be so long now before you will have bathed.” But he did not live till then.¹¹³

Glikl appears to have longed for this last physical contact with her beloved husband, who died relatively young, for the remainder of her life. Unlike in the case of Leone and Esther who were not supposed to touch (sexually and otherwise) because they were not married, at first glance we seem to have a case of fear of pollution here (“I was then *treyfē*”). Chava Turniansky has noted that the use of the word “*treyfē*” for *niddah* is a rare and unusual choice in this context.¹¹⁴ However, as Charlotte Fonrobert has reminded us, the “prohibition of a man touching his wife is not based on the fear of her menstrual impurity, but on the notion that touching her will lead to sexual relations as a time when they are biblically prohibited.”¹¹⁵ In terms of Halakah it would

¹¹¹ *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena's Life of Judah*, ed. Mark R. Cohen (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 90.

¹¹² On contacts between young Italian-Jewish men and women before marriage, see Roni Weinstein, *Marriage Rituals Italian Style: A Historical Anthropological Perspective on Early Modern Italian Jews* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), particularly chapter six, 311–350.

¹¹³ Turniansky, *Glikl*, 366–367; Abrahams, *Glückel*, 108, with some changes to the English translation.

¹¹⁴ Turniansky, *Glikl*, 367, note 27.

¹¹⁵ Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 20–21. For a somewhat

have been permissible for Glikl to touch him since he was mortally ill. One could read his refusal to be touched by her as a sign that he still hoped that his condition was not fatal and that he would recover after all or perhaps also as an acknowledgement that, even when dying, he was still aware of her attractiveness as a woman.

Their discipline and ritual observance in Ḥayyim's hour of death, shortly before he whispered the Shema and died, helped his soul to "escape in holiness and purity" and Glikl found a certain relief and comfort in her melancholia of old age, poverty and loneliness in this, as she summarized this difficult experience with "[f]rom his end it was clear what sort of a man he was."¹¹⁶ Because Ḥayyim had shown halakhic discipline to his very end, although it meant discomfort to his body, he kept his soul "holy and pure" for which he could expect reward in the world to come.

Conclusion

Glikl took comfort in Ḥayyim's physical discipline in the hour of his death while Asher's experiences of *keri* threatened to prevent him from "participating in divine perfection" on Yom Kippur. Such experiences, recorded in memoirs sometimes clearly meant to be read by readers beyond the intimate circle of close family, would indicate that there is indeed a specific "Jewish body experience" because Jews as Jews were subjected to a specific set of normative rules which regulated the way they experienced and understood their bodies. In these and other examples, Jews demonstrate awareness of halakhic rules and set out to follow them. It appears that there is no significant gap between normative standards and the realities of practical life. When our authors did disregard Halakha—as Asher haLevi did when drinking non-kosher wine—or fail to follow the ideal—when experiencing *keri* on Yom Kippur—they were well aware that their behavior did not conform to religious law and expressed regret about their weaknesses manifested in intimate body experiences. Debra Kaplan has argued that this openness about and acknowledgement of one's transgressions

different interpretation of this incident, see the contribution by Ruth Berger in this volume.

¹¹⁶ Turniansky, *Glikl*, 368–369.

and sins is “characteristically early modern” and constitutes a notable distinction to earlier confessional texts.¹¹⁷

The body causes not only regrettable deviance from religious ideals. In the descriptions of pregnancy, birth, illness, and the plague in Jewish self-writing of the seventeenth century, the body appears also as a source of crisis, suffering, and despair and not one of pleasure, satisfaction and enjoyment. The body has to be controlled according to God’s commandments, but it is ultimately God upon whose mercy and justice physical experiences depends.

Autobiographical texts have been used for a long time by social historians, and they provide us with valuable information on how Jews lived and which values they hold dear.¹¹⁸ Michael Stanislawski has recently warned of generalizations derived from such accounts and urged that they should be corroborated by findings from other sources.¹¹⁹ While I accept his critique of a naïve construction of facts based on personal memories, I would argue that these—more or less self-conscious, historically accurate or deliberately embellished—voices of early modern Jews tell us a lot about their *Weltanschauung*. The way they saw and understood the world and the way they constructed the narrative of their lives was influenced by the values and norms of early modern Jewish society, by certain codified cultural models. It seems therefore perfectly legitimate to examine such accounts if we want to get a better understanding how early modern Jews understood themselves and the world around them. This does not necessarily mean that all seventeenth-century Central European Jews experienced their bodies in exactly the same way, neither that this was very different from that the experiences of German Protestants or Catholics. I have tried to demonstrate that certain attitudes and practices, for example, regarding pregnancy, sickness or treatment of illness, crossed religious borders. This is not surprising given the close level of contact and cooperation on a daily basis. Glikl’s *Shabbes Goye* ran for the desired medlars in order to revive Glikl’s son, a Christian midwife assisted during the labor of Pinḥas Katzenelnbogen’s wife. However, tension could easily arise in times of crisis. An epidemic such as the dreaded plague heightened

¹¹⁷ Kaplan, “The Self in Social Context,” 216–218.

¹¹⁸ For a recent example of this approach, see the articles in Marion A. Kaplan, *Jewish Daily Life in Germany, 1618–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹¹⁹ Stanislawski, *Autobiographical Jews*, 42–43. Cf. the methodological reflections by Graetz, “Jüdische Mentalität zwischen Tradition und Moderne,” 117–121.

the Jewish sense of vulnerability and led to suspicion of their Christian neighbors and to a very palpable fear of persecution. On a smaller scale, the tragic death of a wife following complications in childbirth confirmed suspicions harbored against the Gentile midwife.

I could discuss only a few body issues raised in early modern self-writing in this article. Each of the sources selected would merit an in depth-study, particularly Glikl's *zikhroynes* whose complete and uncensored version is finally accessible in Chava Turniansky's edition and Pinhas Katzenelbogen no less fascinating but much less studied *Yesh Manḥilin*.¹²⁰ Topics that would deserve a close investigation include the influence of stellar constellations on body and mind, the awareness of kabbalistic texts and the use of practical Kabbalah and popular magic, eating and fasting, the interpretation of dreams, sexuality, in/fertility, mental illness, and death.

¹²⁰ Nimrod Zinger discusses some aspects of Katzenelbogen's understanding of illness in his article in this volume.

“WHO KNOWS WHAT THE CAUSE IS?”:
“NATURAL” AND “UNNATURAL” CAUSES FOR
ILLNESS IN THE WRITINGS OF BA‘ALEI SHEM,
DOCTORS AND PATIENTS AMONG GERMAN
JEWS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY*

NIMROD ZINGER

In his memoirs, Pinḥas Katzenelbogen, an eighteenth-century rabbi serving several Jewish communities in southern Germany, records the sickness of his daughter, the widowed Ms. Rachel of Prague, in the year 1758. Rachel suffered from serious bouts of fever, which harassed her repeatedly. The doctor she had turned to for help, recommended that she take a certain herb, but the herb did nothing to improve her health. A second doctor named Zalman instructed her to try another remedy, but this medicine provided only temporary relief for her condition which subsequently deteriorated rapidly. Rachel asked her brother to consult with “specialist doctors” during his upcoming journey to Vienna, and to describe to them her ailments and her vain attempts to cure her illness through various medicines and amulets. She hoped that one of those doctors might provide her with an effective medication for her illness. In addition, she asked her father to pray for her rapid recovery. Her father also turned to another means familiar to him in order to find the appropriate remedy for “those with the fever disease.” Katzenelbogen tells us that “one woman” gave him the recipe for the remedy she used to cure her husband who had suffered from a similar illness. This recipe called for the boiling of a combination of wine and various herbs in a clay pot. After boiling, the sick person was to drink down the entire brew; subsequently, the clay pot was to be discarded in a river. Another remedy that the rabbi received came from

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his son-in-law's deceased grandfather's writings. The remedy recommended the following procedure:

For those ailing with fever, God forbid, one is to acquire a kettle ... and put inside the kettle 77 grains of pulses and to recite: nit eins, nit zwei [not one, not two] ... and so forth, until seventy seven. Afterwards, the fever-ridden person must urinate into the kettle directly over the pulses; the kettle is to be concealed with a cover, and firmly glued with mortar. Next, the kettle is to be buried entirely ... deep in the ground, in a place, where no man will pass ... This remedy has been tried and verified, by God's help.¹

The methods used in coping with Rachel's sickness, a story to which we will return later on, corresponds to Peter Burke's concept "medical pluralism," which, according to him, characterized medicine in early modern Italy. This term refers to the practice of choosing between a variety of medical treatments. Often, the ill would undergo several methods of treatment concurrently.² The common belief in eighteenth-century Europe was that illness stemmed from a number of causes, beginning with "natural" causes as well as causes "that were not according to nature," like godly punishment, demonic activity or astrological influence. The suitable method of treatment was based on the sick person's own diagnosis. The same course of action was recorded in eighteenth-century Germany as well,³ and was also practiced among the Jewish population. In this article, I will present the various rea-

¹ Pinḥas Katzenelnbogen, *Yesh Manḥilin* (Jerusalem: The Ḥatam Sofer Institute, 1986), mark 26. This remedy for fever was quite common in this period. For example, see Ya'akov Ben Moshe Katz, *Minḥot Ya'akov Shela* (Wilhermsdorf: Zvi Hirsch Ben Ḥayyim of Fürth, 1731), 50; *Segullot Urefuot*, Boston manuscript, F.A. Countway Library of Medicine Heb. 19, The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jewish National and University Library Jerusalem-F 41350, 41; H. Bächtold-Stäubli and E. Hoffmann-Krayer, ed., *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1927), 2:1454. On the motif of transferring the disease to objects and animals in Jewish and European folk-medicine, see Wayland D. Hand, "Measuring and Plugging: The Medical Containment and Transfer of Disease," in *Magical Medicine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 93–105; H.J. Zimmels, *Magicians, Theologians and Doctors: Studies in Folk-medicine and Folk-lore as Reflected in the Rabbinical Responsa, 12th–19th Centuries* (London: Edward Goldston & Son, 1952), 141–142; Herman Pollack, *Jewish Folkways in Germanic Lands (1648–1806): Studies in Aspects of Daily Life* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press), 127.

² Peter Burke, "Rituals of Healing in Early Modern Italy," *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 207–222.

³ A useful illustration can be found in Barbara Duden, *The Woman beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth Century Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 72–103.

sons for the appearance of physical illness as found in the writings of Ba'alei Shem, doctors, and patients, and portray the treatments that they implemented. Through this discussion, I will suggest a model that will enable us to more clearly understand the nature of the healers and their various practices as well as the broader medical world of German Jews in the Early Modern Period.

Any researcher dealing with the history of medicine in early modern Europe will soon discover that their modern language and perception make the reconstruction of the past a difficult task. Even a basic sorting of healers and their methods into distinct categories will meet with complications. As Robert Jütte explained, the heavy load carried by categories like: “non-orthodox,” “irregular,” “alternative,” and—we might add—“magic,” “religious” and “popular,” will inevitably be anachronistic and lead to a judgmental attitude.⁴ In the past, historians of early modernity tended to divide healers and their methods into two groups: learned and popular. The first category was made up of doctors that had graduated from universities and those subject to them, like pharmacists and surgeons. The second group, which has attracted much less interest, was made up of charlatans, wise women, witch doctors and a wide variety of other healers. Over the past two decades, disagreements concerning the term “popular culture,”⁵ also led to strong criticism of the historiography of medicine of the Early Modern Period. This criticism was strengthened by developments in the historical research of medicine, which rejected the definition of modern medicine as “coming out of the dark ages into light.” A number of researchers emphasized that the “learned” doctors had no clearly demarcated position and were but one of many groups of healers operating in the “medical marketplace.” They also stressed the presence of a language shared by both levels—“learned” as well as “popular.” The critics maintained that the term “popular medicine” engenders a dichotomous thinking, which does not reflect the reality of that period’s world of medicine.⁶

⁴ Robert Jütte, “The Historiography of Nonconventional Medicine in Germany: A Concise Overview,” *Medical History* 43 (1999): 342–343.

⁵ On this problem, see R.W. Scribner, “Is a History of Popular Culture Possible?,” in *Religion and Culture in Germany (1400–1800)*, ed. Lyndal Roper (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Carl Watkins, “‘Folklore’ and ‘Popular Religion’ in Britain during the Middle Ages,” *Folklore* 115 (2004): 140–150.

⁶ For an overview of a historiography of medicine, see Judith Walzer Leavitt, “Medicine in Context: A Review Essay of the History of Medicine,” *The American His-*

In response to these difficulties, new categories were developed for defining medicine at the beginning of the modern period, criteria which, however, posed new problems.⁷ The central difficulty lies in finding the fine balance between two tendencies. On the one hand, as different healers apparently belonging to different categories bore similar characteristics, a dichotomous division cannot properly define the condition of medicine. On the other hand, in spite of their common ground, distinctions between healers did exist, and these differences were well apprehended by their contemporaries. In this regard, David Gentilcore's attitude proves to be most useful. Gentilcore, who researched medicine in Naples of the Early Modern Period, proposed a model comprised of three intersecting spheres: a medical sphere, an ecclesiastical sphere and a popular sphere. Each sphere intersects with the other two, creating a certain common ground. Those spheres are not only categories of healers and practices, they are etiological categories as well. Gentilcore demonstrates how this model corresponds precisely to his evidence, and suggests that different findings require different models.⁸

In light of these observations, I intend to apply the recommended model to my own findings on the Jewish community in eighteenth-century Germany. The model I am about to present is comprised of three intersecting spheres as well. The application of Gentilcore's model to Jewish society will certainly require a redefinition of the ecclesiastical sphere. I chose the concept "spiritual" for this sphere, in order to cover a variety of phenomena in the religious arena. A main component in this sphere is the Kabbalah. The second sphere in Gentilcore's model, the medical sphere, meaning the academic side of medicine in general, I have left unchanged. Likewise, the third sphere,

torical Review 95 (1990): 1471–1484; Gert Brieger, "The Historiography of Medicine," in *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine*, ed. W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter (London–New York: Routledge, 1993), 24–44; Laurence Brockliss and Colin Jones, *The Medical World of Early Modern France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1–6; Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1–12; David Gentilcore, "Was There a 'Popular Medicine' in Early Modern Europe?," *Folklore* 115 (2004): 151–166.

⁷ Matthew Ramsey for example recommended the division between "regular" and "irregular healers." See Matthew Ramsey, *Professional and Popular Medicine in France 1770–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁸ David Gentilcore, *Healers and Healing in Early Modern Italy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Gentilcore, "Was there a "Popular Medicine" in Early Modern Europe?."

the “popular,” is adopted unchanged. Although this term has been subject to criticism, I will continue to use it for lack of a better term. I believe that the more flexible, three-sphered model, will efficiently counter the dichotomous nature of our terminology. The “popular sphere” is very hard to define. We can identify it with the ways of the peddlers, of the “women,” or in a simplistic manner, and define it as containing all the domains not included in the other two spheres.

I would like to add a further layer to this model by emphasizing the importance of magic in the world of medicine at this period of time.⁹ Although several recent studies on both European and Jewish society have emphasized the centrality of magic, the study of magic has yet to receive the attention it deserves.¹⁰ Some approaches—that of Katharine Park, for example—mark a categorical separation between magic, medicine and religion.¹¹ In my perception, magic cannot be considered as a separate entity, as it is an integral part of every aspect of life. Thus, magic is present in each of our model’s three spheres.

The given model treats each healer, healing method and perspective individually, as they are expressed within a specific text. I refrain, for example, from categorizing an entire group of healers as “popular,” or “spiritual,” but locate each healer within the model, based on his individual characteristics, as described in the extant textual sources. This model allows for a more pluralistic description of medicine in the daily life of German Jews, without ignoring the particularities pointed out by contemporaries. I believe that a closer look at the European

⁹ Within the limited frame of this work, I will not be able to relate the complexities surrounding the definition of “magic.” For a thorough discussion of “magic,” see Yuval Harari, “HaMagia HaYehudit HaKeduma: Iyyunim Metodologim Uphilosophim” (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1996).

¹⁰ For example: Moshe Idel, “Yahadut, Mistika Yehudit VeMagia,” *Madda'ei HaYahadut* 36 (1996): 25–40; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971); Stephen Wilson, *The Magical Universe: Everyday Ritual and Magic in Pre-Modern Europe* (London: Hambledon and London, 2000); Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Charles Zika, *Exorcising our Demons: Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

¹¹ Katharine Park, “Medicine and Magic: The Healing Arts,” in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis (London and New York: Longman, 1998). Avriel Bar Levav presents a similar separation of terminology in his discussion of the separation of remedies as seen in the book of R. Shimon Frankfurt. See Avriel Bar Levav, “Tefisat HaMavet BeSefer HaHayyim LeRabbi Shimon Frankfurt” (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997), 373, 377–378.

Jewish community, which was relatively homogeneous in nature, will not only demonstrate the problems inherent in dividing medicine into learned and popular medicine, but will also instruct us as to the complex character of medicine in that period, and to the value of the suggested model to the understanding of it.¹² Turning now to the diagnoses and prescriptions of Ba'alei Shem, doctors and patients, I will apply the suggested model to their perceptions of the various reasons for the appearance of illnesses in the human body.

Causes for Illness According to the Writings of the Ba'alei Shem

The title of Ba'al Shem (master of the name) relates to a person considered an expert in "practical Kabbalah" who is acquainted with the different names of God and the angels, and, by using them, possesses the ability to perform wondrous deeds.¹³ In this period, a variety of fantastic abilities were attributed to the Ba'alei Shem, including the extinguishing of fire, the identification of the location of stolen items, the halting of rains, and even the ability to become invisible. Their main activity, however, concerned medical issues like fertility, birth, the healing of insanity and the casting out of demons. We find the same abilities in other healers active at that time in Europe, also accompanied by a magical component. In modern research, these healers have been grouped under the definition of "cunning folk."¹⁴ In the past,

¹² An example of this complexity is seen in the figure of the Ba'alei Shem. Research has generally classified them as "popular" as opposed to "learned" healers. These personalities, however, were recognized as high authorities in practical Kabbalah, an esoteric area reserved for the few who wrote amulets on the basis of an incomparable amount of acquired knowledge. Thus, they hardly qualify as less "learned" than a doctor who prescribes a prescription.

¹³ On the subject of Ba'alei Shem see Gedalyah Nigal, *Magia, Mistica, VeHasidut* (Tel Aviv: Yaron-Golan, 1992), 13–32; Moshe Rosman, *HaBesht Mehaddesh HaHasidut* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1999), 21–40; Immanuel Etkes, *Ba'al HaShem: HaBesht—Magia, Mistica, Hanhaga* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2000), 15–53; Michal Oron, *Mi"Ba'al Shed" Le"Ba'al Shem"*: Shmuel Falk, *HaBa'al Shem miLondon* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2002), 13–28; Karl E. Grözinger, "Jüdische Wundermänner in Deutschland," in *Judentum im deutschen Sprachraum*, ed. Karl E. Grözinger (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 190–221.

¹⁴ For studies of those type of healers, see Willem de Blécourt, "Witch Doctors, Soothsayers and Priests: On Cunning Folk in European Historiography and Tradition," *Social History* 19 (1994): 285–303; Robin Briggs, "Circling the Devil: Witch Doctors and Magical Healers in Early Modern Lorraine," in *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Stuart Clark (London: Macmillan Press,

historical writing described the Ba'alei Shem as a group that was active among the "illiterate ones"; today, however, it is widely accepted that many of the Ba'alei Shem enjoyed great prestige among their contemporaries. R. Naphtali Katz of Pozna (deceased 1719), who served as the rabbi of the Jewish community of Pozna and in Frankfurt, R. Jonathan Eibeschtütz (1690–1764) who served as the rabbi of Prague, Metz, and the three communities of Altona-Hamburg-Vandsbeck, R. Samuel Essingen, who served as the rabbi of Worndorf in the 1740s, and Ephraim Rischer, a presiding judge of Wertheim in the second decade of the same century—these are but a few of the many Ba'alei Shem who possessed senior positions in their communities. The Ba'alei Shem nevertheless constituted a heterogeneous group, not all of whom held prominent positions. As acknowledged experts in the practical Kabbalah, which was considered a key to the understanding of human existence, the lion's share of their practice included amulets, prayers and spells grounded in their kabbalistic knowledge.¹⁵ Thus, at first glance, we should situate these healers in the model's "spiritual" sphere. A

2001), 161–177; Scott C. Dixon, *The Reformation and Rural Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 176–202; Wolfgang Behringer, *Shaman of Oberstdorf: Conrad Stoecklin and the Phantoms of the Night* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 128–145; Owen Davies, *Cunning Folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003). Recently there has been a growing trend comparing the Ba'alei Shem with the figure of the Shaman. For a discussion on Shamanism, see Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1964); Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey, ed., *Shamanism, History and the State* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1996). The tendency to compare the figure of the Shaman with that of the Ba'al Shem, is emphasized in Moshe Rosman's book. See Moshe Rosman, *HaBesht Mehaddesh HaHasidut*, 24–25, 27; as well as Haviva Pedaya, "Bikoret: Moshe Rosman, HaBesht Mehaddesh HaHasidut," *Zion* 69 (2004): 20–21. This trend seems to find reinforcement through the general trend in research, seeking shamanistic roots in European society. For example: Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); Gabor Klaniczay, "Shamanistic Elements in the European Witchcraft", in *The Uses of Supernatural Power: The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 129–150. My opinion is that caution is needed when comparing the Ba'alei Shem, who were active in Central and Eastern Europe and the Shamans, active in the Siberian deserts. It is my contention that greater benefit will be derived from comparison with other healers active in the same geographical region. For a point of view arguing against the inclusion of European healers under the concept of "Shamanism," see Davies, *Cunning Folk*, 178–186.

¹⁵ It is my intention to elaborate elsewhere on the subject of the training of the Ba'alei Shem.

thorough and meticulous reading of their writings, however, will reveal the pluralistic nature of their medical perspective.

The Ba'alei Shem left us with a substantial amount of material in the form of "books of remedies and medicines," which contain innumerable ways of treatment addressing a variety of misfortunes. Most of these were published in the first half of the eighteenth century.¹⁶ The concentration of such publications in this period may be explained as an attempt, on the part of the Ba'alei Shem, to maintain their position in a changing medical world, in which a growing number of Jewish doctors were graduating from European universities. It also demonstrates, however, that the demand for their services during the first half of the eighteenth century was still substantial.¹⁷ Although the main works that I will refer to were composed or printed in the German area, for several reasons I will also consider books of remedies and medicines written in Eastern Europe around the same period of time: first, I believe that these books contain similar treatments and medical perspectives; second, many of the Ba'alei Shem active in Germany began their professional course in Eastern Europe; and finally, the majority of works printed in Eastern Europe were published later in Central Europe as well.¹⁸

¹⁶ Regarding the books of remedies and medicines, see Hagit Matras, "Sifrei Segullot URefuot Be'Ivrit Teĥanim UMekorot" (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997). The books of remedies and medicines are not uniform in content. The essential distinction between the various books is between those books printed and directed towards the wider public and unpublished compositions created for the use of the Ba'alei Shem themselves. The works intended solely for the Ba'alei Shem included, apart from collections of remedies and medicines, tools for creating other methods of curing. We see definite signs of restraint in the printed material, whereas the written manuscripts present ways of treatment not mentioned in the published books, mainly through the use of names of defilement and demons, and other means, considered controversial or too complicated for the common person, as in the case of casting out of demons and evil spirits.

¹⁷ On the different approaches to this subject, see Etkes, *Ba'al HaShem*, 52–53; Haviva Pedaya, "Bikoret: Etkes: *Ba'al HaShem*," *Zion* 70 (2005): 256–257; Ze'ev Gries, "Demuto HaHistorit shel HaBesht," *Kabbalah* 5 (2000): 416.

¹⁸ Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern claims that the books of remedies from Central Europe differ from those of Eastern Europe, insofar as the latter have a stronger tendency towards "witchcraft" than their counterparts. In other words, they deal with harmful magic, make use of defiling powers, and mainly recommend to those seeking help "pharmaceutical foulness." See Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, "The Master of an Evil Name: Hillel Ba'al Shem and his Sefer Ha-Heshek," *AJS Review* 28 (2004): 241. I disagree, arguing that there is no essential difference between the printed books and the written manuscripts of Central Europe and their "siblings" in Eastern Europe. One can find harmful spells throughout the German compositions as well, for example, regard-

There are no comprehensive, theoretical discussions to be found within the books of remedies and medicines, and most of them focus solely on treatment instructions, as is typical for this genre.¹⁹ Therefore, in order to reconstruct the reasons for illness, as seen by the Ba'alei Shem, we are forced to be satisfied with the few extant fragments of theoretical discussion, and build on the recommended methods of treatment, in order to deduce how they reasoned the emergence of an illness.

Such analysis of the books of remedies and medicines will show that the authors maintained the medical perspective that an illness has causes that are “from nature,” and causes that “are not according to nature.” This understanding is portrayed at the beginning of Jacob Pesach's book *Ze'vah Pesah* (Zólkiew 1722), which discusses various causes for the plague (*iposh*):

It is advisable to know that there are two types of plague ... It can be caused by nature: for instance, when there is a loss of air, due to dead corpses and a large amount of dead bodies as happens after wars or famines that follow them. Yet, there is also a kind of plague that results from an astrological constellation dominated by Saturn and Mars, or that has been affected by a legion of demons ... Whereas the natural ones require natural medicines and remedies, those that come from the stars and the demons call for the use of names and amulets. In those cases, natural medicine can accomplish nothing. Thus, the heart of the man who pursues life is involved in them all. For who knows what the cause is.²⁰

ing the “forcible compulsion of a woman,” and arousing enmity between the members of a couple. See *Kameot, Segullot, Goralot UMazalot, Be'Ivrit UbeYiddish*, Moscow MS, Ginzburg 1391, The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jewish National and University Library Jerusalem—F 48463, 48–49. I oppose Shtern's view, which makes the absence of prescriptions of “foulness” in the German compositions the distinguishing criterion. David Tevel, for instance, recommends the drinking of a hare's feces as a remedy, and the spreading of a man's excrement on a wound for the purpose of stopping the bleeding. See David Tevel Ben Ya'akov, *Sefer Beit David* (Wilhermsdorf: Zvi Hirsch Ben Hayyim of Fürth, 1734), 22, 25. As was mentioned earlier, certain Ba'alei Shem were active both in Poland and in Germany, and we have no substantial evidence for assuming that their ways of treatment changed with geographical movement. Moreover, we find incidents in which Jewish members of the German community turned to Ba'alei Shem from Poland for medical assistance.

¹⁹ On the genre of “books of secrecy” in Europe in the Early Modern Period, see William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²⁰ R. Ya'akov Pesach, *Sefer Ze'vah Pesah* (Zólkiew: Aaron Ben Hayyim David Segal, 1722), author's introduction. This separation between “natural” remedies and those that are “not according to nature” is also found in the writings of the Ba'al Shem Benjamin

At first sight, this division between “natural” and “unnatural” seems to deviate from the outlook of the period. According to the neo-platonic view, which constituted a significant stream in Europe of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not only do angels, demons and stars make up an integral part of the natural world, they are the key to the very understanding of it. Furthermore, proponents of different streams were of the opinion that, although demons and witches apparently have abilities which do not accord with nature, it is actually their wide knowledge of nature’s laws that leads to their fantastic abilities.²¹ The belief in the existence of demons and in the ability to recruit their powers for the causing of harm, was a common belief in European society at large, and served as the foundation for the witch hunt, which culminated in the first half of the seventeenth century, and simmered, on a low flame, in certain regions until the late eighteenth century.²² In the books of remedies and medicines, we find similar beliefs and many references to the terrible damage that can be caused to a person’s health by demons and witches. A large number of references are connected to the areas of “insanity,”²³ and fertility.²⁴ The most terrifying

Binush HaCohen of Kratschin, the acquaintance of R. Pinhas Katzenelnbogen (see Katzenelnbogen, mark 22), who gives the following as his reason for publishing *Amtahat Binyamin*: “I resolved in my heart and mind to raise in this book some of the issues regarding remedies, medicines, and prayers that would open Israel’s eyes in knowing what to do, how to take caution in the treatment of the body, by natural means as well as those means that are not according to nature, for those who are sick, wounded and those very grave cases in the world ...” R. Benjamin Binush HaKohen of Kratschin, *Amtahat Binyamin* (Wilhermsdorf: Zvi Hirsch Ben Hayyim of Fürth, 1716), opening page. Immanuel Etkes is convinced that the Ba’alei Shem actively employed both natural as well as magical means in their treatment of patients. Although this division has its own problems, Etkes demonstrates why the methods of the Ba’alei Shem were not contradictory to doctors’ methods. See Etkes, *Ba’al HaShem*, 22, 47.

²¹ An example can be found in the story of Solomon the Wise and how he learned secrets from the lips of Asmodeus (the king of demons in Jewish demonology). See *Sefer Toledot Adam* (Jerusalem: Makhon Benei Issakhar, 1994), 64.

²² A vast literature exists on the subject of the “witch hunt.” See, for example, Brian P. Levack, *The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Longman, 1995); Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*; Ankarloo Bengt and Stuart Clark, ed., *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Period of the Witch Trials* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2004); Wolfgang Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria: Popular Magic, Religious Zealotry and Reason of State in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²³ Benjamin Binush HaCohen, *Amtahat Binyamin*, 74.

²⁴ See for example *Sefer Toledot Adam*, mark 86; R. Zechira Ben Ya’akov Saminer, *Sefer Zehirah* (Zitamir: Defus Hanina, 1848), 57–58.

demon was Lilith, the female demon that was believed to cause harm to women or to their newborn babies during birthing.²⁵ Yet, all the activities of witches, demons and even of Satan, were regarded as “according to nature.”²⁶

Although there was no disagreement with the view that demons and witches work within the natural frame of the world, the terminology that the Ba'alei Shem used, i.e., “natural” and “unnatural” causes, fits the general European discourse of the Early Modern Period. Many texts of the time categorize a sickness that was regarded as having its origin in demonic influence or caused by some heavenly movement, as “unnatural”—in other words, not according to the ways of doctors. At the beginning of the Early Modern Period and well into the eighteenth century, the understanding of a doctor's course of treatment was consistent with the classical theory found in the school of thought of Hippocrates and Galen.²⁷ In accordance with this theory, also called the humoral theory, there are four biles in a human body which are conditioned by four states of climate: heat, cold, humidity, and dryness, and connected to the four winds and the four elements: fire, water, wind and earth. A lack of balance between the various biles will automatically lead to a sick body. Books of remedies and medicines describe a congruence between the concept “nature” and the humoral theory. When sources of the period under study use the expression “the nature” of a so-and-so, they actually refer to the humoral state within that person's body, a state that changes from person to person.²⁸ We can find an affirmation of this correlation in the writing of Zvi Hirsch Ben Yerachmiel Hoches in his book *Derekh Yesharah* (Fürth 1697):

The wisdom of medicine is divided into three parts: first that of doctors and this part is grounded in nature, as there are four foundational elements in human beings: water, fire, wind, and earth; and if the heat will grow stronger in a person, one must use all kinds of cooling methods

²⁵ For an interesting amulet protecting against Lilith, see Ginzburg 1391; on Lilith see Gershon Scholem, “Al Lilith,” in *Shedim, Ruhot UNeshamot*, ed. Esther Libes (Jerusalem: Makhon Yad Ben Zevi, 2004), 65–79.

²⁶ Lester S. King, *The Philosophy of Medicine: The Early Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 34–40; Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 161–177, 214–232; Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London–New York: Routledge, 1994), 174–175.

²⁷ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 168–169; Gentilcore, *Healers and Healing in Early Modern Italy*, 6.

²⁸ See, for example, R. Yechezkel Lando, *Noda Beyehudah She'elot UTeshuvot* (Jerusalem: Pardes, 1960), mark 69.

... until the heat decreases. And this is according to nature. And there are two additional parts that are not according to nature, and these are treated by the peddlers, who work with remedies ... that don't belong to nature. And there are other things that are healed by means of spells ... things that arouse love in higher worlds.²⁹

From these sources, we can conclude that, according to the Ba'alei Shem, illnesses can have natural causes—that is, causes that can be explained by the humoral theory, as well as unnatural causes—demonic activity, witchcraft, godly punishment and astrological influence. Every sickness whose cause cannot be identified by the methods of the doctors, will automatically be described as caused by unnatural factors. This source is a good illustration of the three-sphere model I presented earlier. A sickness deriving from a natural cause is to be treated by doctors' methods; in other words, it becomes part of the medical sphere. Any sickness caused by unnatural sources has to be treated by means of peddlers' remedies based on components from the animal and plant world, which speaks of the popular sphere. When use is made of remedies connected to the heavenly world—amulets, spells, and other rites based on practical Kabbalah (the Ba'alei Shem's area of expertise)—we have entered the spiritual sphere. The Ba'alei Shem were of the opinion that all pains must be explored, as “who knows what the cause is” of a specific sickness that attacked the body of a certain person.

In addition, examining the books of remedies and medicines, we can identify a further division: a separation between causes connected to the body and those connected to the soul.³⁰ While bodily illness stems from natural as well as unnatural causes, the sickness of the soul has its root in defective moral and religious behavior. One must treat such sickness by returning to a life lived according to God's will, through repentance and prayer. Within the writings of Jewish thinkers at the beginning of the Early Modern Period, as in the case of the Maharal (Jehuda Loew b. Bezalel) of Prague, we also find a clear separation between body, nature, soul, and the heavenly realm.³¹ In the books of

²⁹ Zvi Hirsch Ben Yerachmiel Hoches, *Sefer Derekh Yesharah* (Fürth: Defus Zalman Shneur, 1697), 4.

³⁰ See, for example, Ephraim Risher Ben Naphtali, *Sefer Sha'ar Efrayim* (Fürth: Defus Boneft Ben Yosef Schneur, 1728), opening page; *Toledot Adam*, 56.

³¹ Regarding the Maharal's attitude toward studies of nature, see David Ruderman, *Mahshavah Yehudit Ve'Taglyiot Maddayiot Ba'Et HaHadashah HaMukdemet BeEropa* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2002), 63–101; Noah Efron, “Nature, Human

remedies and medicines, this separation of body and soul is not always clear. According to the Ba'alei Shem, a sickness can have physical causes that stem from “natural” and “unnatural” factors, as well as causes rooted in the domain of the soul, i.e., in religious factors.

In the pluralistic outlook represented in the compositions of the Ba'alei Shem concerning the causes of sickness, besides treatments based on practical Kabbalah, we find remedies normally conveyed by the peddlers as well as medicines that function according to “the ways of doctors.” The Ba'alei Shem mention Hippocrates and Galen in their writings, and also draw upon the knowledge of Jewish doctors from their own period, as for example, the Italian doctor Jacob Z̄ahalon, author of the book *Oz̄ar Ḥayyim* (Venice 1683),³² and local physicians who graduated from the Italian universities, like the doctor Samuel of Hamburg, and the doctors Simcha Menachem Ben Yochanan and Abraham Itzhak Portis of Lemberg (Lwów).³³ In some of the writings of the Ba'alei Shem, we discover an awareness of the discourse taking place in universities concerning the validity of classical theories or the medical innovations of the time. An interesting example can be found in the introduction to the book *Mif'alot Elokim* (Zólkiew 1724), whose author was most likely Rabbi Yoel Ba'al Shem the Second.³⁴ There, the anonymous compiler mentions that other compositions draw knowledge from ancient medicine:

It is well known that since those generations the ways of nature concerning human beings have changed. Though all doctors take and learn from the ancient books of Hippocrates and Galen ... [this is] only for general understanding ... but the remedies themselves do not change. They remain forever the same. Yet medicines ... change through time. Thus, we should not rely on them, except in emergencies. Not so with this

Nature and Jewish Nature in Early Modern Europe,” *Science in Context* 15 (2002): 29–48; David Sorozkin, “HaTeologiya shel HaNivdal—HaMaharal MePrag VeZmihato shel HaModernizm HaOrtodoksi HaMukdam BaHagut HaYehudit,” *Kabbalah* 14 (2006): 263–328. The relation between soul and body was a subject disputed among Catholic and Protestant theologians. Whereas Catholics seemed to stress more forcefully the interrelation between the two at the time of the Council of Trent, a number of Protestant thinkers chose to emphasize the separate nature of the two areas of the human being. Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*, 174–179.

³² For more on this composition, see David Ruderman, *Mahshavah Yehudit*, 214–218.

³³ On the two doctors from Lemberg, see Petrovsky-Shtern, “The Master of an Evil Name,” 223.

³⁴ A discussion regarding the author of the books *Mif'alot Elokim* and *Toledot Adam*, can be found in Mataras, *Sifrei Segullot URefuot*, 85–89; Etkes, *Ba'al HaShem*, 44–45.

composition, which provides remedies from the writings of the above-mentioned great Kabbalists, as well as from the medicine of natural doctors, famous and well-known experts ... that were close to this generation, in which we can trust.³⁵

We should not read this statement as reflecting an “anti-doctor” way of thinking, but rather as a statement granting supremacy to the doctors of the era over their predecessors, who, due to the novelty in the field, lost their total authority. Thus, the three spheres of our model find expression in the medical practices and perspectives of the Ba’alei Shem. The “spiritual” sphere was naturally the most dominant one. The books of remedies and medicines contain amulets, spells, and oaths, which are considered practical Kabbalah, as well as various prayers; it is not always clear how one remedy differs from another. Those means are based mainly on the different names of God, of his angels, and sometimes even on the names of powers of defilement and demons. Potions, ointments, and other means belonging to the popular sphere, usually described as “peddlers’ ways,” make up a large part of these books as well. Some of the objects needed for remedies were an integral part of daily life, while others were a bit more extraordinary: a “sword that has been already used for killing,”

³⁵ *Mifalot Elokim*, 45–46; Further evidence that the Ba’alei Shem did not oppose visits of the sick to the doctor is provided in their statements that one of the reasons for their publishing books of remedies and medicine was to assist those who were unable to receive medical support from a doctor, whether due to geographical distance or day-to-day financial difficulties. In his introduction to his book *Beit David*, 2, David Tevel writes: “For I saw some people living in the woods or in far away villages, who have no doctors to run to ... [and consequently] some died before their appointed time ... especially the frequent death of women in childbirth; thus, the above-mentioned book is aimed at assisting such women to give birth.” For further examples, see Benjamin Binush HaCohen, *Amtahat Binyamin*, author’s introduction. Documents from a later period also provide evidence that the Ba’alei Shem made use of methods of treatments characteristic of doctors of their period; writings like *Shivhei HaBesht* (See *Shivhei Ha-Besht*, with introduction and annotations by Avraham Rubinstein (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 2005), 73–75, 120, 187; for further examples, see Rubinstein, “Sipurei HaHitgalut,” *Alei Sefer* 7 (1979): 178, 181; Etkes, *Ba’al HaShem*, 73–75), and compositions of maskilim which, their harsh attacks against the Ba’alei Shem notwithstanding, provide us with significant information about them. Many maskilim attributed the success of the Ba’alei Shem in treatment to means of “regular medicine,” rather than “tricks of practical Kabbalah.” See, for example, Shlomo Maimon, *Sefer Hayyei Shelomoh Maimon* (Tel Aviv: Mosad Bialik, 1942), 137–138; Yehuda Miseses, “Kinat HaEmet,” in *BeMistarei HaSatira*, ed. Yehuda Friedlaender (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1994), 3:100–101; on this subject, see Shmuel Verses, “Tofaot shel Magia VeDemonologia BaAspaklaria HaSatirit shel Maskilei Galizia,” *Mehkarei Yerushalaim BeFolklor Yehudi* 17 (1995): 33–48; Etkes, *Ba’al HaShem*, 275–291.

the rope used for a thief's death sentence, parts of the human body like fingernails or hair, the blood of a menstruating woman, bones, and even the brain of a person.³⁶ Compared to what has been presented so far, the prescriptions belonging to the "medical" sphere constitute but a small portion amongst the remedies and medical treatments recommended by the Ba'alei Shem. A large portion of their methods fall under the first two spheres. A significant number of methods fit into more than one sphere. There are incantations to be pronounced while preparing an ointment or potion, and specific activities to be done when writing holy names on pieces of food or on certain objects. The means included in the "medical sphere" are not totally "independent," either. For example, the reciting of prayers before blood-letting, which was considered acceptable treatment according to the doctors. Methods of treatment varied from one Ba'al Shem to the next, and from one text to another. While some texts place greater focus on the methods of doctors, others are written from an almost entirely spiritual perspective.³⁷

An exemplary illustration of the view of the Ba'alei Shem is found in the manuscript of a certain David Tevle Ben Haim Ashkenazin, of whom, aside from his name, we know nothing at all. The manuscript instructs us as to the casting out of demons and dybbuks (souls of

³⁶ On the topic of folk remedies see Pollack, *Jewish Folkways in Germanic Lands*, 113–145. This area of "popular medicine" is instructive for understanding the interrelation of the Ba'alei Shem and their environment. Many of the methods of treatment which appeared in the books of remedies and medicines, were used by the Christian population as well. Illustrations of such methods and beliefs from this domain in the German and European society of that same period can be found in: Bächtold-Stäubli and Hoffmann-Krayer, ed., *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*; Dixon, *The Reformation and Rural Society*; Wayland D. Hand, *Magical Medicine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*; Wilson, *The Magical Universe*; Clark Stuart, "Witchcraft and Magic in Early Modern Culture," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, ed. Ankarloo Bengt and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 97–187.

³⁷ Yet there are also writings, like *Sha'ar Efrayim*, written by the Ba'al Shem Ephraim Rischer, a presiding judge from Wertheim, which contain few spiritual methods. This book includes a number of prayers, whereas the majority of remedies and medical approaches are devoid of all practical Kabbalah. The reason for this is certainly not a lack of expertise on the part of Rischer, as the opening pages of the book report the great deeds achieved by the author through the means of practical Kabbalah, but rather the resistance of many rabbis to the spreading of these hidden secrets. Rischer; *Sefer Sha'ar Efrayim*, Hashkamat R. Menachem Mendel MeWirmeische. I will expand elsewhere on the rabbinical attitude towards the methods of the Ba'alei Shem.

sinner) that possessed the human body. This fascinating piece of writing includes hundreds of pages containing hundreds of names of angels and demons, and innumerable techniques for driving out the powers of impurity. Among these techniques, we find instructions for complicated cases of exorcism, similar to the techniques used to drive out dybbuks in the Nickelsberg community in 1696, by the Ba'al Shem Moshe Praeger, and in the Bega village opposite Dettmold in 1743,³⁸ by the Ba'al Shem Shmuel Essinger, the presiding judge of Worndorf.³⁹ Before the arrival of the Ba'al Shem, the Shamash (the beadle) of the synagogue, along with a group of ten notables of the community, came to the sick person. The beadle's first task, in this case, was to clarify the exact identity of the "intruder," and whether it was a demon or a dybbuk. Threats of excommunication should be the first step of the exorcism, and the people present must shout aloud "go out, defiled one, go out," several times, and read out the "song of damage," i.e., Psalm 91, a psalm well-known for its effectiveness against such attacks.⁴⁰ Yet, after the use of

³⁸ Bega is the historical part of the village Dörnrup in North-Rhine Westphalia near the town of Lemgo.

³⁹ Gedalyah Nigal, *Sippurei Dybbuk Be-Sifrut Israel* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1994), 96–105, 107–114. On the subject of casting out evil spirits and demons in the Jewish community of the modern period, see Gedalyah Nigal, *Sippurei Dybbuk*; Tamar Alexander, "Dybbuk HaKol HaNashi," *Mikan* 2 (2001): 165–190; Rachel Elior, "HaDybbuk: Bein HaOlam HaNigleh LaOlam HaNistar: Kolot Medabberim, Olamot Shotekim VeKolot Mushtakim," *Mehkarei Yerushalaim BeMahshevet Israel* 19 (2005): 499–536; Yoram Bilu, "HaDybbuk BaYahadut: Hafra'a Nafshit KeMashav Tarbuti," *Mehkarei Yerushalaim BeMahshevet Israel* 2 (1983): 529–563; Sara Zfatman-Biller, "Ma'ase shel Ruach Bk"K Kratsch-Shalav Hadash BeHitpathuto shel Genre Amami," *Mehkarei Yerushalaim BeFolklor Yehudi* 2 (1982): 17–65; Matt Goldish, ed., *Spirit Possession in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003); J.H. Chajes, *Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). On the subject of exorcism in Europe in the Early Modern Period, see Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 389–422; H.C. Erik Midelfort, "The Devil and the German People: Reflections on the Popularity of Demon Possession in Sixteenth Century Germany," in *Religion and Culture in the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Steven Ozment (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989); H.C. Midelfort, *Exorcism and Enlightenment: Johann Joseph Gassner and the Demons of Eighteenth-Century Germany* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2005); D.P. Walker, *Unclean Spirits: Possession and Exorcism in France and England in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries* (London: Scholar Press, 1981); Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*, 199–225.

⁴⁰ This psalm was the basis for incantations for the exorcism of demons and wicked spirits. This incantation is the "Shir shel Pegayim deR. Akiva" ("The Song of Damage of R. Akiba"), of which is told that it was used by Essinger in Dettmold. "Shir shel Pegayim deR. Akiva," also called "Havdala deR. Akiva," executed at the end of Sabbath, is an incantation that was established, according to G. Scholem, at the end of the Gaonic period in Babylonia or in Italy, and from there traveled to the Ashkenazic

various means against the intruder, the beadle leading the ritual at this point proposes another reason for the situation of the afflicted: "If this sickness has a natural reason, then we pray and ask mercy before you, great God ... that healing be sent to the sick person, healing of the body, and healing of the soul." In case no improvement takes place, the beadle addresses the "intruder" and warns him that "tomorrow a Ba'al Shem and a sacred committee are coming." At the arrival of the Ba'al Shem, who must be dressed in white on his first appearance, he will inquire again if the reason for the suffering be natural, and will first pray for "healing of the body and healing of the soul."⁴¹

This field of exorcism provides an illustration of the vagueness of borders between natural and unnatural, body and soul. When demons intrude into a person's body, they do this as a consequence of sin, that is, as a result of a cause from the domain of the soul. As we have learned, demons were placed in the category of unnatural causes, yet their entry into a body, had physical consequences that were definitely natural.⁴² The symptoms that characterize this phenomenon were not as minor as might seem from the report of a Ba'al Shem called Ephraim, who performed an exorcism on a virgin called Sarahle, daughter of Breichna, from the village of Jägge, near Speyer in 1715. This terrifying demon brought the virgin into severe torments, causing her to vomit stones, hair and additional objects out of her throat, and causing her a severe hemorrhage.⁴³ According to the instructions of the exorcist David Tevle, one should consider the possibility of a medical mistake in the diagnosis, where a cause might be not demonic but natural. The means used by Ba'alei Shem in treating sicknesses of natural cause is prayer—meaning that the medium is spiritual. This can teach us that within the mindset of the Ba'alei Shem, there was a deep connection between the natural and the unnatural, the body and the soul. Eclecticism, the willingness to make simultaneous use of various methods of medicine from separate fields, is the main characteristic in the treatments employed by the Ba'alei Shem.

countries. A detailed explanation can be found in Gershom Scholem, "Havdala deR. Akiva," *Tarbiz* 50 (1981): 243–281.

⁴¹ David Tevle, *Kovez BeKabbalah Ma'asit*, Oxford Bodleian Library, Neubauer Catalogue 1965/1, The Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, National and University Library, Jerusalem—F 19127, 227–230.

⁴² For example see Chajes, *Between Worlds*, 88–90.

⁴³ MS Moscow, Ginzburg 1391, 57. For a further example of vomiting similar objects, see Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 408.

*The Doctors: Reasons for Sickness According to the Books
“Harmonia Wallichia Medica” and “Ma’ase Tuviyyah”*

As we have discovered so far, the image of the Ba‘alei Shem conveys a pluralistic approach to medicine in the period under discussion; yet the issue of the doctors’ position within the pluralistic system remains to be dealt with. What was their attitude towards other healers in the medical marketplace? Did they accept, like the Ba‘alei Shem, that there might be “unnatural reasons” to sickness? Before we attempt to address these issues, we should bear in mind that the gates of universities were closed to students who were not of the Christian faith. Thus, the training of Jewish doctors was usually passed down as a personal apprenticeship, often from father to son. In the sixteenth century, Jews began to be accepted at the University of Padua, in Italy, which was considered as one of the leading universities in Europe. In the seventeenth century, we find an ever increasing number of Jews from Germany studying in Italy, and later on, this development takes place in Holland as well.⁴⁴ From the second decade of the eighteenth century on, Jews began to receive doctors’ certificates in a growing number of Protestant German universities as well.⁴⁵ The further we advance along the timeline of history, the greater the number of academic Jewish doctors in German lands.⁴⁶

This reality is expressed in the composition of the Hebraist and theologian Johann Jacob Schudt, who devoted an entire chapter to the

⁴⁴ On the Jewish students from the university of Leiden see Yosef Kaplan, “Studentim Yehudim MiAmsterdam BeUniversitat Leiden BaMea HaSheva-esreh,” in *Mehkarim al Yahadut Holand*, ed. Yosef Machman (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1979), 65–75.

⁴⁵ From the 1670s on, Jews could be accepted to the study of medicine at Brandenburg, and soon thereafter, in other German locations as well. They could not, however, receive a diploma.

⁴⁶ On Jewish doctors in the Early Modern Period in Germany, see J.R. Marcus, *Communal Sick-Care in the German Ghetto* (Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1947); J.M. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Robert Jütte, “Contacts at the Bedside: Jewish Physicians and Their Christian Patients,” in *In and Out of the Ghetto*, ed. R. Po-chia Hsia and Hartmut Lehmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 137–150; Wolfgang Treue, “Zur Sozialgeschichte der Medizin: Lebensbedingungen jüdischer Ärzte in Frankfurt am Main während des Spätmittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit,” *MedGG* 17 (1998): 9–55; Wolfgang Treue, “Zwischen jüdischer Tradition und christlicher Universität: Die Akademisierung der jüdischen Ärzteschaft in Frankfurt am Main in der Frühen Neuzeit,” *Würzburger medizinhistorische Mitteilungen* 17 (1998): 375–397.

subject of Jewish doctors in his book on Frankfurt Jewry published in 1714. Like other Christian writers, Schudt draws an extremely negative portrayal of the Frankfurter Jewish doctors. One of the Jewish doctors attacked in accusatory language by the theologian is Leib Wallich. Although Schudt mocks this Wallich's knowledge of Latin and Greek, his take on this particular Jewish doctor seems to be far more positive than that demonstrated towards his other Jewish colleagues of "good old Frankfurt."⁴⁷

Leib Wallich, a University of Padua graduate, belonged to a long and famous dynasty of doctors, and, to the best of our knowledge, these doctors' activity began in the fourteenth century. Abraham Wallich, his father, a graduate of Padua himself, was a well-known doctor as well as a property owner in Frankfurt. At least two of Leib's brothers had also completed university in Padua.⁴⁸ In 1700, Leib published the composition of his deceased father, *Sefer Dimyon HaRefuot, Harmonia Wallichia Medica*, appending a long introduction and, according to the opening page, several new ideas as well. Hence, we should consider this work, as a joint composition of father and son. When investigating the perspective of the house of Wallich with respect to the causes for sickness in the human body, we find an attitude similar to that of the Ba'alei Shem. In their composition, cases of sickness have "physical" causes, as well as causes from the realm of the soul; consequently, we find medical recommendations for the "body" and for the "soul." The first illness treated is the "vertigo," a sickness which causes a person dizziness and fainting. Relying on the writings of Hippocrates, Galen, Aristotle and Maimonides, this doctor attributes a physical reason to the sickness, founded on classical medicine. The explanation is that intoxicants from the smoke rise from the four biles into the brain cavity and create a sensation of spinning and light-headedness. The treatment for such sickness, as prescribed by Wallich, is to turn to an experienced doctor, who will prescribe the patient the right kind of medicine, based on herbs suited to the patient's needs. Afterwards, Wallich explains that

⁴⁷ Johann Jacob Schudt, *Jüdische Merckwürdigkeiten*, (Frankfurt am Main: S.T. Hocker, 1714), 2:977–997.

⁴⁸ On Abraham and Leib Wallich, see Shmuel Kotok, "Al Dr. L. Wallich," *Korot* 7 (1977): 154–163; Treue, "Zwischen jüdischer Tradition und christlicher Universität," 387–389. On the Wallich family, see Daniel J. Cohen, "An Autographic Letter by Moshe Wallich, Author of the *Kuhbuch*: The Key to his Biography and Family Connections in Worms, Frankfurt and Hamburg," *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 14 (1982): 4–15.

such sickness is characteristic of arrogant people who are always running after honor and money. The medicine for the soul that such prideful kind people should take is to become more humble.⁴⁹ For another sickness leading to fainting, Wallich attributes the physical explanation to white bile mucous which plugs up the brain, while the reason from the realm of the soul is the transgression of the commandments. Here, the proper medicine is repentance. Repeatedly throughout the course of this book, we find explanations and medicines based on the humoral theory, alongside religious and moral prescriptions, such as charity, fasting, and the recitation of psalms. The connection between sin and heavenly judgment in terms of sickness is prominent throughout this book.

Arguably, Wallich's preoccupation with the domain of the soul is extraordinary. However, a closer look at the compositions of other doctors of his time reveals this preoccupation to be far less unusual. The connection between soul and body, sin and sickness, is a theme that recurs in the writings of well-known doctors in Europe throughout the seventeenth as well as at the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁵⁰ One such example is the composition of Joseph Delmedigo's (1591–1655) apprentice, the doctor Issaschar Bär Teller, *Be'er Mayim Hayyim*, which was published approximately half a century before Wallich's work. In this book, Teller provides various remedies based on classical medicine, yet, when mentioning the plague, he writes that its source lies in the wrath of God.⁵¹

Wallich, like other doctors among his contemporaries, held a common view that the cause of sickness is inseparable from that person's moral behavior as much as it is from God's wrath or indignation. But how did they relate to the other reasons that the Ba'alei Shem categorized as "unnatural," such as demons, witchcraft and astronomical bodies? Regrettably, Wallich does not refer to these subjects directly. Yet, throughout the book, and especially in the introduction written by his son Leib, we find references to other healers who were active in the medical marketplace of Frankfurt on the threshold of the eigh-

⁴⁹ Avraham Wallich, *Sefer Dimyon HaRefuot* (Frankfurt am Main: Johannes Wovetsch, 1700), 11–12.

⁵⁰ Lester S. King, *The Philosophy of Medicine*, 125–151; Andrew Wear, "Early Modern Europe 1500–1700," in *The Western Medical Tradition*, ed. Lawrence I. Conrad and Michael Neve (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 240–242.

⁵¹ Issaschar Bär Teller, *The Wellspring of Living Waters*, trans. Artur Teller (New York: Tal Or Publishers, 1988), 62.

teenth century. At the end of his introduction, Leib Wallich writes a few verses which express his opposition to the dominant position of women in the treatment of the sick, and the harm they cause not only to the patients but also to the good reputation of doctors, because of their failure to exercise the doctors' instructions and their reliance on "well-tested remedies."⁵²

These verses of Wallich's son lead us to a topic much discussed in contemporary research: that it was the patients themselves, and especially women in the family of the sick that had the last word in determining the method of treatment. Wallich belittles the women's use of remedies and spells. Would Wallich then, refer to the Ba'alei Shem in the same way he refers to these women? These questions become even more pertinent as the Wallichs (son or father) attack the habit of consulting old Gentile women whom they identify as witches.⁵³ While referring to kidney stones and urinary casts, the eighth chapter of Wallich's book provides us with an answer. His physical explanation notes that, when food is not being digested as required, it will cause this kind of pain. As moral reason for this ailment, Wallich provides the excess of semen, referring to people who engage in an excessive degree of sexual intercourse, and those who are adulterers. Regarding the medicine one is to apply in this case, the author writes:

The medicines of the soul for the sickness mentioned above are well-known throughout the books of morality, especially in *Sefer Ḥasidim* ... and if the sick is not able to understand those books, he may go to the healers with names [Merapim BeShemot] ... that are easily found in every place ... and try to keep all that they instruct him.⁵⁴

Not only does Wallich not come out against the Ba'alei Shem, as he did against the women, but he highly acclaims these healers and recommends that the reader pay attention to their instruction. Therefore, we may safely conclude that the house of Wallich did not contradict the medical perspective and the treatments of the Ba'alei Shem. The above-mentioned example leaves us with the impression of cooperation between experts in physical medicine, meaning doctors, and experts in the medicine of the soul, meaning the Ba'alei Shem.

Tobias HaCohen who studied in Frankfurt an der Oder and finished his degree in Padua, is the most prominent Jewish doctor of that

⁵² Wallich, *Sefer Dimyon HaRefuot*, 9.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

period.⁵⁵ His book entitled *Ma'aseh Tuviyyah*, first published in Venice in 1707, is considered the most significant medical essay in the Jewish world of the Early Modern Period. Like Leib Wallich, Tobias HaCohen comes out against women that heal by “casting a spell on the wound,” but also opposes other healers that had insufficient education. Tobias bemoans the situation of the medicine in his time, and mainly complains about the status of doctors, who, despite their exaggerated studiousness, were not granted by the general public the honor and position in the healing business that he felt they deserved.⁵⁶ Throughout the book, Tobias attributes natural causes to different cases of sickness, based on classical as well as contemporary theories. From time to time, we find him referring to unnatural causes for illness as well. When dealing with epilepsy, he writes that the generally accepted view that witchcraft and demons cause this sickness is absurd.⁵⁷ Tobias HaCohen also refers to the belief that was foundational to the remedies Katzenelnbogen found for his daughter—that of the transfer of sickness into an object or an animal. He is amazed that numerous doctors believe in such treatments as well, and writes that “we refer to all such things as outside of nature, and I have nothing to do with the occult.”⁵⁸

The negative reference of the doctor towards the use of “hidden things” appears in a firm, yet complex discussion regarding the “Polish sickness.” This sickness causes matted hair, the proliferation of lice, and the darkening of the nails. He rejects a number of proposed reasons for this sickness, including the assumption that it is caused by demons. Tobias doubts the existence of demons, and after accepting, unwillingly, the decision of the Sages (*Hazal*), he denies that demons can influence human beings. He then comes out against those involved in any kind of incantation or invocation of names, and distances himself firmly from them.⁵⁹

The clear impression conveyed by the past few examples, especially the last one, becomes more blurred as we continue to read in other

⁵⁵ On Tobias the doctor, see A. Levinson, *Tuviyyah HaRofo VeSefer Ma'aseh Tuviyyah* (Berlin: Ramon, 1924); Avraham Melamed, *Al Kifvei Anakim* (Ramat Gan: Hozat Bar Ilan University, 2004), 226–232; David Ruderman, *Maḥshavah Yehudit VēTaglyiot Maddaiyot*, 212–234.

⁵⁶ Tuviyyah HaCohen, *Sefer Ma'aseh Tuviyyah* (Jerusalem: Bakal, 1967), author's introduction.

⁵⁷ Tuviyyah HaCohen, *Sefer Ma'aseh Tuviyyah*, 96.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

sections of the book, in which those suffering from hair matted by demons, are prescribed a “confirmed remedy,” passed down from his father and received from an old peasant woman.⁶⁰ This ambivalent attitude grows even stronger in the part of the book dealing with children’s disease. When he deals with “children who have become emaciated due to witchcraft,” he mentions verses from the Sages, which one could use to cancel witchcraft as well as the evil eye, and makes mention of the “song of damages.” Afterwards, he mentions a number of “women’s remedies.” Although we might surmise that Tobias does this to please the general public, his words lack any intimation of criticism, even when impotence is ascribed to the actions of witches.⁶¹ Moreover, astrology, in Tobias’s remarks, is a necessary tool for the learned doctor.⁶²

We should investigate the position of Tobias HaCohen with regards to causes of sickness that are “outside of nature,” while looking at other medical theories of his time, an age of many changes in the field of medicine and in the world at large. Throughout the seventeenth century and until the first half of the eighteenth century, a scientific argument was waged with respect to the ability of demons and witches to cause real physical damage to people. While many doctors were opposed to some aspects linked to magic and witchcraft, they embraced others. While skepticism towards demonic and magical activity has always been present, it rarely undermined the very existence of demons. This skepticism was directed towards reducing their influence on human beings and searched for alternative “natural” explanations. Negating the existence of demons meant negating the very authority of the Holy Scriptures. The stance that Tobias adopted, casting doubts on demons’ activity and diminishing their centrality, on one side, while accepting the sayings of the Sages, on the other side, was a common attitude, found among Christian thinkers as well.⁶³ From the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 124; for a further example, see *ibid.*, 128.

⁶² See, for example, *ibid.*, 92.

⁶³ See Oskar Diethelm, “The Medical Teaching of Demonology in the 17th and 18th Centuries,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 6 (1970): 3–15; King, *The Philosophy of Medicine*, 202–208; William Monster, *Ritual, Myth & Magic in Early Modern Europe* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1983), 114–127; Clark, *Thinking with Demons*; Thomas Robisheaux, “Witchcraft and Forensic Medicine in Seventeenth Century Germany,” in *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Stuart Clark (London: Macmillan Press, 2001), 197–216.

stance of Abraham and Leib Wallich, as well as that of Tobias HaCohen, we can discern a pluralistic outlook with respect to both natural and unnatural medical causes for sickness among the leading Jewish doctors of the period. We must keep in mind, that the doctors of the house of Wallich as well as Tobias HaCohen, were not representatives of all Jewish doctors. Many Jewish doctors had not acquired their knowledge in Padua and were not experts regarding medical innovations. Among them, we find an even stronger connection, both in perspective and in methods of treatment, between natural and unnatural factors, between science and Kabbalah. Elements that had become marginal throughout the seventeenth century, continued to make up part of these doctors' practices. Robert Jütte claims that it was precisely this characteristic that earned the Jewish doctors their popularity among the Christian population in Germany.⁶⁴

The Patients

As I mentioned earlier, there is a trend in the present historiography of medicine to emphasize the centrality of the patients and that of their family members in the medical treatment of the Early Modern Period.⁶⁵ We receive this impression from the complaints of Leib Wallich, Tobias HaCohen, and from various other documents of the same period. One of these sources is called *Kontras HaMekonen* ("The Pamphlet of Lament"). This "Memorbuch" perpetuates the memory of members of various communities throughout Germany. From the short eulogy dedicated to each and every member individually, we can see that many had been involved in one way or another with the treatment of sick

⁶⁴ Jütte, "Contacts at the Bedside," 148–149. From this perspective, the profiles of many Jewish doctors lacking academic education in this period are similar to those Jewish doctors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who harmoniously integrated between Kabbalah and various medical theories. See David Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988). An interesting example for the methods and views of a Jewish German doctor at the end of the sixteenth century, which combine Kabbalah and classical theories of medicine, can be found in the manuscripts of what seems to be one of Leib Wallich's forefathers. See *Refuot VeGoralot*, Oxford Bodleian Library MS 746, The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jewish National and University Library Jerusalem—F 2104.

⁶⁵ Roy Porter, "The Patient's View—Doing Medical History from Below," *Theory and Society* 14 (1985): 175–198.

people, and the high number of women among them is remarkable.⁶⁶ In many instances we can observe that the diagnosis of a doctor with a diploma does not live up to that of the “wise women.” As we see in a case presented by Ezekiel Landau (1713–1793), the well-known rabbi of Prague, a Christian doctor changed his medical diagnosis regarding the vaginal emission of a sixty-seven year old grandmother, after he had heard “the women’s stance.”⁶⁷ A doctor’s diagnosis, like that of other healers, was merely a recommendation brought before the patient. It was the sick person as well as his family members and acquaintances that made the final decision concerning the proper diagnosis or method of treatment.

In the modern world of medicine, the dialogue between patient and doctor is not a conversation between equals. The doctor has absolute authority over the sick person, authority rooted in knowledge not possessed by his patient, and achieved by training and expertise in “scientific” instruments that enable him to look at what is “beneath the skin.”⁶⁸ This picture was not characteristic of pre-modern Europe. As opposed to past research that has emphasized the difference between “learned” doctors and the “mob,” a number of new investigations point to the common corpus of knowledge shared by “ordinary” people and doctors. The “ordinary person” who was not a professional healer (and we should keep in mind that every person had the potential to become active in the healing process), possessed a basic knowledge of medicine and knew the foundational medical concepts embodied in the humoral theory. Due to the healers’ lack of ability to see “beneath the skin,” the main diagnosis was done by the patients themselves. The humoral theory stressed the fact that each person has a unique humoral equilibrium, thus strengthening the notion that only the patient himself possesses sufficient knowledge to make the appropriate decision regarding his own diagnosis.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Aharon Yelnik, *Kuntres HaMekonen* (Pressburg: Defus David Levi VeAvraham Ben David Alkala, 1881); I am indebted to Tami Licht who brought this source to my attention.

⁶⁷ *Noda BiYehuda*, mark 55.

⁶⁸ There is no doubt that in our own days this situation is gradually changing as a result of the availability of medical information on the internet.

⁶⁹ John Henry, “Doctors and Healers: Popular Culture and the Medical Profession,” in *Science Culture and Popular Belief in Renaissance Europe*, ed. L. Paolo and M. Slawinski (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 191–221; Mary Lindemann, *Health and Healing in Eighteenth Century Germany* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe*; Duden, *The Woman*

An important example showing that the humoral theory was not a domain entered exclusively by doctors and other healers, can be found in the writings of the famous rabbi Jacob Emden (1697–1776). His autobiographical composition entitled *Megillat Sefer* shows that Emden dealt at length with his own body and various issues of medicine. Throughout the book, the rabbi explains various diseases according to the principles of the humoral theory.⁷⁰ Emden's discussions display an extraordinary familiarity with various medical theories, an impression that only grows stronger as we read his essay *Migdal Oz*. He speaks at length of the four biles in the human body, and makes plain that each person's goal is to "pursue peace between those four brothers," because "there is nothing worse than the hatred between them." This necessary equilibrium is also connected to the individual's age and eating habits, to the seasons of the year, the hours of the day, and climactic conditions.

Much like Abraham and Leib Wallich, Emden discusses not only "physical" causes for a sickness, but also those from the realm of the soul; he sees a connection between religious behavior and the physical state of a person and the change in that person's humoral balance.⁷¹ In order to be able to heal diseases, one has to turn to "natural" medicine, by changing one's habits and through moral transformation. Emden speaks of the existence of a further hidden stratum, and explains that the understanding of the four foundations in human beings is not possible by "mere human wisdom." The true essence of things lies, according to him, in the "act of Creation"; thus, for the perfection of this craft, one must acquire the knowledge of the names.⁷² Emden's work emphasizes the tremendous forces of practical Kabbalah and declares that "God has passed his scepter into the hands of the Kabbalists."⁷³

beneath the Skin, 72–106; Gentilcore, *Healers and Healing in Early Modern Italy*, 6–7. Many documents indicate that "ordinary men" were acquainted with the basic terminology of the humoral theory, and shared a common language with the doctors. See, for example, within the responsa literature, *Noda BeYehudah*, mark 69; R. Shimon Yair Hayyim Bakrach, *Havat Yair* (Frankfurt am Main: Johannis Waust, 1699), mark 234. On this topic, see Zimmels, 78–80.

⁷⁰ R. Yaakov Emden, *Megillat Sefer* (Jerusalem: Moreshet Yerushalaim, 1979), 37, 45, 61, 138.

⁷¹ For a similar approach that connects specific religious commandments with the health of certain organs, see R. Zvi Hirsch Koydnuber, *Sefer Kav HaYashar* (Sulzbach: Zekel Ben Aharon, 1805), 62.

⁷² R. Yaakov Emden, *Migdal Oz* (New York: M.P. Press, 1957), Halon Zuri, Neve Hakham.

⁷³ Emden, *Migdal Oz*, Ozar HaTov, Pana 6.

The writer opposes the “philosophers” who refuse to believe in the power of the names, and proves their effectiveness. Emden warns of demonic powers that lie in wait in any possible place, especially of the female demon Lilith, and attests to the demons’ destructive force.⁷⁴ Such belief in spirits and demons was not out of the ordinary at all. Stories about demonic entities, spirits, and witches, and about how they cause damage to human beings, are scattered throughout seventeenth and eighteenth-century documents. People who held beliefs of this kind were not necessarily from a low echelon, but belonged to every part of society.⁷⁵ The strong belief in the existence of demonic powers led to an astounding number of protective techniques against them. We find evidence of the use of amulets in books of customs, mainly for protection against Lilith.⁷⁶

Emden’s healing activities speak of his pluralistic perspective with respect to possible causes for sickness. We know that Emden, as well as members of his family, accepted the treatment of doctors. Emden’s wife received medical care from a professor of the University of Leiden.⁷⁷ However, this medical visit was not considered to be in contradiction with the use of names, and we should interpret the vehement attacks on a number of Ba’alei Shem not as a reflection of fundamental opposition to them, but as part of the controversy between Emden and Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschütz, one of the most famous Ba’alei Shem of his time.⁷⁸

We find a similar pattern in the autobiographical composition of Rabbi Pinḥas Katzenelbogen, which I cited at the beginning of this article. Throughout his book *Yesh Manhilin* the rabbi speaks of his many sicknesses and those of his family members. From his stories,

⁷⁴ Emden, *Migdal Oz*, Aliyat HaTeva, Aliyat HaYeriyah.

⁷⁵ For other examples, see R. Menashe Ben Israel, *Neshamat Hayyim* (Jerusalem, 1968), third article, chapter 12, chapter 16; Koydnuber, 24, 35; Katzenelbogen, mark 7, 15, 16, 77.

⁷⁶ R. Yosef Juspa Hahn Neuerlingen, *Yosef Omez* (Frankfurt am Main: Hermon, 1928), 362; Josef Shammash MeWarmaisa, *Minhagim dek”k Warmaisa* (Jerusalem: Izḥak Zimer, 1988), mark 528; Johann Jacob Schudt also provides evidence of the frequent use of amulets against illness by the Jews of his city Frankfurt. See Schudt, *Jüdische Merckwürdigkeiten*, 2:1033, 2:1221.

⁷⁷ Emden, *Megillat Sefer*, 138.

⁷⁸ R. Yaakov Emden, *Iggeret Purim*, Bodleian Library Hebrew MS, 2190, 7; R. Yaakov Emden, *Beit Yehonatan HaSofer* (Altona: Defos Y. Emden, 1763), 1, 9; Emden, *Megillat Sefer*, 143, 258; see also: Oron, *Mi”Ba’al Shed” Le”Ba’al Shem”*, 47–50; Rosman, *HaBesht Mehaddesh HaHasidut*, 37–38.

we can learn that Katzenelnbogen turned to a number of healers and methods of treatment for help, and that he himself was well-versed in the various distinctive fields of medicine. When discussing the medicine he received from his brother-in-law, medicine that was given to him by a Viennese doctor and intended for solving his eye problem, he writes a detailed explanation based on the humoral theory.⁷⁹ He ascertains that a sickness can evolve from natural as well as unnatural factors. We find, for instance, mention of a dybbuk that harmed a servant,⁸⁰ of a demon that caused his grandfather's death,⁸¹ and of a Gentile midwife who, by acts of witchcraft, had brought about his wife's death.⁸² Katzenelnbogen was also of the opinion that problematic religious behavior would generate God's wrath, and he enumerated various cases of disobedience to God's commandments that led to death.⁸³ His mastery in the domain of medicine "that is not according to nature" was impressive. Katzenelnbogen referred to his knowledge of theoretical Kabbalah, yet took great care not to enter the field of practical Kabbalah, turning instead to the service of several Ba'alei Shem.⁸⁴ The rabbi did not desire to keep this knowledge to himself, and loaned out an amulet made by the Ba'al Shem Benjamin Binosh to several birthing women within his community.⁸⁵

The story that best illustrates the approach of the Katzenelnbogen family to sickness, is the story of Rachel, the widow from Prague, with which I introduced this article. In order to find relief from her high fever, Rachel looked for help among doctors, used amulets, and wrote to her family members who suggested to her various remedies. In this singular case, we find the involvement of at least three different doctors, four members of her family, several acquaintances, and apparently, at least one amulet-writer. Moshe Rosman uses this case as a proof for the change of times and claims that, contrary to her father Pinhas, Rachel did not depend on practical Kabbalah alone, but looked for help among the doctors as well.⁸⁶ Yet, as we have seen so far, her

⁷⁹ Katzenelnbogen, mark 45.

⁸⁰ Ibid., mark 15.

⁸¹ Ibid., mark 75. Although we are told that his grandfather was harmed by a demon, we also know that doctors treated him.

⁸² Ibid., mark 24.

⁸³ Ibid., mark 64.

⁸⁴ Ibid., mark 22, 23.

⁸⁵ Ibid., mark 31.

⁸⁶ Rosman, *HaBesht Mehaddesh HaHasidut*, 39; Immanuel Etkes also refers to this incident. His approach is closer to mine. See Etkes, *Ba'al HaShem*, 30.

action was by no means a sign of historical change. Like her father, her grandfather and many contemporaries of her period, Rachel had a pluralistic perspective towards sickness, i.e., she believed that an ailment can have a number of different causes. The basic belief that sickness can be attributed to factors of the body and of the soul, natural and unnatural causes, was foundational in the search for different healers or ways of treatment, and accordingly, every possibility was solicited. The belief in the effectiveness of one method was not contradictory to faith in the effectiveness of another. When facing such a complex system of belief, one must realize that the attempt to impose modern concepts on the pre-modern reality is problematic. I have proposed in this article a flexible model to reflect an elaborate and complex reality. This model is made up of three spheres: the medical, the spiritual and the popular, woven together. Each specific healer, method of treatment, and medical perspective, as expressed within the particular texts, may be placed at a different position in this model. This model reflects on one hand, the pluralistic outlook of the period's contemporaries, while on the other hand, it shows how various categories co-existed within their world. Rachel's story and her interaction with all the three spheres places her, along with many other contemporaries in German Jewry at the beginning of the modern period, at the heart of the model.

PART II

THE HALAKHIC BODY

“LA‘AVODAT BOR’O”: THE BODY IN THE
SHULḤAN ARUKH OF R. JOSEPH CARO*

JEFFREY R. WOOLF

Which Shulḥan Arukh?

“Let him overcome (his inhibitions)
like a lion, to rise up in the morning,
to the service of his Creator (*la‘Avodat
Bor’o*).”¹

With these words, R. Joseph Caro (1488–1575)² opens the *Shulḥan Arukh*, the code that set the contours of Traditional Judaism for the next four centuries. It is a styptic work of law, which reads as if it was its own source of authority. It is also a passionately spiritual book. Liberally sprinkled among its thousands of legal dicta are homiletic hints and elaborations aimed at encouraging the individual to develop his own, personal mode of spirituality, and to aspire to supererogatory behavior.³ It is a legal masterpiece of the acknowledged halakhic authority of his day. At the same time, it is an authentic expression of a profoundly mystical personality, who was visited by a Divine hypostasis.⁴

* Abbreviations: BT = Babylonian Talmud, EH = *Even ha-Ezer*, OH = *Orah Ḥayyim*, YD = *Yoreh De‘ah*.

¹ OH I, I.

² Caro’s life and *oeuvre* have been the subject of much scholarly attention. The important discussions are Yekutiel Yehudah Greenwald, *Ha-Rav Yosef Karo u-Zemano* (Columbus, 1954); R.J.Z. Werblowsky, *Rabbi Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); Isadore Twersky, “*Shulḥan Aruk*: Enduring Code of Jewish Law,” *Judaism* 16 (1967): 141–158; Yizḥak Raphael, ed., *Rabbi Yosef Karo: Iyyunim u-Meḥkarim be-Mishnat Ba‘al ha-Shulḥan Arukh* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1969); and Meir Benayahu, *Yosef Behiri: Maran Rabbi Yosef Karo* (Jerusalem: Assufot, 1991). Remarkably, an integrated intellectual and biographical study has yet to appear.

³ As in so much else, he took his cue from Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*. See Isadore Twersky, “Some Non-Halakhic Aspects of the *Mishneh Torah*,” *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 95–118 and idem, “Ha-Rav Yosef Karo ha-Ba‘al Shulḥan Arukh,” *Assufot* 3 (1989): 245–262.

⁴ See Werblowsky, *Rabbi Joseph Karo*, passim. The impact of Kabbalah on the purely

The words with which he chose to commence this work are also highly repercussive. They reflect an underlying, perpetual dynamic within Judaism; the dialectical tension that exists between the requirements of the body and the aspirations of the soul; between the draw of physicality, and the allure of the spirit. The eternal dialectic between body and soul in Judaism is manifested in an endless series of variations. It was, however, especially marked among the mystics of sixteenth-century Safed.⁵ These unique individuals, including Caro, were consumed by their passionate desire to “taste” God. On the other hand, after a long and protracted struggle, the *Shulḥan Arukh* became the formative point of departure for all subsequent halakhic development.⁶ Though Jewish Law continued to expand, it did so concentrically, and continued to be organized by and take its cue from Caro’s work. The *Shulḥan Arukh*, thus, is a particularly promising barometer for measuring the impact of this spiritually charged atmosphere on Jewish Law.

At the same time, it is important to clarify exactly which *Shulḥan Arukh* will be the object of our examination. As the late Isadore Twersky once noted, the term has a three-tiered meaning. First, *Shulḥan Arukh* is the title of a brief, four-part code of Jewish Law by R. Joseph Caro. It also designates a composite, collaborative work, combining this original text with the detailed glosses—both strictures and supplements—of R. Moses Isserles (Rema; c. 1525–1572), that represented the traditions of medieval Franco-Germany (Ashkenaz), as they had been distilled in Poland.⁷ This literary symbiosis then generated a spate of commentaries and super-commentaries, brief or expansive, defensive or dissenting, and the term *Shulḥan Arukh* continued to be applied to this multi-dimensional, ever-expanding volume.⁸

legal content of the *Shulḥan Arukh* is examined by Jacob Katz, “Post-Zoharic relations between Halakhah and Kabbalah,” *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard Cooperman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 283–307 and Moshe Hallamish, “Ha-Kabbalah be-Pesikato shel R. Yosef Karo,” *Ha-Kabbalah be-Tefillah, ba-Halakhah u-va-Minhag* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2000), 161–179.

⁵ See, inter alia, Mordekhai Pachter, *Mi-Ẓefunot Ẓefat: Mehkarim u-Mekorot le-Toledot Ẓefat va-Hakhameha ba-Me’ah ha-16* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar 1994); and the classic essay by Solomon Schechter, “Safed in the Sixteenth Century,” *Studies in Judaism* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 231–297.

⁶ See M. Elon in *Ha-Mishpat ha-’Ivri* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 41987), 1087–1187.

⁷ See Twersky, “*Shulḥan Arukh*,” 144–146; Asher Siev, *Ha-Rema: R. Moshe Isserles*, (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1957); and Joseph Davis, “The Reception of the “*Shulḥan ‘Arukh*” and the Formation of Ashkenazic Jewish Identity,” *AJS Review* 26 (2002): 251–276.

⁸ The above is a highly compressed rendering of Twersky, “*Shulḥan Arukh*,” 141.

The present study will focus upon the *Shulḥan Arukh* in its primary meaning: the small, apodictic code that Caro published in 1565–1566. This deceptively lean book can, in turn, be approached from two different directions, each of which is accompanied by different methodological considerations and questions.

In the printed introduction to the work, Caro declared that he regarded the *Shulḥan Arukh* as a *précis* of his larger, more monumental code, *Bet Yosef*.⁹ He explicitly intended that the former serve as a primer for students, a review text for scholars, and an accessible handbook for those involved in mysticism. Examination of the work, from this point of view, can only be done against the broader context of the inter-relationship between the *Bet Yosef* and the *Shulḥan Arukh*, on the one hand, and the author's use of his sources, on the other. This approach is the more appropriate one if we are seeking to understand the author's direct imprint upon the work, alongside its intellectual and cultural *Sitz im Leben*. Such a study, while it is certainly a major scholarly *desideratum*, is impossible within the limits of this article.¹⁰

The alternative approach is equally important, and could be viewed as even more consequential. It concentrates upon the literary integrity, character and fate of the *Shulḥan Arukh*, *per se*. Its point of departure is the acknowledgement that it was as an independent work, freed of its sources and original aims and intentions, that R. Caro's code shaped subsequent Jewish religion and culture.¹¹ It became, especially after the addition of its classic commentaries, the point of departure for all

⁹ The introduction is reprinted the first volume of most recently published editions of the *Shulḥan Arukh* and is featured on the Bar-Ilan University Responsa Project CD.

¹⁰ See Jeffrey R. Woolf, "The Responsa of Leon Modena: Continuity Without Change," in *The Lion Shall Roar: Leon Modena and His World*, ed. David Malkiel (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2003), lv–lxviii (Hebrew).

¹¹ This is true both for traditional and non-traditional forms of Judaism. In the latter instance, the *Shulḥan Arukh* provided the point of departure for specific reforms and, more frequently, for caustic satire and abuse. See, for example, Jacob Katz, "The Controversy over the Temple in Hamburg and the Rabbinical Assembly in Braunschweig: Milestones in the Development of Orthodoxy," *Divine Law in Human Hands: Case Studies in Halakhic Flexibility* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1998), 216–254; Moshe Samet, "The Beginnings of Orthodoxy," *Modern Judaism* 8 (1988): 249–269; idem, *Ḥadash Assur min ha-Torah: Perakim be-Toldot ha-Ortodoksiya* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Dinur, 2005) and Walter Jacob and Moshe Zemer, *Progressive Halakhah: Essence and Application* (Tel Aviv: Freehof Institute of Progressive Halakhah, 1991). A thorough scholarly examination of the role played by the *Shulḥan Arukh* in the conflict between Orthodoxy and Reform Judaism remains to be undertaken.

subsequent halakhic analysis.¹² In light of this consideration, as well as those of space, the present discussion will examine some salient themes concerning the body and its place in Jewish religious life and practice, as they appear in the *Shulḥan Arukh*, as a whole.¹³

Over all, the *Shulḥan Arukh* is marked by a tense, multi-faceted and often dialectical relationship between body and soul, between the duties of the heart and the duties of the limbs.¹⁴ The relationship is sometimes antagonistic, sometimes complementary. As already noted, this supple, complex interaction is a permanent characteristic of the rabbinic heritage upon which R. Joseph Caro drew.¹⁵ At the same time, it is possible to identify certain unique emphases and nuances that mark it.¹⁶

¹² For example, the noted Halakhist, R. Eliezer Fleckeles of Prague (1754–1826), denied the worth of any responsum that commenced with citations that dated earlier than the *Shulḥan Arukh* (*afilu be-elf betelin*). See the introduction to his collected responsa, *Teshuvah me-Ahavah*, I (Prague, 1800). On the other hand, the *Bi'ur ha-GRA* of R. Elijah, the *Ga'on* of Vilna, was aimed at reversing this trend. See H. Devir, “Bi'ur ha-GRA al ha-Shulḥan Arukh,” *Yeshurun* 5 (1999): 3–13.

¹³ Another area in which human physicality plays a key role in the *Shulḥan Arukh* is that of postures of prayer and religious observance. Jewish tradition, since biblical times, mandated specific modes of sitting and standing along with the active employment of the senses in any number of religious rituals.

See, e.g., OH 2:6, 24:3–4, 61:5, 62:3, 94:5, 113, 123 and others.

This subject has recently been the subject of several path breaking studies that relate, perforce, to various passages of the *Shulḥan Arukh*. See Eric Zimmer, “Tikkune ha-Guf be-She'at ha-Tefillah,” *Sidra* 5 (1989): 89–130; idem, “Tenuḥot u-Tenu'ot ha-Guf be-She'at Kerī'at Shema,” *Assufot* 8 (1994): 345–368; Uri Ehrlich, *Kol Azmotay Tomarna: Ha-Safah ha-lo Milulit shel ha-Tefillah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999); Yisrael Ta Shma, “Maḥavei Amidah ve-Yeshivah be-Kerī'at Shema u-Virkhoteha,” *Knishta* 1 (2001): 53–61 and the treasure trove of material and analysis in Daniel Sperber, *Minhage Yisrael*, I–VIII (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1989–2007).

¹⁴ Cf. Isadore Twersky, “Religion and Law,” *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S.D. Goitein (Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), 69–82.

¹⁵ The literature on the subject is extensive. See, inter alia, Ephraim Elimelech Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979); Alan Lazaroff, “Bahya's Asceticism Against its Rabbinic and Islamic Background,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 21 (1970): 11–38; Steven Fraade, “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” in *Jewish Spirituality, I: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 253–288; Lawrence Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition: A History of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (New Jersey: KTAV, 1991); Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and Charlotte E. Fonrobert, “On Carnal Israel and the Consequences: Talmudic Studies since Foucault,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95 (2005): 462–469.

¹⁶ See Lawrence Fine, “Purifying the Body in the Name of the Soul: The Problem of the Body in Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah,” in *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective*, ed. H. Eilberg-Schwartz (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 117–142 and Elliot Wolfson, “The Body in the Text: A Kabbalistic Theory of Embodiment,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95 (2005): 497–500.

The Body and the Service of God

The first section of the *Shulḥan Arukh*, known as *Orah Ḥayyim* (lit. “Way of Life”), provides a step by step guide for the Jew as he proceeds with his daily routine, from the moment he awakes until the time he retires. Inevitably, the act of dressing became the first point of the day wherein the individual was called upon to address the contrast between his body and his ongoing and acute awareness of standing before an omnipresent God.¹⁷

For reasons of modesty, standing naked before God was a highly problematic proposition.¹⁸ This made dressing in the morning into something of a challenge. R. Caro observes:¹⁹

Let him not don his gown while in a sitting position. Rather, he should take his robe and insert his head and arms, while he is still lying down,²⁰ so that he arises already covered. Let him not, however, say: “I’m in the privacy of my room [*hadre hadarim*], who can see me?” For the glory of the Holy One, blessed be He fills the entire world.²¹

It is important to note that the question of the body in any halakhic code is intricately bound up with the definition of modesty. Modesty (*zen’ut*) is one of those powerful, yet evasive, values that permeate classical Jewish literature, from the Bible onward. It is a protean concept that is nourished by ongoing traditions, external challenges and norms, and contemporary evaluations of just how to address those challenges. Contemporary Orthodox Jewish society, both in Israel and in the Diaspora, is in the throes of just such a struggle, wherein law, culture, western norms and religious policy collide. See Ora Cohen, *Hilkhot Zen’ut be-Idan ha-Moderni: Rezev u-Temurah ba-Halakhah ha-Yehudit* (Elkanah, 1999) and Yehudah Herzl Henkin, “Contemporary Tseni’ut,” *Tradition* 37 (2003): 1–48. Pesah Eliyahu Falk, *Oz ve-Hadar Levusha: Zen’ut be-Levush u-ve-Hanhagah* (New York: Feldheim, 1998) and Shlomo Aviner, *Gan Na’ul: Pirke Zen’ut*, (Jerusalem: Hoza’at Bet El, 2003) are good examples of this phenomenon.

¹⁷ See Rema, ad loc.

¹⁸ There was a widespread tendency to sleep without bedclothes (as implied by OH 74 par. 1). See A. Roger Ekrich, “Sleep We Have Lost: Pre-Industrial Slumber in the British Isles,” *American Historical Review* (2001): 343–359; idem, *At Day’s Close: Night in Times Past* (New York: Norton, 2005).

¹⁹ OH 2, 1–3. The Jewish attitude was similar to that of medieval Christianity and Islam. Cf. Georges Duby, ed., *A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Gregory Staretz, “The Hexis of Interpretation: Islam and the Body in the Egyptian Popular School,” *American Ethnologist* 22 (1995): 953–969; and Marion Holmes-Katz, *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunni Law of Ritual Purity* (Albany: SUNY, 2002).

²⁰ And he is, presumably, still under his bedclothes.

²¹ Cf. Isa. 6:3. The reverse procedure is expected upon retiring. See OH sec. 239 par. 2.

There is a fundamental incongruity between nakedness and the all-pervasive presence of God.²² This even applies in the privy, where men and women are advised to conduct themselves as modestly as possible. They should, R. Caro advises, expose only so much of their persons as absolutely necessary.²³

The absolute inappropriateness of exposing the body before God is expressed even more sharply in laws regulating the recitation of prayers and blessings, in which context God's Name was likely to be pronounced. Two different themes may be discerned behind this ruling. The first is the desire to act modestly and appropriately when standing in the presence of God. Thus, R. Caro rules: "One should gird himself with a belt at the hour of prayer, even if one is already wearing [a] sash so that his heart does not see his privates,²⁴ because of 'Prepare [to meet your God, O Israel].'"²⁵ "There are those who say that it is forbidden to pronounce God's Name bareheaded."²⁶ "One should not stand [to pray] wearing one's money belt, or bareheaded or with one's legs exposed, if the local custom is that one does not stand before important people without leggings."²⁷

The second is somewhat different, and takes its cue from the biblical injunction that "no unseemly thing [*ervat davar*] be seen among you, that He will turn away from you."²⁸ Rabbinic tradition, echoed by the *Shulḥan Arukh*, enumerates a number of things that are termed *ervat davar*, and thereby preclude prayer.²⁹ The most prominent among these are factors that may be broadly characterized as being sexual in nature.

²² Cf. *Ibid.* par. 6: It is forbidden to walk rigidly upright. Similarly, one should not walk four cubits bareheaded (out of deference for the Divine Presence), and let him check his bowels. Walking stiffly could be seen as a sign of arrogance. The same is true of walking bareheaded. See Eric Zimmer, "Men's Head Covering: The Metamorphosis of this Practice," *Reverence, Righteousness, and "Rahamanut": Essays in Memory of Rabbi Dr. Leo Jung*, ed. J. Schacter (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1992), 325–352.

²³ OḤ 3, pars. 2, 4 and 12, based on BT *Berakhot* 23b.

²⁴ See below.

²⁵ Sec. 91 par. 2 based upon Amos 4:12. Other actions suggested by this verse are bathing, washing one's hands and ordering one's attire, and putting oneself in the proper frame of mind in anticipation of prayer. Cf. BT *Berakhot* 23a and BT *Shabbat* 10a.

²⁶ *Ibid.* par. 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.* par. 5.

²⁸ Deut. 23:15. Cf. BT *Berakhot* 25b; BT *Shabbat* 150a and *Tur*, OḤ sec. 75.

²⁹ These are, primarily, human waste and unpleasant sights or odors that either distract or disgust the worshipper. Cf. OḤ secs. 76–87.

Thus, when reciting the *Shema*³⁰ or the regular prayer (*Amidah*), there must be a clear division between one's heart and one's privates. Even if he is wearing a free flowing gown, he must either cross his arms or wrap a sash around his waist, "lest his heart see his privates."³¹ There is, albeit, some difference of opinion as to the exact meaning of this phrase.³² By all accounts, it is meant to detach a person from awareness of his sexual, lower nature during Divine worship. One key component of this undesirable awareness is the fear of sexual stimulation and distraction from a worshipful modality. This point is clearly made in the rulings that immediately follow the above discussion:

One may not recite the *Shema* in the presence of a woman, even his own wife, a handbreadth of whom is uncovered, in a place that she normally covers.

One may not recite the *Shema* in the presence of woman's hair, that she is accustomed to covering.³³

Thus, it is not the female body, *per se*, that presents a problem. Rather, it is the sexual stimulation that men will experience by seeing parts thereof that are normally covered.³⁴ The specific parts of the female body whose exposure is deemed sexually provocative are, in turn, dependent upon contemporary mores.³⁵ The point is that this is a situational clash. It is not based upon an elemental contradiction between the physical and the spiritual.

³⁰ The *Shema* is the basic doxology of Judaism. Composed of three biblical passages (Deut. 6:4–9; 11:13–21 and Num. 15:37–41), it is recited twice a day, morning and evening.

³¹ OH sec. 74:1–6 based on BT *Berakhot* 25b. Men present a greater problem, as their genitals are obtrusive. Nevertheless, while the SA appears not to demand this of women, generally, in the *Bet Yosef* (ad loc.) he appears to side with those who do. Cf. Rema *ad loc.* par. 4.

³² Cf. Rashi, *Berakhot* 25b s.v. *ve-hare*; *Tosafot*, *Shabbat* 10a s.v. *terihuta*; and *Hiddushe ha-Rashba*, *Berakhot* 25b s.v. *yashen*.

³³ OH 75 pars. 1–2.

³⁴ This distinction is not uniquely Jewish. See, for example, W. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

³⁵ Cf. *Mishnah Berurah ad OH* sec. 75 s – p. 2 and Yehudah Herzl Henkin, "Is Handshaking a Torah Violation?," *Hakira* 4 (2007). The *Shulḥan Arukh* (OH 75:3) also discusses the question of listening to a woman's voice during prayer.

This point finds expression in the blessing recited upon leaving the lavatory.³⁶ The text had already been mandated by the Talmud,³⁷ but R. Caro chose to provide an exposition of the text, phrase by phrase.³⁸ The passage reads, in part:³⁹

When one leaves the privy, one recites the blessing: “Who created man with Wisdom”—for the creation of man was achieved with amazing wisdom. Some interpret this [i.e., wisdom] to mean that the body is like a wind filled bag that is full of holes. Others interpret “with wisdom,” that he arranged Adam’s sources of nutrition and, only then, “created openings and hollow tubes within him” as follows: He created many openings, such as the mouth, the nose and the rectum,⁴⁰ and also He also created many hollow organs, such as the heart, the stomach and the intestines. “If one of these becomes obstructed”—For example, among the apertures there is one, namely the mouth, that is closed while one is in one’s mother’s womb, and opens up upon his emerging into the world. If, once he entered the world, it were to remain sealed, it would be impossible to exist for even a moment. Similarly, regarding the hollow organs, if one were to open, it would be impossible to exist ... “Who heals all flesh”—refers to the fact that He created the openings to remove his food waste. Were it to decay in his belly, he would die, and its removal constitutes an act of healing. “And does marvelously”—For man may be compared to a bag full of wind. If someone pricks it with a pin, the air goes out. Man is full of holes, yet his soul is preserved within him. This is a marvel ...

³⁶ The following comment by Marion Holmes Katz (*Body of Text*, 1) concerning Islamic Law comes immediately to mind: “It is a truism that Islamic law (the *Shari‘a*) is a comprehensive system encompassing all aspects of life. Not limiting itself to public or enforceable norms, it provides guidance for the most intimate and the most apparently trivial details of the believer’s private conduct. The *Shari‘a*’s unflinching attention to the least sublime aspects of human existence has often ... been met with the incomprehension of outside observers. Its exhaustive examination of the minutiae of the believer’s biological functions, up to and including the details of elimination and sexual behavior, has provoked the mirth of seventh century pagans and twentieth-century Americans alike. The classical Islamic sources themselves, however, consistently insist that false modesty should not prevent thorough inquiry into this area of law.” With appropriate alterations, the same can be said of the Judaism expressed by the *Shulhan Arukh*. Cf. BT *Berakhot* 62a.

³⁷ BT *Berakhot* 60b. The basic text (of which there are several variations) is: “Blessed are You, O Lord, King of the Universe who has formed man in wisdom and created in him many orifices and many cavities. It is fully known before the throne of Thy glory that if one of them should be opened or one of them closed it would be impossible for a man to stand before Thee. Blessed are You, O Lord, who heals all flesh and does wondrously.”

³⁸ OH sec. 6:1.

³⁹ It is worth noting that R. Caro’s discussion is far more expansive, and poetic, than that of the *Tur* (ibid.), which serves as its point of departure.

⁴⁰ See *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah* 8:11.

This somewhat graphic disquisition reflects a number of body-related themes and tensions that resonate throughout the *Shulḥan Arukh*.

The first point to notice is the highly appreciative attitude expressed therein toward the proper functioning of the body, and the miracle of good health, generally.⁴¹ The author highlights a sense of wonder and appreciation for the intricacies of the body and the Divine Wisdom expressed in the proper functioning of the human body.⁴² Sensitized awareness of the proper functioning of the body is a source of positive inspiration for the cultivation of a sense of closeness and gratitude toward God.⁴³ Strikingly, it is specifically those aspects of bodily functions that contemporary society views (at best) with unease, are perceived as contributing to an individual's spiritual development.⁴⁴

Health, however, is not an end in itself. The *Shulḥan Arukh* actively cultivates one's physical health and stamina in the overarching interest of facilitating the service of God. This position is clearly spelled out in the following passage:⁴⁵

So it is that in every pleasure that one derives from this world one should not intend it for one's own pleasure, but for the service of the Creator,

⁴¹ He returns to the religious requirement to care for one's health on a number of occasions. See OH 167:1 and 202:4.

⁴² The various ways wherein this idea is expressed provide a *topos* for the attitude of Jewish thinkers throughout the ages toward the body and man's physical nature. See, among many, Shabbetai Donnolo, *Sefer Ḥakmoni*, ed. D. Castelli (Florence, 1881), 6–15; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yēsodei ha-Torah* 2, 1–2; Moses of Coucy, *Sefer Mizvot Gadol* (Venice, 1547), *Mizvat Aseh* 3 (fol. 96a–b); Isaac of Corbeille, *Sefer Mizvot Katan* (Jerusalem, 2005), no. 3; Menachem b. Zerah, *Sefer Zedah la-Derekh* (Jerusalem, 1963) and J. Briskin, *Sefer Tav Yehoshua* (Vilna, 1878).

⁴³ This is true of one's awareness of the rest of creation, for which the Talmud mandated a long, intricate series of blessings. See OH 217–229.

⁴⁴ See I. Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 459–460. Contrast the still pertinent comments in Phillip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 100ff. and Philippe Ariès et al, *A History of Private Life, IV–V* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1991), *passim*.

⁴⁵ OH 231 par. 1. The passage is a reworking of Maimonides's discussion in *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot De'ot* 3, 2–3. See Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 459–468. The exact relationship between the *Shulḥan Arukh* and Maimonides' code remains to be fully examined. Despite his veneration for Maimonides, Caro's use of the *Mishneh Torah* is not consistent. Sometimes he mechanically copies whole passages, and other times he ignores him completely. Then again, in some cases, he reproduces the text of the *Mishneh Torah*, but judiciously omits uniquely Maimonidean formulations that were not to his liking (e.g., philosophical interpolations). See the studies cited above, note 3 and Jeffrey R. Woolf, "Maimonides Revisited: The Case of the 'Sefer Misvot Gadol,'" *Harvard Theological Review* 90 (1997): 175–205.

blessed be He, as it is written [Prov. 3:6]: “Know Him in all of your ways.” The Sages have said:⁴⁶ All of your actions should be for the sake of Heaven. Even things that are optional, such as eating, drinking, walking, sitting, rising, sex, talk and all of the body’s requirements should all be for the service of the Creator, or to facilitate His worship. For even if he was hungry or thirsty, if he ate and drank solely for his enjoyment, he is not praiseworthy. Instead, he should intend to eat and drink in order to sustain himself, in order to serve his Creator ... In sum, a person is obligated to set his eyes and heart upon his ways, and to weigh all of his actions in the scales of his reason. When he sees something that leads to the service of the Creator, blessed be He, let him do it. If it does not, let him not do it. He who acts in this manner serves God perpetually.⁴⁷

This programmatic statement contains the major lines of thought that mark the place of the body and physical pleasure in the *Shulḥan Arukh*. The body and its needs are positive factors, but only so long as they are integrated into the worship of God. On the other hand, as R. Caro writes: “even if he was hungry or thirsty, if he ate and drank solely for his enjoyment, he is not praiseworthy. Instead, he should intend to eat and drink in order to sustain himself, in order to serve his Creator.” Pleasure for its own sake is not a legitimate pursuit.

In any event, in the context of the service of God, the body possesses positive religious worth. It must be maintained in order to allow the individual to study Torah and observe the commandments. One is absolutely forbidden to harm the body by scratching, tattooing, stabbing or otherwise abusing it.⁴⁸ In addition, the *Shulḥan Arukh* abounds with directives aimed at fostering health, and avoiding bodily harm or discomfort. Washing one’s hands and face every morning is deemed an important requirement, to which no less than twenty-three paragraphs are devoted.⁴⁹ While hand washing, generally, is understood to be a preparation for prayer (or eating),⁵⁰ this was no mere ritual. R. Caro explicitly states that concerns of health and contagion also play a significant role here, and washing is expanded to one’s face and one’s mouth.⁵¹ He declares emphatically that “these are the things that require one to wash one’s hands: Getting out of bed; leaving the privy or the bath house; paring one’s nails; removing one’s shoes; touching

⁴⁶ M. Avot 2, 12.

⁴⁷ Cf. Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, III, 51.

⁴⁸ YD 180.

⁴⁹ OH 4.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 23 and OH 157–165.

⁵¹ Ibid. 17 and 20.

one's feet and washing one's hair. And there are those who say even walking among the dead; touching a dead body; shaking one's clothes for lice; engaging in sexual intercourse; touching a louse; and touching his body with his hands."⁵² In the same connection, he admonishes his readers "to be careful before praying or eating, not to touch one's calf, thigh or one's covered places, since there are [sc. dirty] beads of sweat present. Similarly, one should not pick at one's head."⁵³ In like manner, he offers detailed advice as to conduct in the privy, demands that people eat properly at the appropriate time, and not over indulge in mid-day naps.⁵⁴

Ill-health not only impedes the service of God. It prevents it, both *de facto* and *de jure*. The obligation to heal is an absolute religious duty, abstention from which is tantamount to murder.⁵⁵ Danger to human life or health overrides almost any halakhic obligation and obligates the desecration of the Sabbath and the Day of Atonement.⁵⁶ Health considerations bar pregnant women and nursing mothers from fasting.⁵⁷ One who is in physical distress may be exempted from donning phylacteries, prayer, sitting in a *Sukkah* and any number of significant observances.⁵⁸ Of signal importance here is also the way that R. Caro seamlessly integrates these dicta into, *prima facie*, ritual regulations. In this manner he, implicitly, conveys the message that these are no less obligatory than any other halakhic ruling.⁵⁹

⁵² Despite the health oriented bent of these requirements, in an age before Lister, the ramifications of not heeding these rules are of a more pre-modern order. R. Caro writes that "whoever does any of these and did not wash his hands: if he is a scholar, he will forget his learning. And if he is not a scholar, he will go out of his mind."

⁵³ OH 4:21.

⁵⁴ OH 2:9-11; 4:16 and 22; 89:4; 157:1; and 231:1.

⁵⁵ YD 331:1. The Talmud, itself, preserves differing opinions on the issue. Cf. *Berakhot* 60a and the discussion in Immanuel Jacobovitz, *Jewish Medical Ethics: A Comparative and Historical Study of the Jewish Religious Attitude to Medicine and its Practice* (New York: Bloch, 1975).

⁵⁶ OH 329 and 618. The exceptions are situations warranting martyrdom. Cf. YD 157:1.

⁵⁷ OH 554:5, 575:5, and 617. This license, which does not include *Yom Kippur* or *Tisha BeAv*, was ultimately rejected by Ashkenazic authorities. Indeed, the more stringent tendency among Ashkenazim on many of these points is notable and deserves closer study. See Hirsch Zimmels, *Ashkenazim and Sephardim: Their Relations, Differences and Problems as Reflected in the Rabbinical Responsa* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1996).

⁵⁸ OH 38:1 and 9; 46:4; 62:4; 90:1; 276; 304:1 and 440:3.

⁵⁹ In some cases, he translates bits of talmudic advice into actual regulations. Thus, he recasts (OH 551:18) a talmudic observation (BT *Pesahim* 111b) that in the summer

Concern for an individual's physicality is not confined to facilitating the performance of the commandments. Observance requires the cultivation of physical pleasure as an integral part of a religious life. Sensual pleasure is acknowledged and celebrated through the recitation of specific blessings.⁶⁰ On the Sabbath, Festivals, and the eve of *Yom Kippur* not only is fasting forbidden, "one eats, drinks and rejoices" more than his usual custom.⁶¹ Indeed, one is called upon to make an extra effort to spend the appropriate sums to fulfill this obligation.⁶²

On the other hand, the fact that one's physical pleasure and health are dependent upon the need to meaningfully serve God leads the *Shulhan Arukh* to introduce an element wherein physical satisfaction is either ignored, or countered, into his discussions. For example, on the first night of Passover, every adult male and female is obligated to drink four cups of wine and to eat a specified amount of unleavened bread (*Mazẓah*). R. Caro rules that enjoying these foods is an integral part of the commandment's observance that "it is forbidden to eat bread from the tenth hour onward,⁶³ so that he may eat *Mazẓah* with gusto ... nor may he drink small quantities of wine, because it is satiating."⁶⁴ Nevertheless, and more tellingly, "one who does not drink wine because it harms him must force himself and drink, in order to fulfill the commandment of the four cups."⁶⁵

one should avoid going outside in the mid-day sun, for fear of a demon named *Ketev Meriri*, as a quasi-injunction, The role of magic and demonology in the *Shulhan Arukh* requires a separate study. See Werblowsky, *R. Joseph Caro*, passim, Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Shmuel Kotak, "Shedim u-Maḥalot ba-Talmud," *Holi u-Marpeh bi-Yemei Kedem* (Haifa: University of Haifa Press, 1996), 28–35; and the reissued edition of Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2004), with a prolegomenon by Moshe Idel.

⁶⁰ OH 46 and 202–231.

⁶¹ Note that he does not limit the injunction to become inebriated on Purim (OH 695:2). Rema, in his gloss on this paragraph, cautions that "there are those who say that one need not become that intoxicated. He should merely drink more than is his custom."

⁶² Note the manner in which R. Akiva's dictum (BT *Shabbat* 118a) to treat the Sabbath as a weekday rather than rely upon charity is carefully modified in OH 222:1, while it is cited straightforwardly in the Laws of Charity (YD 255:1).

⁶³ About 3 P.M.

⁶⁴ OH 471:1. Cf. 470: 1.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 472:10.

Asceticism as Spiritual Corrective

Side by side with this generally positive attitude toward the satisfaction of physical drives and needs, and its integration into the worship of God, the *Shulḥan Arukh* also has a contrapuntal motif of self-control and self-denial.⁶⁶ Thus, in describing the reasons for binding phylacteries upon one's arm and head, the author declares: "And let him subjugate his soul (which is his mind), to the Holy One, blessed be He; as well as the heart, which is the source of lusts and thoughts. In this manner, *he will remember the Creator and minimize his pleasures.*" [emphasis added]⁶⁷ The clear message is that physical health and pleasure are legitimate, but that man should strive to satisfy himself with the bare minimum that is necessary.⁶⁸

One can sense in these words a certain suspicion of the body and its needs, and a keen awareness of their ability to distract the individual from his ultimate goal, the attainment of his *summum bonum*. Thus, despite the essentially positive view of the body as a medium of Divine Service, the *Shulḥan Arukh* peppers its presentation with calls for restricting the body because of these very suspicions. One notable example of these is found in the laws regarding the taking of vows.⁶⁹

The creation of supererogatory obligations through vows has been an integral part of Jewish religiosity since biblical times.⁷⁰ The attitude evinced toward such vows in biblical, talmudic, and post-talmudic rabbinic literature can only be characterized as deeply ambivalent.⁷¹

⁶⁶ This tallies with R. Caro's personal proclivities. See Werblowsky, *R. Joseph Caro* and Fine, "Purifying the Body," passim. However, caution should be exercised when attempting to collate the personal proclivities of the author with his formal legal positions. See Haym Soloveitchik, "Can Halakhic Texts Talk History?," *AJS Review* 3 (1978): 152–196.

⁶⁷ OH 25:5.

⁶⁸ For example, despite the importance of sleep, the author counsels his readers to keep it to a bare minimum, in order to allow for maximal time to devote to the service of God (OH 231:1). Similarly, a person for whom eating is not enjoyable should not eat on the Sabbath, despite the important obligation to do so (OH 288: 1–3). Indeed, he may even fast because this is his way of enjoying the Sabbath (*Oneg Shabbat*). See Yitzḥak Dov Gilat, "Ta'anit be-Shabbat," *Tarbiz* 52 (1983): 1–15.

⁶⁹ One could also add the institution of fasting. See OH 562–580 and below.

⁷⁰ Cf. Gen. 28:20; Num. 6:1–21; 30:2–17; Jud. 11:30–40; and 1 Sam. 1:11.

⁷¹ Cf. Deut. 23:22–23; Eccles. 5:3–4; BT *Yevamot* 109b and BT *Nedarim* 9b; *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Nedarim* 13, 23–25. See also R. Nogah, "Ha-Noder ve-ha-Nodrim be-Mikra u-ve-Divre Ḥazal," *Sefer Ḥayyim Gevaryahu*, I, ed. Ben Zion Luria (Jerusalem, 1989), 78–89; Samuel Morell, "The Samson Nazirite Vow in the Sixteenth century," *AJS Review* 14 (1989): 223–262; Berekyahu Lifshitz, "Tov Noder u-Meshalem," *Bet*

On the one hand, the desire to give God more than one was initially obligated was acknowledged as a natural moment in religious life.⁷² On the other hand, one who had the temerity to try to “improve” the Torah’s requirements by adding obligations and forbidding additional objects and actions aroused a certain amount of misgiving.⁷³ Not the least of these was the concern that the one might not live up to, or actively violate, his vow.⁷⁴

In its opening discussion of the laws relating to vows, the *Shulhan Arukh* reflects this ambivalence. It starts by declaring his opposition to unnecessary vows, obligations and restrictions. “Do not be accustomed to vow. One who takes a vow, even if he fulfills it, is called wicked and a sinner.”⁷⁵ “If one takes a vow, it is as if he built an illegitimate altar [*bamah*];⁷⁶ and if he fulfilled it, it is as if he offered a sacrifice upon it, for it would have been better had he asked to have his vow absolved. This is the case with most vows. When it comes to charitable vows, however, it is a religious duty to fulfill them, and one should only seek absolution under pressing circumstances.”⁷⁷ *Prima facie*, then, one should not add to the Torah’s restrictions or indulge in superfluous piety.

In the very next paragraph, R. Caro modifies his position when he copies out, in full, a highly suggestive passage from Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*:⁷⁸

Whosoever makes vows in order to discipline his moral disposition and to improve his conduct displays commendable zeal and is worthy of praise. For instance, one who is a glutton and forbids meat to himself for a year or two; Or one who is over-indulgent in wine and forbids wine to himself for a long time, or at least commits himself never to become

Mikra 37 (1992): 146–149 and Moshe Benovitz, *Kol Nidre: Studies in the Development of Rabbinic Votive Institutions* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

⁷² Cf. Ramban ad Num. 30:2.

⁷³ Cf. Haym Soloveitchik, “Three Themes in the *Sefer Hassidim*,” *AJS Review* I (1976): 311–325.

⁷⁴ The Heavenly punishment for such failure could be extremely harsh. Cf. BT *Shabbat* 32b. Interestingly, R. Caro does not invoke this consideration, while R. Moses Isserles (EH 154:1) does.

⁷⁵ YD 203: 1.

⁷⁶ According to biblical and rabbinic tradition, the construction of private altars was forbidden from the time that the Central Sanctuary was established in Jerusalem, as they were seen as impugning the importance of the latter. Its use as a metaphor for extra-legal vows is obvious. See *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, III (Jerusalem, 1981), 399.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 3.

⁷⁸ *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Nedarim* 13, 23. The translation is based upon Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader* (New York: Behrman House, 1972), 131. Cf. Twersky, *Introduction*, 466–468.

inebriated; or one who runs after gratuities in his eagerness to amass wealth, and binds himself to accept no presents or to derive no benefit from the people of his country; or one who is proud of his good looks and vows to become a Nazirite; or anyone else who makes vows of this kind. All such vows are ways of serving God, and of them and their like, the Sages have said:⁷⁹ “Vows are a fence around self-restraint.”

If self-denial is necessary in order to counter one’s drives, to correct or to improve one’s moral and/or spiritual disposition, it is a praiseworthy recourse. As R. Caro notes, in a related context: “One who is fasting: If he is able to suffer the fast, is called a saint. If not, as for instance if he is not healthy and strong, is called a sinner.” In a word, ascetic behavior is a totally legitimate, even highly laudable, tool if it facilitates the service of God, and renders no harm to the practitioner.⁸⁰

The Challenge of Sexuality

In the *Shulḥan Arukh*, the tensions that are liable to arise between the service of God and man’s physical needs are very evident in matters relating to marital relations.⁸¹ Much of the relevant material is found located at the end of the author’s discussion of one’s daily regimen, which is comprised of a collation of rules and advice culled from throughout rabbinic literature. He entitled this disquisition, *The Laws of Modesty* (*Hilkhot Zeni’ut*).⁸² Later on, in *Even ha-Ezer*, in the context of discussing the legal obligations that obtain between husband and wife, R. Caro returns to a number of these.⁸³

⁷⁹ *Mishnah, Avot* 3, 13.

⁸⁰ OH 571:1 Note the similar use of the epithet “sinner.” It is noteworthy, that the *Shulḥan Arukh* does not reproduce Maimonides’ famous attack on asceticism in *Hilkhot De’ot* 3, 1.

⁸¹ As it is true of many other traditions, the special challenge posed to religious ideals by the individual’s sexual urges was true of Judaism from the beginning, and was especially notable among Jewish mystics. In the present context, however, it should be noted that this issue was of critical interest in the kabbalist circles within which R. Caro moved. See Mordekhai Pachter, “Kabbalistic Ethical Literature in Sixteenth-Century Safed,” *Binah* 3 (1994): 159–178; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Idel, *Kabbalah*, passim; and Sharon Koren, “Mystical Rationales for the Laws of ‘Niddah,’” in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, ed. Rahel Wasserfall (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England and Brandeis University Press, 1999), 101–121.

⁸² OH 240.

⁸³ EH 25.

As with the discussions with which he opened the *Shulhan Arukh*, R. Caro places great emphasis upon the fulfillment of one's marital obligations in the most modest, discrete fashion possible. While not stated explicitly, one senses that the modesty the concerns the author is both *vis-à-vis* man, as well as God. Absolute privacy is required.⁸⁴ Relations should be undertaken only in the middle of the night, when all can be assumed to be asleep, and in the dark.⁸⁵ Even certain sexual positions and acts are rejected as immodest, and even arrogant.⁸⁶

At the same time, especially in the passages in *Even ha-Ezer*, the author presents a very sensitive description of how sexual congress should be undertaken. His words presume that physical pleasure is an integral part of the act. Thus, while one must not be with one's wife too much, he must not neglect the minimum satisfaction of his conjugal obligations to her, and must train himself to give her his undivided attention.⁸⁷ He may not abuse or be crude in his love-making. Thus, one may not have relations when inebriated.⁸⁸ He adds: "He must not act frivolously with his wife, and not speak lewdly to her concerning worthless matters. He may, however, speak of sexual union, in order to increase his desire. Or, if he was wroth with her and needs to appease her, he can address her in order to appease her."⁸⁹ He continues that even "when he does have relations at the appointed time (*onah*), he should not have his own pleasure in mind. Rather, he should think of himself as one who is paying off his obligation, that he is bound to her set time, and to fulfill his Creator's command to be fruitful and multiply, so that he may have sons who occupy themselves with the Torah and fulfill the commandments in Israel. And he must not come upon her except with her consent. If, however, she does not desire, he may appease her until she consents. Moreover, let him be very modest at the time of sexual relations."

This view of sexual activity, wherein the woman's pleasure is an integral part of the proceedings and deemed a religious obligation,

⁸⁴ Ibid. 6.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 7 and EH 25:5.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 4-5.

⁸⁷ R. Caro abjures a man not to think of another woman when he is with his wife. Cf. OH 240:2 and EH 25:10.

⁸⁸ It is striking that R. Caro emphasizes that it is absolutely forbidden to have relations with one's wife if he hates her, or if he has already decided to divorce her. Cf. EH 25:8, 76:9-11 and 77:2.

⁸⁹ EH 25:2.

is reiterated by R. Caro when discussing the legal definition of those marital obligations that are part of the marriage contract (*ketubbah*). The author reiterates that one must be with his wife in accordance with the accepted frequency, on the night she visits the *mikveh* after completion of her menstrual impurity, and before leaving on a trip.⁹⁰ Moreover, if he demands that intercourse must be done in a totally mechanical manner, “I in my clothes and she in her clothes,” “he must divorce her and give to her her marriage settlement.”⁹¹

However, in marked contrast to the above, a very different picture emerges from the aforementioned *Hilkhot Zēni’ut*. There, in a discussion that the author well knew would be read by a wider audience,⁹² he writes: “If he is married, he should not be accustomed overmuch to his wife, but rather in accordance with the *onah* prescribed by the Torah.” He then repeats the above discussion concerning female pleasure but adds: “and if he intends to restrain himself through her, lest he lust after sin, since he sees his lust overcoming him and desiring that thing, it would be better for him to push off and suppress it ... but one who does not need something, but rather stimulates his lust in order to satisfy it, that is the counsel of the evil inclination.”⁹³

In contrast to the emphasis placed in *Even ha-Ezer* upon the wife’s pleasure, not excluding his own, in *Hilkhot Zēni’ut* R. Caro writes that: “he should engage in relations in fear and awe ... as if compelled by a demon.”⁹⁴ “And there are those who interpret that he should expose only a handbreadth of the apron that he wore ... and cover it at once to diminish his pleasure.”⁹⁵

This latter requirement, which the *Shulḥan Arukh* notes scrupulous individuals should observe, is a marked expression of the difference

⁹⁰ EH 76:1–2 and 4.

⁹¹ Ibid. 13.

⁹² *Even Ha-Ezer* was, and remains, study material for scholars and not for laymen.

⁹³ OH 240:1.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 8.

⁹⁵ According to the author sexual activity is potentially dangerous. “Semen is the body’s strength and the light of the eyes. Whenever it is emitted overly much, the body is diminished and life force is lost. Anyone who immersed in copulation, becomes prematurely old, his strength diminishes, his eyes dim, a foul odor comes from his mouth, and the hair of his head, his eyebrows and his eyelashes fall out. His beard, his armpits and his legs grows thicker, his teeth will fall out, and many other pains aside from these will come upon him. The greatest physicians have said: One in a thousand dies of other maladies, and a thousand from too much sexual intercourse. Therefore, one must be careful.” (ibid. 14).

between *Even ha-Ezer* and *Orah Hayyim*. In both, there is a clear intent to restrict (or at least, to regulate) a man's passions and their marital expression. Nevertheless, as we found elsewhere in the book, in *Even ha-Ezer* the author affirms the value of the physical within the proper limits required for the service of God. In *Orah Hayyim*, however, concern with the potentially (or, inevitably) negative ramifications of the sexual impulse leads him to adopt a far more ascetic, body denying stance. How else can one explain that in the latter he advocates a practice ("uncovering a handbreadth"), that in terms of the discussion in *Even ha-Ezer* could be construed as grounds for divorce? One is left with the conclusion that here, more than anywhere else in the work, bodily drives emerge less as distractions, and more as factors that need not only be channeled but, to a significant degree and in contravention to accepted halakhic norms, suppressed.⁹⁶

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, we have attempted to characterize, in broad strokes, the attitude toward the body and human physicality that arises from a reading of the *Shulhan Arukh*. That perusal leads to a number of conclusions. First, and perhaps foremost, the work is not characterized by an attitude of *contemptus mundi* or, more properly, *contemptus corporalis*. An individual's physicality or personal pleasure are not, per se, evil. These are validated or invalidated solely in terms of their contribution to the fulfillment of the commandments and living out of God's Will for man. At the same time, the maintenance of the body and the satisfaction of its drives are not merely necessary, begrudgingly acknowledged actions that enable man to observe the *mizvot*. They are often enlisted as elements of Divine service, on their own terms. When self-denial is invoked, it is usually for spiritually therapeutic reasons. In this regard, R. Caro's work reflects the general thrust of rabbinic thought on the subject, dating back to talmudic times and apparently bears out the observation that R. Joseph Caro's mystical doctrines have nary an echo in the *Shulhan Arukh*.

⁹⁶ Again, while this may well be an expression of R. Caro's own spiritual *Weltanschauung*, that is not explicitly stated here and, as such, was not a factor in its subsequent impact.

The operative word, in this context, is “apparently.” When it comes to sexuality, the *Shulḥan Arukh* presents a markedly conflicted stance. On the one hand, the author dutifully codifies the relevant rulings that express a positive attitude toward sexuality. On the other hand, in a section of the work (*Hilkhot Zēni’ut*) that was more likely to achieve wider provenance (*Orah Hayyim*), he presents the student with a much more severe, ascetic view of sexuality. In light of what we know of R. Caro’s inner life, as discussed by Werblowsky, the sentiments expressed in the latter discussion jibed more closely with his own sentiments.

There is an irony in this. The sources that the author cites in *Hilkhot Zēni’ut* are based upon halakhic and other non-mystical sources. At the same time, it is hard to escape the impression that his own mystically based ascetic orientation was a driving force behind its composition. In other words, in *Hilkhot Zēni’ut* we find a mystical impulse expressing itself in traditional halakhic terms and, for that very reason, becoming part of normative Halakhah.⁹⁷ More to the point, in this manner, a markedly ascetic attitude toward physical pleasure moved from the elitist periphery of the mystical adept and became a norm to which the average Jew was expected to aspire.

In this light, future analysis should focus upon the way in which later Halakhists understood and interpreted; modified and expanded; accepted and rejected the principles and legal details outlined by R. Joseph Caro. For, as history has shown, it set the halakhic and religious agenda of the next half-millennium.

⁹⁷ This is in line with Katz’ observation of the way in which R. Caro upgraded the halakhic status of the Zohar in both the *Bet Yosef* and the *Shulḥan Arukh*. See Katz, “Post-Zoharic Relations,” 300–305.

VIRGINITY: WOMEN'S BODY AS A STATE OF MIND: DESTINY BECOMES BIOLOGY*

HOWARD TZVI ADELMAN

Introduction

Discourse about virginity provides an opportunity to examine the relationship between physical and emotional categories, between body and mind, and between biology and culture. The term “virginity” is used in two different sometimes contradictory ways, both as a specific physical, biological marker that might objectively reveal the prior sexual experience of a female and as a label for the cultural state of a female who has had no previous sexual intercourse.¹ While rabbinic literature seems to assume that the meaning of the two terms usually overlaps, in fact, however, it does report cases in which a virgin has no signs of virginity and a woman who has had intercourse shows signs of virginity. Biological signs do not necessarily provide help for emotional clarity. A careful examination of rabbinic literature, including specific cases from early modern Italy, reveals that bodily processes, among them sexually charged conditions that have significant cultural meaning such as virginity may be more of a state of mind than a demonstrable physical category.²

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¹ David Malkiel, “Manipulating Virginity: Digital Defloration in Midrash and History,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 13 (2006): 105–127; Roni Weinstein, *Marriage Rituals Italian Style* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 243, 384–405; Roni Weinstein, “En-onot ushlemut hamishpahah bikheillah hayehudit be’italiah bereshit ha’et hahadashah,” in *Eros, Erusin, ve-isurim: miniyut umishpahah bahistoriah*, ed. Israel Bartal and Isaiah Gafni (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 1998), 159–173; Paloma Gay-Y-Blasco, “A ‘different body?’ Desire and virginity among Gitanos,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3:3 (September, 1997): 517–536.

² Amalia Sa’ar, “Many ways of becoming a woman: the case of unmarried Israeli-Palestinian ‘girls,’” *Ethnology* 43:1 (2004): 1–18, describes virginity as a “mental and/or emotional state” or “an emotional and a cognitive” condition.

The anthropologist Mary Douglas offers a taxonomy on the role of sexual relations in social systems that provides a paradigm for an analysis of approaches to virginity in Jewish life.³ Her basic premise is that social systems are based on contradictions, have self-defeating aspects, and can be at war with themselves and that there are three basic ways that societies resolve sexual ambiguities: 1) In some societies clear sexual roles are enforced by men at the expense of women by using violence, which might be lethal. In such systems there is no need for legal niceties or ritual concerns. As an example she gives the Walbiri of Australia. 2) In societies without much coercion, men and women enjoy closer, often sexually free relations. Such relationships are adjusted by means of subtle, legalistic, and practical institutions based on a fluidity of definitions and fictions to protect society. She gives many examples from Asia, such as South India, Ceylon, Southern Nagar, and the Nambundiri Brahamins of Malabar, as well as the Nuer of East Africa. 3) In some societies, the principle of male domination competes with other principles involving female independence and protection. Under such circumstances, without coercive devices, in order to establish clear boundaries between men and women, ideas of pollution are invoked. Under such circumstances, Douglas asserts, sexual relations are like a conflict between enemies and the man sees the woman as a source of pollution and danger. As an example she gives the Mae Enga of the Central Highlands of New Guinea. While Douglas gives different tribes as examples of each taxon, Jewish thinking about the body offers examples of all taxons.

The charge that a bride was not a virgin constituted a stain on family honor, both hers and his. Families, therefore, wanted to redeem their honor and save face after a terrible blow. The Bible offers an example of lethal force used in enforcing sexual behavior. A new bride accused of not producing signs of virginity on her wedding night was threatened with being stoned to death by the people (*anshei*) of the city at the door of her father's house because she had done evil to the entire people by having intercourse while she lived in her father's house, and it was necessary to extirpate the evil from the midst of the people.⁴ The biblical text, however, did not grant men absolute authority over women. Before she could be stoned, her parents had

³ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 140–158; Lawrence Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), 45–47.

⁴ Deuteronomy 22:13–21; TB Ketubbot 11b, 36b; Hiddushei Haramban, Ketubbot

a chance to intervene and to defend her by presenting a stained sheet to the elders of the city. If the man had brought a false accusation against his bride, he could be afflicted and punished by a payment of 100 silver pieces to her father, and despite his slandering her, he could never divorce her, an inauspicious beginning to the marriage. This symbolic sum remained central to future discussions of virginity among Jews, although the recipient shifted from the father of the bride to the woman herself.

Although rabbinic literature retained references to the biblical script for killing brides who were not virgins, Jews rarely had the authority to impose lethal punishments to restore their lost honor. Supported by popular Jewish literature, such as magic books and collections of prayers, rabbis developed a subtle, flexible approach to the ambiguities of bodily processes and to the supervision of them. Indeed, the frequent use of legal fictions cushioned Jewish society from the fact that, despite rhetoric and intrusive supervision by families and experts, coercion was limited, and men and women often followed their desires in establishing sexual relations. Ultimately, therefore, in what seems to be a strict attempt to maintain the validity of tests for virginity, rabbinic deliberations are marked by a legalism that shows willingness to adjust biological considerations to meet the cultural needs for the outcome of the case.

At the same time, however, rabbinic literature shows a counter tendency for rabbinic involvement in the consummation of marriages and the adjudication of another matter of bodily function in which the threat to honor was not as high as in cases of ascertaining virginity, namely preventing pollution by the accidental mixing of hymeneal blood with menstrual blood during consummation. Without full coercive devices to establish clear boundaries, rabbis attempted to distinguish between two kinds of blood to prevent pollution by requiring a virgin to separate from her husband after they consummated their marriage and to wait for seven clean days without any sign of menstrual blood before they resumed intercourse. This close supervision and all the attendant questions it produced contributed to male attempts of domination over the biological processes of a woman's body.

3a. All rabbinic citations unless otherwise cited are from the CD *The Responsa Project* 13+ (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2005).

In this paper I will try to answer the following questions: Why, on the morning after his wedding, would a man report that his bride was not a “virgin,” whatever definition of the word was intended? Or, knowing full well that she was not a “virgin,” why would he not convey that information? Who else was interested in whether a bride was a virgin or not? What if she gave the physical appearance of not being a virgin due to nature, or an accident, but claimed that she never had intercourse? How could anybody really tell if a female was a “virgin” or not? Finally, if a bride was not categorized as a virgin who was expected to bleed on consummation, why would she have to separate from her husband for a week? I will conclude with a brief comparison with rabbinic treatment of adultery. In their efforts to find an answer to these questions, or to avoid them, each interested party followed several distinct strategies, including appeals to textual authority, biology, and honor.

Like many other aspects of social and family life, the surviving textual discourse relevant to these questions is richest surrounding not common events, but rather difficult cases, especially those involving individuals in liminal circumstances in the margins of accepted categories. Above all, the attempts to determine virginity are based on an assumption that a female may have already had sexual intercourse.

Premarital Intercourse

Rabbinic literature, repeated in Italy, presents premarital intercourse in terms of a double standard by defining promiscuity in terms of the behavior of a woman and not a man. The standard assumption is that “a man does not have intercourse promiscuously” (*en adam oseh be’ilato be’ilat zenut, en adam bo’el shelo leshem miẓvah*),⁵ and “a single man who has intercourse with a single woman makes her a whore” (*panui haba ‘al penuyah shelo leshem ishut asa’ah zonah*).⁶

Maimonides, followed by subsequent rabbis, divided single women into those who were virgins and those who were not.⁷ Single Jewish women, like their male coreligionists, were not always chaste prior to

⁵ TB Ketubbot 73a.

⁶ Tosefta Kiddushin 1:4; MS Jerusalem, 4° 617, no. 17.

⁷ MT Isurei Biah 21:3; Tur EH; Jacob ben Moses Senior cited in Raphael Meldola, *Mayim Rabbim* (Amsterdam: Joseph Dayan, 1737), EH, no. 28.

marriage, if they ever married. Sexual relations could be random, the result of seduction under the guise of eventual betrothal and marriage, part of a loving long-term relationship, or a way to marry against family wishes. Sexual relations outside of marriage could result from the impediments that life in general and Jewish law and custom in particular placed in the way of (re)marriage, such as the inability to find a permanent mate, the lack of means to finance a marriage, the impossibility of marriage under certain circumstances, and the length of time required for engagement, betrothal, and marriage. It was also the result of unbridled passions of men and women. Disregarding any moral considerations, some rabbis boldly asserted that the only reason against premarital intercourse was concern that single women did not go to the ritual bath for purification at the end of their menstrual periods.⁸ The question that faced families was what to do about premarital intercourse when it happened. For example, in Ferrara in 1577, Ishmael, the son of Azariah ben Solomon Finzi, killed his unnamed, unmarried sister because “she was promiscuous as a maiden in her father’s house” (*ki zantah kena’arah bevet aviha*). Although her punishment was stipulated in the Bible, in this case she was not condemned by any procedure but rather by her brother acting alone “in a spirit of zealotry.” Azariah wrote a responsum justifying his son’s act of rage, vengeance, and summary execution on the basis of biblical and rabbinic precedents in order to restore the lost honor to the house, family, and lineage that she shamed, mocked, scorned, disgraced, and made impure.⁹ Despite his zeal, Finzi offered an ambiguous message. On the one hand, Finzi lowered the threshold of immorality for which a *na’arah* could be executed from the biblically mandated “evil” to “any trace of harlotry or abomination” (*kol shemez zenut veto’evah*). On the other hand, he concluded that there are times when rabbis must ignore disgraceful behavior because dealing with it might produce more harm than good and he stressed that it is up to the rabbis whether to enforce Jewish law or to skirt the issue, a step which may better preserve their honor.¹⁰

⁸ Sifra, Tazria; AZ 36b; M. Niddah 4:3; Horayot 5:1.

⁹ Numbers 5:14; 25; Deuteronomy 22:13–21; Genesis 34; Leviticus 21:9; Yevamot 60b; Sanhedrin 46a.

¹⁰ Abraham Yagel, *Bat Rabbim*, fols. 57a–58a, MS Moscow/Ginsberg 129 (Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Jerusalem, MS 6809).

Stages of Development

Tests for determining virginity were based on assumptions about the particular stage of development of a bride. Rabbinic literature offers at least three different but interconnected ways of determining the life stages of a female, ultimately creating contradictory criteria and ambiguous situations. 1) Time is measured by absolute chronology according to which specific ages are the automatic markers of transition. The precise divisions found in later rabbinic literature between a *ketanah*, a *na'arah*, and a *bogeret* (minor, girl, and mature women), however, are not systematically defined in classic rabbinic literature; at times they are assumed, and at other times they are ignored. Time is also measured relatively. The period in which a girl is a *na'arah* is considered to be a period of six months, despite discrepancies as to when it begins and how it is recognized.¹¹ 2) The passage of time is measured by physical bodily signs which mark a change of status. In determining puberty, rabbinic discourse focuses mainly on pubic hair, particularly the traditional requirement of two hairs and then full growth (the lower sign), but also on breast transformation (the upper sign) involving the size, pendulousness, coloration, and firmness of the breast and the nipple, based on observation and palpation, compared to the stages of a ripening fig (*pagah*, *bohel*, and *zemel*).¹² 3) Growth is marked behaviorally and socially in terms of the abilities of children to act appropriately in matters such as avoiding intimacy with relatives and safeguarding marriage documents.¹³

These rabbinic discussions offer extremely graphic and intrusive evaluations of the physical stages of a young girl's maturation process. The Talmud addresses the question of how rabbis were able to acquire such intimate, invasive knowledge of pubescent girls by telling that at least one rabbi, Samuel, examined a slave girl and then paid her for the indignity she endured.¹⁴ A medieval rabbi discussed the ambiguity

¹¹ TB Niddah 65a, Kiddushin 79a, Ketubbot 39a.

¹² M. Niddah 5:7–8.

¹³ See Leopold Loew, *Die Lebensalter in der jüdischen Literatur* (Szegedin: Druck von S. Burger, 1875); Israel Lebediger, "The Minor in Jewish Law," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 7 (1916–1917): 89–174; Bernard J. Bamberger, "Qetanah, Na'arah, Bogereth," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961): 281–294; John Parsons, "The Medieval Aristocratic Teenaged Female: Adolescent or Adult?," in *The Premodern Teenager*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 311–321.

¹⁴ TB Niddah 47a.

concerning appropriateness of men evaluating the bodies of young women. On the one hand, he stated that if a man wants he can examine a woman's breast by putting his hand on her nipple in order to discredit the testimony of a woman who judged that a minor had brought forth the necessary signs of puberty. On the other hand, he quoted another rabbi, who said that females must be examined by women, and as proof he gave names of rabbis who had their wives or mothers fulfill this task.¹⁵

Subsequent rabbis relied on combinations of categories. Basing himself on chronological categories, Maimonides called a girl from the time she is born until the end of her twelfth year either a minor (*ketanah*) or a child (*tinoket*), perhaps even meaning infant.¹⁶ He also introduced physiological criteria: even if she grows pubic hair before she reaches the end of her twelfth year, it is considered to be a mole and not part of the maturation process until she reaches the end of her twelfth year. After she reaches the age of twelve, a girl who has grown two pubic hairs is called a *na'arah* for the next six months.¹⁷ Maimonides mixes two different types of criteria here: a girl does not become a *na'arah* until she is both twelve and has shown the physical signs of puberty. Picking up on the relationship between the two criteria, a latter commentator stipulated that "when a woman passes twelve years and one day, IF she brings forth two hairs, she is called a *na'arah* for the next six months, then she is called a *bogeret*, that is she has (*milah*) a complete growth of hair."¹⁸

Each stage of development provides different challenges in terms of evaluating a female for signs of virginity based on the nature of her hymen and the tightness of her vagina. In particular, many rabbis believed that the advanced age of a *bogeret*—around twelve and a half—might cause her hymen to be absorbed in her body or her vagina no longer to be as tight as that of a younger girl. Moreover, rabbis were aware that accidents could eliminate the signs of virginity from even the most chaste females.

¹⁵ Sefer Or Zarua 1, Halizah, no. 672.

¹⁶ MT Ishut 2:1.

¹⁷ MT Ishut 2:2.

¹⁸ SA YD 234.1.

Tests for Virginity

When the Bible calls for the father and the mother of the *na'arah* accused of not being a virgin on her wedding night to display the garment (*simlah*) with the signs of virginity (*betulim*) to the elders at the gate of the city, it does not discuss what is meant by virginity, a *na'arah*, or the possibility that the signs were lost through act of nature or accident rather than through sexual activity.¹⁹ Rabbinic literature discussed three tests of virginity: 1) bleeding, 2) vaginal tightness, and 3) vaginal permeability.

1) The Talmud, following the biblical passage referring to a garment with signs of virginity, understands that a female bleeds when having intercourse for the first time, or at least the second or the third. Instead of the bride's parents' bringing the garment to the elders of the city at the gate, in rabbinic literature various parties make a house call to inspect the new couple. Rabbis discuss the possibility that after intercourse the woman might claim that she produced blood of virginity, but her husband might claim that it was blood from a bird. Therefore, the Talmud suggests procedures to supervise the couple and to frisk them (*lemashmesh*) by a representative of each spouse when they go into the bridal chamber (*huppah*) in order to make sure that they bring in no extraneous items, presumably a bloody sheet, a quantity of blood, or implements to cause bleeding.²⁰

The Talmud also discusses subtle reasons why a female might not bleed: females in the bride's family have a history of not menstruating, or of not bleeding on loss of virginity; it is a time of famine; she is easy to penetrate because of her mature age; her new husband missed her hymen; or the blood was covered with semen,²¹ testimony to the potential for the signs of virginity to remain after intercourse.

According to Maimonides, in cases in which no blood is found, after her family history is examined, her health is assessed to ascertain whether she is sick, suffering from a lack of moisture, or had afflicted herself with fasts, that is, her menses stopped due to what could be anorexia, taking the talmudic idea of a time of general famine and

¹⁹ Deuteronomy 22:13–21.

²⁰ TB Ketubbot 12a; TP Ketubbot 4:4, 28c; Ḥiddushei Haramban, Ḥiddushei Harashba, Ḥiddushei Haritba, TB Ketubbot 9a–12a, BY EH 68:7,9; Yam Shel Shelomo, Ketubbot 1:24; Maharam Alshker, no. 95.

²¹ TB Ketubbot 9a–12a; TP Ketubbot 25a 1:1, 28c 4:4; cf. MT Ishut 11:12; Tur/BY EH 68.

changing it into fasting on the part of the woman. If this is the case, she is moisturized, fed, and given something to drink before her husband tries again to have intercourse with her. This time, if she does not produce blood, her husband can charge her with not being a virgin. Maimonides' physiology is based on the principle that no matter whether a female is a *ketanah*, *na'arah*, or *bogeret*, unless she is sick, "every virgin has blood." Even if her husband finds her tight, but she does not bleed, she is not a virgin.²²

2) If a man feels that his bride does not offer vaginal tightness (*dohak*) when having intercourse with her for the first time, he declares: "I found an open door," *petah patuah mazati*.²³ The Talmud, however, finds ambiguity in such a claim. On the one hand, according to Rabbi Nahman, the groom is believed because he would not prepare the wedding feast only to forgo it. In other words, the assumption is that if a man has something to lose, his accusation against his bride must be justified and the burden of proof is on her. On the other hand, the Talmud presents a seeming contradiction when it says that he is to be lashed because he had enough sexual experience to know about such things.²⁴ Rabbi Ahai tries to resolve the contradiction by differentiating between an unmarried man who is lashed for his previous sexual experience, but not a previously married man who is obviously sexually experienced. Raban Gamliel, however, raises the possibility that the man who feels an easy opening may have had intercourse by entering from the side or forcefully (*bemezid*),²⁵ offering an instance in which signs of virginity or their absence do not necessarily correlate with previous sexual experience.

Maimonides continues in this vein and reverses the talmudic reason why a man does not feel vaginal tightness by suggesting that he may have engaged in sex gently (*benahat*). Nevertheless, he tries to remove the ambiguity by raising the threshold for demonstrating virginity by asserting that if a bride is still a *ketanah* or a *na'arah* (not a *bogeret*), healthy or sick, every *na'arah* who is a virgin has a tight vagina, so that even if her husband finds blood, if her vagina is not tight, she is not considered a virgin.²⁶ For minors and *na'arot*, Maimonides insists

²² MT Ishut 11:12.

²³ TB Ketubbot 10a.

²⁴ TB Ketubbot 10a; MT Ishut 11:14.

²⁵ TB Ketubbot 10a.

²⁶ MT Ishut 11:12.

on both the appearance of blood and the feeling of tightness. Jacob ben Asher, who often follows Maimonides, reverts to the talmudic approach, saying that the husband did not feel the tightness because he engaged in intercourse using force.²⁷

3) The third test attempts to base a fictional sense of the body on a scientific control. First, two non-Jewish female servants, one a virgin and one who is not, are placed on a wine barrel. In the case of the one who is not a virgin, the smell of the wine should go through her body to her mouth; if she is a virgin the smell should not go through her. Then the Jewish woman is tested.²⁸ Later rabbis do not always include this test.²⁹ One later commentator explained that this test was suspended because wine was no longer strong enough for its aroma to carry through a woman's body if she were not a virgin.³⁰ Destiny becomes oenology.

Because continence and abstinence are not sufficient to insure the continued presence of the signs of virginity, even among the most chaste females, as Jewish females grow up, there are steps that their families can take to preempt any later accusations against them.

Mukkat Ez

The Mishnah and the Talmud discuss cases of the accidental injury to the vagina of a young girl, "hit by a stick," *mukkat ez*. Describing the highly ambiguous situation, some rabbis, Raban Gamliel and Rabbi Eliezer, ruled that if a female is found without signs of virginity at the time of her marriage and her husband claims she had intercourse with another man (*derusat ish*) but she claims that she is *mukkat ez*, she is believed. According to R. Joshua, her word is not considered reliable, but she may bring proof for her words, though the nature of the proof is not mentioned. Rabbis introduced additional physiological subtleties: If the accident happened prior to the age of three, according to rabbinic

²⁷ Tur EH 68.

²⁸ TB Ketubbot 10b; Yevamot 60b.

²⁹ Maimonides omits it (MT Ishut 11:9); Jacob ben Asher includes it; Joseph Caro omits it (Tur/SA EH 68); a later editor refers to it (SA EH 68.4).

³⁰ R. Moses ben Isaac Judah Lima, *Ḥelkat Meḥokek* and Samuel ben Uri Shraga Faibish, *Beit Shmuel*, on MT Ishut 11:9.

physiology, the hymen regenerates.³¹ This presumption of regeneration, in whole or in part, is gradually applied to older females.³²

Rabbis highlighted the ambiguity of *mukkat ez* by discussing whether a *mukkat ez* receives the full *ketubbah* amount of 200, according to Rabbi Meir, or, one *maneh/minah* (100), according to the Sages,³³ symbolic amounts without reference to the specific currency or to the more significant sums of the entire marriage settlement. Subsequent commentaries determined which of the two amounts she received based on whether she is believed or not.³⁴ Maimonides has it both ways by accepting the word of a *mukkat ez*, but only granting her a *ketubbah* of 100.

The Talmud describes a case of a *mukkat ez* as a virgin who falls from a chair which pierces her private parts or her hitting the ground which causes her to bleed (*beneihen shel matah tohot bekarka*).³⁵ During the Middle Ages, several formularies describing cases of *mukkat ez* circulated and were preserved in manuscript for repeated use in the Jewish community.³⁶ The stated purpose of such documents was to protect modest daughters of Israel from slander in the event that they do not present signs of virginity at the time of their marriage. The witnesses attest to a stereotypical course of events: she was playing, jumping, swinging, climbing, or getting on a box, her foot slipped, she fell, she cried and screamed because the pain was so great, but there was nothing to do to help her. Witnesses were summoned who saw her inconsolable condition and her dress covered with blood copiously flowing from her vagina (*makom hatenufah*, literally the place of foulness).

³¹ M. Niddah 5:4; TB Niddah 45a.

³² Today, because injuries to the vagina play a crucial role in the diagnosis of sexual abuse and the conviction of abusers, hymeneal trauma and regeneration has received some scientific and legal attention, although not without controversy. The main feature of recent discussions is that the hymen can be partially damaged and it can partially heal. See Martin A. Finkel, "Anogenital Trauma in Sexually Abused Children," *Pediatrics* 84 (1989): 317–322; Astrid Heppenstall-Heger, "Healing Patterns in Anogenital Injuries," *Pediatrics* 112 (2003): 829–837; US Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit, no. 97–1881, *Sherman Howard vs. Richard Gramely*, <http://laws.findlaw.com/7th/971881.html> (last access: October 1, 2007).

³³ M. Ketubbot 1:3.

³⁴ M. Ketubbot 1: 6–7 and TB Ketubbot 11b–13a and Rashi, TB Yevamot 59a.

³⁵ Cf. TB Gittin 76b and Rashi.

³⁶ For examples of *mukkat ez* documents, see the 1548 Aramaic attachment to the end of a 1525 manuscript commentary of Ibn Ezra's commentary on Genesis (probably from Provence); MS Paris, Oriental, no. 179; MS Jerusalem, no. 4166; MS Jerusalem, no. 2007, fols. 171a–173a; MS UCLA no. 960, bx 1 4/2; MS Jerusalem, no. 32791, fols. 9b–10a.

These blank legal forms already include very specific details, such as the girl's age and the prominent detail that the first to be summoned to the scene were the witnesses.

One text offers a paean to the virginity of the daughters of Israel and it takes one of the most sexually problematic passages of the Bible, the text from Esther in which it seems that she slept with the king, the biblical passage that is often referred to as the "beauty pageant," and converts it into a tribute to the purity of Jewish women. It quotes the beginning of the passage: "When the turn of each young woman to go to the king arrived,"³⁷ but omits what follows: she would spend twelve months in the house of the women preparing herself with perfumes and oils, then would go in the evening and leave in the morning and report to the house of the concubines (*pilegshim*) to await word from the king. This *mukkat ez* text, however, understands "king" not as Ahashuarus, but rather as the bride's beloved husband, who finds her gates locked, sealed, and closed. It states that a stranger never got close to her and that nobody would dare to approach the distinguished, pure, and holy daughters of Israel. It goes on to say that when something untoward happens that could raise suspicion, such as a stick, a stone, or another object, it is necessary to minimize any malicious talk that could be generated and to put forward the truth. Rabbinic morality becomes the biblical text.³⁸

In Padua in 1582, Solomon Pelestrina appeared before the three judges of the community in a panic because of what had happened to his daughter Bela, four years old and past the traditional age of hymeneal regeneration. Based on a record that he already recorded in his prayerbook, he described how the young girl climbed up on a box to play, slipped, and hit her vagina on the sharp corner of the box and ruptured her hymen on her dress. In this case, as in others,³⁹ for reasons of modesty the court received the testimony from two old, important women, perhaps midwives, Rosa della Comara and Sorlena, the widow of Aaron Rava, who were present and saw the blood flowing while the young girl was lying on her bed. The court recorded their testimony for posterity.⁴⁰

³⁷ Esther 2:12.

³⁸ MS Jerusalem 2007, fols. 171a–173a.

³⁹ Minz, no. 6.

⁴⁰ Daniel Carpi, ed. *Pinkas Vaad K"K Padua 1* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1973), 457.

In another case, in 1528, a young girl was up in an attic searching for leaven before Passover. In his report of the case, Azriel Diena wrote that this is what women usually do (*kederekh hanashim*), despite the fact that in the same document he discussed a rabbinic controversy over the suitability of women and minors to fulfill tasks like this because of their lack of trustworthiness and their laziness, but are allowed to do so in matters in which they had intimate knowledge (*beyadah*).⁴¹ While searching, this unnamed girl fell off the ladder onto a piece of wood and her vagina was pierced, her blood flowed, and her mother ran around to find two or three modest women to serve as witnesses to what happened. They came, inspected the damage, and verified that the girl was telling the truth. They then went to Diena to testify that she was accidentally wounded and had not been sexually intimate with a man (*derusat ish*). They appealed to Diena for their testimony to remain valid when the young girl gets married.

Diena supported their request with great legal subtlety. He raised the possibility that these women witnesses might not be acceptable if their testimony involved a matter from the Torah rather than rabbinic enactments, invoking the principle that “the rabbis believe her in a matter of rabbinics” (*Hemanuha rabanan bederabanan*). Diena emphasizes the rabbinic rather than the biblical aspects of the case, stating that the Torah does not contain the category of *mukkat ez*, and that the *ketubbah* amount is rooted in rabbinic law. He did not mention that the case could easily have been seen as biblical because the Torah does deal with a woman who is found not to be a virgin on her wedding night,⁴² and that some rabbis saw the *ketubbah* as biblical,⁴³ a discussion that he reported elsewhere in his own work.⁴⁴ Diena concluded by stating that he is writing so that the testimony of these women will be valid forever, but added unflattering images of women suggesting that they may become rebellious or that they might be spinning in the moon, gossiping, or strutting in arrogance,⁴⁵ traditional negative characterizations of women. Other rabbis noted that in fact such cases are brought to their attention for judgment rather than to women.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Tos. Eruvin 59a, “*Utehumim*.”

⁴² Deuteronomy 22:13–26.

⁴³ TB Ketubbot 10a.

⁴⁴ Azriel Diena, *She'elot uteshwot*, ed. Ya'akov Boksenboim (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1977), no. 155.

⁴⁵ Diena, no. 137.

⁴⁶ “*Mukkat Ez*,” Paḥad Yizḥak.

Birth on Friday

Another stratagem for fending off future charges against a female for not showing signs of virginity on her wedding night was, according to one unnamed Italian rabbi, for a written record to be preserved testifying to the fact that she was born on a Friday. He explains the concern that Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, who influences the day of the week named after her, Venerdi, has a detrimental effect on the sexual behavior of a girl born on that day and, when she marries, she might not appear to be a virgin or might not be one. Italian contemporaries saw the potential for the influence of Venus on everybody between the ages of fourteen and twenty-two,⁴⁷ well past the age when rabbinic tests for virginity were reliable. According to this rabbi, it is the practice, based on earlier precedents—but admittedly none from the Talmud, Jewish law, ethics, medicine, or even non-Jewish medical works—to keep a written record that a daughter was born on Friday. He suggests that although this document is not legally necessary, he errs on the side of caution in advocating it in order to prevent future slander and litigation. He stresses that it is necessary to be particularly vigilant concerning the supervision of the behavior of girls born on Friday because it is more likely that something untoward might happen to them. Thus, he concludes in cryptic terms that it should be no deep secret as to why such girls should not be married to ignoramuses but to modest experts who will better understand this matter. With such a document available to her, a bride is protected from a claim against her by her husband that she had been promiscuous before their marriage. The rabbi maintains the ambiguity of such considerations of virginity by stating that the influence of Venus is not necessarily always consistent because he saw cases in which girls who were born on Friday did bleed when they lost their virginity as well as other cases in which they did not. Such documents, as well as those certifying *mukkot ez* (plural), serve as insurance policies for all women who might have been born on Friday and might need protection later in life.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Fiona Harris Stoertz, "Sex and the Medieval Adolescent," in *The Premodern Teenager*, 227.

⁴⁸ "Na'arah im noldah," Paḥad Yizḥak.

Magic and Prayer

Magic texts show another way to deal with the ambiguity of signs of virginity by offering formulas to restore them and to eliminate any cause for suspicion of previous sexual activity, offering the equivalent of the modern hymenoplasty, the surgical reconstruction of the hymen. The formulas are written in the masculine voice which may mean that these were designed to be used either by fathers for their daughters, by men for their lovers, or by expert practitioners for their clients. Two formulas offer an opportunity to restore, or at least to give the appearance of, the two main features of virginity, a mucous-varicose membrane and the sensation of tightness. According to one formula, the man takes, among other ingredients, a brain immersed in a mucous membrane and puts it in the vagina. As a result, the female appears as if she were a virgin. According to the other, the man takes the skins of golden dried pomegranates and crushed glass, cooks them in water or in strong vinegar. After inserting them in her vagina, it turns over several times a day and returns to its original taut condition.⁴⁹ Such magic formulas heighten the ambiguity of virginity by further undermining the connection between signs of virginity and sexual experience and by providing stratagems for defeating tests for it.

In a similar way, a rabbi, Azriel Diena, prays that God will be with an unmarried female and defend her when she marries, or that He will return her to a state of virginity with the help of Piskon, Itmon, and Sigron, alternative names for the angel Gabriel, the closer, the sealer, and the shutter,⁵⁰ and she will not be not be a source of gossip.⁵¹

Consummation

These procedures were in anticipation of the moment of consummation (*be'ilat mizvah*). In rabbinic discourse a verse from Isaiah: "those who have intercourse with you make you" is read as "a woman does not form a covenant except with one who made her a vessel."⁵²

⁴⁹ MS JTSA, Mic. 1636, fols. 15a and 14a.

⁵⁰ TB Sanhedrin 44b.

⁵¹ Diena, no. 137.

⁵² Isaiah 54:5; M. Sanhedrin 22:2.

During the Middle Ages, Jews developed a blessing for consummating a marriage and finding the hymen, which in its various versions includes the following: “Blessed be you Lord our God king of the universe who places a nut (*zag*),⁵³ or a couple, in the Garden of Eden, the lily of the valley, without a stranger ruling over a sealed well, therefore, a lovely woman (and a charming one, or holy seed), has guarded her purity and did not violate the law, blessed are You Lord, who chose the seed of Abraham (the one who chooses Abraham and his seed after him who blesses the Jewish people).” The blessing was either said by the man alone, over a cup of wine or liquor, or by a gathering of the wedding guests. Some, including Maimonides, rejected the blessing entirely as a blessing for naught with no basis in the Talmud and suggested omitting at least the divine name. Gradually this blessing fell into desuetude.⁵⁴

The consummation of a Jewish marriage is intimate, yet not completely private. The couple is, or at least supposed to be, bound by a range of laws, customs, and practices connected with the loss of virginity, tests for previous chastity or lack thereof, and concerns about menstruation. Each member of the couple as well as other witnesses have a role to play. How often these roles were actually played is impossible to ascertain. The discourse, like that concerning so many matters, is preserved in traditional tropes, occasionally with slight variations that might indicate local changes or longstanding differences in law, custom, or practice. The detail of some cases may indicate that the discussion is, in part, a theoretical exercise based on formulas and hypothetical situations with exaggerations to bring out certain points.

Separation

Part of the discourse about virginity is driven by the paradoxical concern that on consummation the absence of any blood may indicate the lack of virginity and the presence of blood may indicate menst-

⁵³ Cf. Song of Songs 6:11.

⁵⁴ On the blessing for consummation, see Ruth Langer, “The Birkat Betulin: A study of the Jewish celebration of bridal virginity,” *Proceedings, American Academy of Jewish Research* 61 (1995): 53–94; *Ha'enziklopedia hatalmudit le'inyanei halakhah* (Jerusalem: Yad Harav Herzog, 2002) “*Be'ilat Mizvah*,” col. 66.

ation, a source of impurity, with which a man may not have contact.⁵⁵ Therefore, some rabbis require the couple to separate for a week at some point during or immediately after they consummate their marriage (*poresh, lifrosh, hafrashah*), with much discussion as to when consummation ends and when separation begins. One school of thought goes further and says that even if the bride is a prepubescent minor and she did not see any blood, nevertheless, because the force of the initial intercourse produced a wound, which there cannot be without blood, even if it is as small as a grain of mustard and covered by semen, she must count seven clean days before returning to have intercourse with her new husband.⁵⁶ Hence, she produced neither hymeneal blood, which might be confused with menstrual blood, nor menstrual blood, but a third category of blood, the blood of a wound caused by intercourse, and because of concerns of pollution, they must refrain from intercourse for a week. Others are lenient in this matter by allowing a girl in this category to continue intercourse without separating. Some rabbis offer similar leeway in the case of a *mukkat ez*. Because her hymen will not regenerate, there cannot be any hymeneal blood that could be mixed with menstrual blood. Whatever the answers may be, the questions now deal with purity and the ambiguities created by the possible mixing of categories: hymeneal and menstrual blood, semen and blood, intercourse and menstruation.

Consummation in Italy

All the issues involved in the stages of development, the tests of virginity, the preemptive strategies to fend off accusations, and the circumstances of consummation and separation appear in a case from late seventeenth century Italy. Rebecca, an elderly, post menopausal virgin and *mukkat ez*, who, after examining herself for seven days and not finding menstrual blood, married Reuben. The question is whether, after seeing no blood on consummation, he still must separate from her out

⁵⁵ Today some Jewish women use birth control pills several months before their weddings to help postpone the onset of their periods until the day after the wedding.

⁵⁶ SA YD 193; EH 62; TB Niddah 5a.

of a concern for menstrual purity. Three prominent rabbis discussed whether after having intercourse for the first time a *mukkat ez*, who theoretically has no hymeneal blood to confuse with menstrual blood, is in the same category as a virgin, who might have hymeneal blood, or as a *bogeret*, who might not have hymeneal blood, and must count seven clean days. This case, real or imaginary, brings together all the factors that would make it highly unlikely for a bride who has never had sexual intercourse to bleed on her wedding night.

Shabbetai mi-Luccio, a rabbi writing from Lugo, asserted that there is no reason to be stringent in the case of a post menopausal *mukkat ez* because she will produce neither menstrual nor hymeneal blood on consummation. The situation of *bogrot* (plural) is different because although there is no presumption a *bogeret* will necessarily bleed or offer any physical resistance and there can be no claim against her for not being a virgin, because some *bogrot* may nevertheless bleed, all *bogrot*, even if they see no blood must separate after consummating their marriages to prevent the mixing of blood and the accompanying impurity. A *mukkat ez*, however, he presumes, does not produce hymeneal blood so he is not concerned with issues of mixing of blood. Shabbetai concludes that there is no reason for Reuben to separate from Rebecca, a *mukkat ez*, after they consummate their marriage.

Against him, Isaac Lampronti of Padua (1679–1756) claimed that perhaps in this case of *mukkat ez* in which the issue of hymeneal blood might not be relevant rabbis might be lenient, but he is concerned that sexual passion might stimulate Rebecca to discharge at least a small drop of menstrual blood (*dam himud*) that might become mixed with hymeneal blood or semen. Invoking the talmudic maxim, but for different circumstances, “All penises (*ezba’ot*) are not the same,”⁵⁷ Lampronti suggests that when a *mukkat ez* has intercourse for the first time, the penis (*shamash*) might not press (*dohek*) or enter in a narrow place, and, although the female did not feel any pain, it is impossible to have a completed initial act of sexual intercourse without the slightest wound and there can be no wound without blood. In other words, blood was surely dislodged, and because it might be mixed with menstrual blood her husband must separate from her for a week. Lampronti reinforces the possibility of a woman who is not a virgin producing blood on intercourse by asserting that experience

⁵⁷ TB Niddah 66a.

demonstrates on a daily basis that when old women who had become widows at a young age remarry and resume intercourse later in life, they might return to their former youthful condition, which includes menstruation and seeing blood on intercourse. Lampronti suggests that it is equally plausible that a small minority of *mukkot ez* experience a regeneration of their hymens and a narrowing of their vaginas. Although he previously stated that a *mukkat ez* is a female whose vagina was damaged after the age of three when it could no longer regenerate, he now moves beyond this traditional age limit and attempts to base Jewish practice on miraculous tales and anecdotes that surpass the limits of rabbinic biological understanding in order to advocate his goal of universal separation after consummation.

Lampronti's desire for parity is ultimately not between women but rather men, as his argument also shifts to talking about penises, his arguments work to ensure that all men without exception separate from their wives for the first week of marriage. Finally, he adds that a prepubescent minor, who has not yet seen any traces of menstrual blood, who bleeds on consummation, and who certainly has produced hymeneal and not menstrual blood, must nevertheless separate because it is possible to confuse hymeneal blood for menstrual. So, even if it is certain that the blood oozing from such a prepubescent minor is pure, that is hymeneal and not menstrual, he asserts that rabbinic sages did not want to make any distinction between different types of blood—though in rabbinic literature they are presented as being experts in this!⁵⁸ Thus, he equates minors, brides, virgins, and *mukkot ez* and opts for a stringent position concerning them all.⁵⁹ Lampronti acknowledges that in this uncertain case concerning a *mukkat ez* a lenient case could be made, but he opts for a stringent response because nothing is lost by being stringent and because Israel is a holy people who are bound to follow the commandment of separation and to shun anything that seems inappropriate. He, therefore, has posited a scenario in which the two categories of blood might become mixed and to avoid any chance of pollution he wants to impose a seven day period of post-consummation separation for newlyweds.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ TB Niddah 20b.

⁵⁹ Cf. Isserles, SA YD 193.

⁶⁰ Solomon ibn Adret, *Torat Habayit Hakaẓar* 7:2 (Berlin: Itzik Heilperon, 1771), fol. 35a.

In reply, Luccio acknowledges that nothing is lost by following a strict approach, but he affirms that in establishing halakhah it is necessary to be lenient. He rejects the ideas that sexual passion might stimulate menstruation in a post-menstrual woman and that *mukkot ez* can experience a regeneration of signs of virginity because “the occurrence of miracles is not proof” (*en ma’aseh nisim re’ayah*). He further challenges Lampronti by saying that even if menstrual blood could be stimulated by intercourse, in which case the couple would have to separate and count seven clean days, in this case because Rebecca examined herself for seven days prior to her wedding and she saw no blood after intercourse on her wedding night, she did not have to separate from him. If these stringent measures apply to Rebecca, a post-menopausal *mukkat ez*, then they should apply to widows as well, and they usually do not. He wants to show that what applies to a widow, not the miraculous category of a widow who begins to bleed on intercourse when she remarried, and not the case of a *bogeret* who loses signs of virginity on her own by the age of twelve and a half, should also apply to a *mukkat ez*. The question is not about a particular female but rather whether a minority of females who might not conform to the specifications of their category determine the restrictions placed on all. If some *na’arot*, *bogrot*, *mukkot ez*, widows, and post-menopausal women do bleed on consummation, perhaps even due to a wound, do all women have to separate after consummation? In other words, can some newly married couples sleep together during the period of the traditional seven day feast after their wedding or should there be one standard for all?

Luccio reports that a *bogeret*, even though her signs of virginity may not appear, has a full price *ketubbah* of 200 and that of a *mukkat ez* and a divorcee is discounted to 100. A *mukkat ez* is not considered as a virgin but rather as a woman whose vagina is fully open (*pitḥah patuah livahah*), associating the physical condition of the vagina with assumptions about sexuality. Luccio contributes to the ambiguity of Rebecca’s position by asserting, on the one hand, that not even a minority of *mukkot ez* has any signs of virginity left, but, on the other hand, he is limiting the categories of females who must separate after consummation to only virgins, for whom there can be no wound without blood even if penetration was easy and painless (*hashamash nikhnas beshalom beli paga vehi lo hirgishah be’azmah shum za’ar ukhe’ev*) and to *bogrot* who actually saw blood. He explicitly rejects the view that due to the bleeding of a small minority of *bogrot* and *mukkot ez*, it is necessary to be cautious about

them all.⁶¹ He associates the signs of sexual experience, an open vagina and a lack of bleeding on penetration, with virginity, although in both cases the women are treated as if they were not virgins (viz. a *mukkat ez* gets a lower ketubbah amount and a women who does not bleed still must separate for a week).

The immediate beneficiaries of Luccio might be Rebecca and Reuben, who gained an extra week of sexual activity together, but there was another more pervasive reason for his advocating this position. Luccio's position, while it seems to heighten awareness of the possibility that *mukkot ez* might have been sexually active, which seems to undermine the whole premise of their condition being due to an accident and not promiscuity, it also removes an entire class of women from having to defend their virginity. Whether they bleed or not on consummation, they are potentially free from any possible stigmas for promiscuity. In this ambiguous situation, Luccio has taken Lampronti's concerns with menstrual purity and shifted the discussion to one involving legal subtleties, perhaps fictions, which expand the category of *mukkot ez* as a recognized group whose signs of virginity, or rather lack of them, are no longer an issue when they marry both in terms of tests for virginity and the need to separate after consummation.

In his reply, Lampronti seeks to undermine Luccio by suggesting that a *mukkat ez* might retain all or part of her tokens of virginity. The stick might have only penetrated her external womb (*rehem hūzoni*) which he also calls "vagina," and not her internal womb. If this is the case she will bleed and it will be necessary for her new husband to separate from her.⁶²

Charges of Non-Virginity made by the Husband in Italy

In one case described by Yehiel Trabot, Moses mi-Marosa reports that on their wedding night he did not find his new, unnamed wife to be a virgin.⁶³ They had intercourse three times, and each time neither he nor women witnesses could find any evidence of blood of virginity on her robe (*halukah*) or the bed sheets, offering evidence that witnesses were called upon at some consummations. In the course of his response,

⁶¹ Rashba, *Torat Habayit Hakaẓar* 2:7.

⁶² Cf. Fano, no. 126.

⁶³ Yehiel Trabot, MS Jerusalem 8^o 194, no. 132.

relying on rabbinic precedent,⁶⁴ Yehiel Trabot describes two of the three traditional tests for virginity, the woman bleeding and the man feeling resistance, but he does not mention the wine barrel test. Trabot asserts that a man may make a claim against a woman for not having bled on her wedding night, because, “every virgin has blood, whether she is a minor, a *na‘arah*, or an adult.” He continues with more rabbinic physiology: every virgin who has not reached the age of maturity, whether a minor or a *na‘arah*, whether healthy or sick, has a tight opening. Trabot radically lowers the threshold for accusations against many categories of females, but maintains some distinction involving *bogrot*: if they are virgins they must bleed, but they do not necessarily have to have a tight opening.⁶⁵

Examination in Italy

The process of examining a bride is seen in an Italian case involving betrothal by means of sexual intercourse. According to the Mishnah, one of the three traditional methods for betrothing a woman, along with money and a document, is sexual intercourse.⁶⁶ Subsequent Jewish tradition offers mixed reactions to this practice, but it persisted.⁶⁷ Hannah, the daughter of Solomon me-Urbino (Accedali), had for many years planned to marry Ovadia, the son of Israel mi-Cividale, against the wishes of her relatives. On Monday, March 17, 1511, Ovadia brought Raphael ben Samuel me-Arenia (Orenio) and Matzliah ben Elhanan mi-Tofino to a courtyard of the Duke of Urbino and asked them to stand by. He took a totally clean white sheet (*ze'if*), Hannah walked past them, they saw her and recognized her, and she entered a room accompanied by a matron (*matronita*). The matron called for Ovadia to join them in the room. He told the two men that they are witnesses to his intention to betroth Hannah by means of sexual intercourse. In the room, the matron and Ovadia encouraged Hannah to participate in the act (*medabberim al libbah ... lekayem et hakorbah*). Shortly afterwards the matron left the room and Ovadia and Hannah

⁶⁴ TB Ketubbot 9a–12a; TP Ketubbot 25a 1:1, 28c 4:4; MT Ishut 11:12; Tur/BY EH 68; cf. Fano, no. 126.

⁶⁵ MT Ishut 11:12.

⁶⁶ M. Kiddushin 1:1.

⁶⁷ TB Kiddushin 12b, cf. Yevamot 52a.

were alone with the door shut. After a half an hour Hannah left, the witnesses identified her, and they immediately entered the room. There they found Ovadia alone, the sheet with stains of blood and white (*loven*) mixed together, and nobody else, nor did they find another sheet. They identified the design (*teviot*) of the sheet as the same as that which Ovadia showed them earlier.⁶⁸

Among Italian Jews (*lo'azim*) of Padua during the fifteenth century, five women—and it had to be five of them together—examined the bride. They scrutinized (*meshamshemot*) the sheets and the bride's garment (*halukah*) in order to find any deceit (*rema'ut*) on the part of the bride and her associates (*kat*). In other words, they were not only looking for blood but also for evidence of stratagems employed by the couple, or one of them, to beat the system. Such inspections may seem degrading and intrusive, but they offered each spouse protection against the possible wiles of the other, pointing to the range of tactics involved in virginity dramas between spouses and the possible adversarial relationship between them from the start.⁶⁹

In one case, following local custom, on the morrow of the wedding of Yotlein, the daughter of Yekutiel (or Koplo/Kaufflein) ben Mahararsh, with Lelman, the honored and mighty women of the town, led by the esteemed and scholarly women (*havertot nekhbadot*), the wives of sages and teachers, *rabaniot*, as well as the mother of the groom, went to the couple to examine the bed sheet for the blood of virginity. Afterwards, when the rumor began to circulate that Yotlein had been six months pregnant at the time of her marriage, Lelman's family wanted to investigate. They sought the testimony of the distinguished women who had examined the sheet. The main witnesses were Olek,⁷⁰ the wife of Rabbi Zanvil, and Mingeit, the widow of Rabbi Anshel Siegel. Lelmen was notified in writing that he or a representative may attend the disposition of the evidence, but he declined. The women testified according to the rules of evidence, under threat of excommunication, that, based on their past experiences in such matters, they saw the blood of virginity. For her part, Yotlein, not remaining silent during these deliberations, explained that she did give birth early in her marriage, but that she had produced an unformed and unviable fetus in the fourth month of pregnancy—although the document heightens the

⁶⁸ MS Jerusalem 8°, no. 194.70.

⁶⁹ Minz, no. 6cf.; TB Ketubbot 12a.

⁷⁰ *Alef vav lamed kuf*.

ambiguity of the situation by stating that she became pregnant in Sivan and gave birth in Kislev, a period of five or six months. Nevertheless, she claimed that she had sufficiently demonstrated her virginity to midwives and others at the time of the marriage.

Judah Minz of Padua (1408–1506), a relative of Yotlein's, discussed the case on Yotlein's behalf. He recognizes that the rabbi who sent him the case was a relative on the side of the man, making this a case in which each rabbi had personal interest to defend the honor of his family. Minz asserts Yotlein was destroyed (*nisefet*) without a trial. Minz questions the rumor in terms of its reliability, substance, procedure, and motive. Such a rumor has no legal standing and goes against the common assumption that women behave properly, do not have intercourse when they are impure, and are virgins when they are married, an assertion belied by some of his own responsa.⁷¹ Minz finds the rumor to be strange because if Yotlein had been in an advanced state of pregnancy, her husband would have noticed: a person does not drink from a cup unless he has examined it, seen it, and is satisfied. Hence, he challenges the view that she has to be divorced or to forfeit her *ketubbah* or *tosefet*, sources of support should her marriage end. In this case not only is a rumor insufficient to convict her, but, unlike in matters of adultery, so is circumstantial evidence. Minz insists on the extreme standard that in order for Yotlein to be convicted, witnesses must view the actual penetration, like an eyeliner stick in the tube (*kemakhhol besheforet*). He notes that all the testimony is not yet in, and, even if it were and it could be demonstrated that the fetus was formed in terms of hair and nails, it would not be considered viable until 30 days after birth. He also dismisses the likelihood of Yotlein having become pregnant because she is not an idiot (*shoftanit*) and certainly could have used birth control. Minz concludes with a strong defense of the sworn testimony of women, who are normally considered unacceptable as witnesses. He states the general principle that one is believed in matters in which one and no one else has direct involvement, such as a midwife in matters of birth or a woman testifying about blasphemies (*herufim*) and other matters which take place in the women's synagogue. He buttresses his arguments with examples from rabbinic literature.⁷² So too in this matter the women who were asked to testify concerning Yotlein's virginity are reliable.

⁷¹ Minz, no. 5.

⁷² TB Ketubbot 27a–b; Agudah, Kiddushin, chapter 2.

There is no reason to cast aspersions on them and anybody who does so should be whipped. Minz offers another instance of destiny becoming biology in the hands of a sympathetic rabbi.⁷³

Virginity on Trial

Rabbinic discussions assume that men might seek a remedy in a court against their new wives if they suspected that they were not virgins and establish the principle that a man should have access to the court the day after his wedding so that he can make his case against his bride before his anger cools down and so that the court could immediately summon witnesses.⁷⁴ Because in small towns the court usually sat only twice a week, on Monday and on Thursday, in order that court hearings could take place on the day after the wedding, the Mishnah encourages the marriages of virgins to take place on Wednesdays so that a man who had accusations to make about his new wife's lack of virginity could appear in court on Thursday.⁷⁵ The Talmud later raised the question of why, if court was also held on Mondays, could marriages not take place on Sundays. The Talmud suggests that because of the need for a minimum of three days preparation for a wedding banquet, the Sabbath would interfere with a Sunday wedding.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the Talmud raises the possibility that if the court sat every day of the week, weddings could take place every day, including Friday with the possibility of a court hearing on Saturday,⁷⁷ but, nevertheless, some rabbis discouraged marriage on Sundays and Fridays.⁷⁸ Medieval and early modern sources show that weddings did take place on Friday.⁷⁹ Some rabbinic passages try to soften the need for a virginity trial and offer other reasons why weddings should not take place on Fridays. They express concern that consummation on Friday might violate the

⁷³ Minz, no. 6.

⁷⁴ Rashi, TB Ketubbot 2a.

⁷⁵ M. Ketubbot 1:1.

⁷⁶ TB Ketubbot 2a; Rambam on M. Ketubbot 1:1; MT Ishut 10:14; Maggid Mishnah Ishut 10:14.

⁷⁷ Hiddushei Haramban, Ketubbot 2a.

⁷⁸ TB Ketubbot 3a.

⁷⁹ Maggid Mishnah Ishut 10:14; MS Moscow Guensberg 356/14 fols. 207a–b; Leon Modena, *Iggerot rabbi Yehudah aryeḥ miModena*, ed. Ya'akov Boksenboim (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1984), no. 286; Y. Yoel, "Ketubbot me'italiah bignizei bet hasefarim," *Kiryat Sefer* 22 (1944–1945): 266–267.

Sabbath by producing a wound.⁸⁰ Others rabbis claim that, because the betrothal and the wedding take place at the same time, there is no time for a betrothed female to have intercourse with another man, and men have no need to turn to the courts for a trial, there is no longer concern about Friday weddings.⁸¹ Others suggest that because the numerical value of *herayon*, pregnancy, produces a gestation period of 271 days, though it can last up to 273, if marriages took place on or after Wednesdays, the baby would not be born on the Sabbath and there would be no need to desecrate it, a view repeated later in Italy.⁸² Numerology becomes destiny.

Masculinity on Trial

A female's virginity at the time of consummation is ultimately based on the ability of the man to test her, which requires not only a sense of what to expect in terms of bleeding and tightness, but also the ability to experience it. The failure of a female to show signs of virginity such as blood and tightness may be due to his inability to produce them. Anxiety, inexperience, or a disability may make a man temporarily or permanently impotent. One response to failure on the man's part, in order to cover his wounded pride, or as a further way to display his sexual ignorance, was to level an accusation against his wife of having been promiscuous or having financial motives, or to beat her.⁸³ In elaborating cases in which a woman is divorced and receives her ketubbah amount, the Mishnah includes her saying, "Heaven is between me and you."⁸⁴ Subsequent rabbis saw this as an accusation by a woman of her husband's impotence, particularly sterility, due to the inability to sufficiently ejaculate, a charge that may have been difficult for her to prove and that raised questions of her reliability and motives for divorce, such as financial gain or the opportunity to take up with another man.⁸⁵ Some considered impotence as penile erection dysfunction as is seen in one case in Italy. Paccina, the daughter

⁸⁰ TB Ketubbot 4a–b.

⁸¹ Kolbo, no. 75.

⁸² Niddah 38a–38b; Minz, no. 6.

⁸³ Dena, nos. 125 and 129.

⁸⁴ Nedarim 11:12.

⁸⁵ Shmuel Shilo, "Impotence as a Ground for Divorce: To the end of the period of the rishonim," *Jewish Law Annual* 4 (1981): 127–143). K.R. Stow, "The Knotty Problem

of Vidal di-Camerino from the La Marche region around Ancona, married Reuben mi-Lucca in 1524 and they lived in Bologna. Two years later, Paccina, laden with household property, left for a wedding in La Marche and while there claimed that she never wanted to return to Reuben because he was impotent (*ki yishan al beto velo ya'amod*) and incapable of satisfying her. She asked to be free from him and to be able to return to her own family where she could mourn her virginity. Reuben denied the accusations and accused her of trying to abscond with his property. The rabbi treating the case, Azriel Diena, wanted Paccina to remain with Reuben for ten years until she could make a claim against him based on infertility. The rabbi hoped that during this time she would be rewarded when God enables her husband to have an erection. In a telling moment, realizing the potential options available to Paccina, like other women, because of the plasticity of the rabbinic system, he said: "Lest they learn from the words of the rabbis how to lie." Diena himself drew on the flexibility of the rabbinic system and information about women's bodies to shift the blame from Reuben to Paccina by telling about some women's vaginas that were so tight that it took their husbands up to three years to consummate the marriage and, if this is the case, then she can wait. Ultimately, with the intervention of more rabbis, Reuben conceded that he had been temporarily impotent because of magicians and sorcerers, but God had freed him and enabled him to perform properly. There was still no resolve of the highly contentious and longstanding discussion about whether an impotent man can be forced to divorce his wife or not. In another case, from around 1570, Ruth, the daughter of Rabbi Boaz Barukh, married her cousin, an unnamed man. After two years of marriage, she wanted a divorce because her husband both beat her cruelly on a regular basis, for no reason, often with weapons, and he was impotent, incapable of an erection or even the first stage of penetration. She turned to Joseph Treves who tried to warn her husband and his father to treat her better, but they refused. He finally had Ruth and her husband live in another house for a six-month trial reconciliation during which she was sheltered, and he was treated. The first step was to ascertain what this man's actual sexual abilities and limitations were. Physicians treated him with drugs, sorcerers provided him with potions, and, on his own, he took the Spanish Fly,

of Shem Tov Soporto: Male Honor, Marital Initiation, and Disciplinary Structures in Mid-Sixteenth Century Jewish Rome," *Italia* 13–15 (2001): 137–151.

cantaride, an aphrodisiac.⁸⁶ This is all in line with books of Hebrew remedies from Italy that provide procedures for men to overcome their sexual dysfunction, especially at the time of consummation, such as rubbing the brain of a raven on the penis.⁸⁷ When the dysfunction was attributed to magic, the man was instructed to take some sort of animal by its mouth from a barrel and put its mouth in the woman's mouth and lie with her.⁸⁸ In terms of Ruth's husband, they tried everything to arouse him, including adulterous flirtations and even simulating animal intercourse under the covers with non-Jewish women, whose husbands, the reader is assured, had consented to their involvement. This intrusive investigation showed that, despite rumors, he was really not impotent and that people had seen "his sheaf rise and stand," but that he was of a cold and weak constitution that could not be changed, that he was likely to hit, throw, kick, and bite like a donkey, and that members of the family were afraid to get near him. In treating the case, Moses Provençal also relied on God to help the man perform properly, if not, the woman might receive an automatic divorce (*im lo yukhal lah yehiyeh get*). To facilitate the divorce, Provençal focused on the fact that the husband had made and broken a vow to divorce his wife. His case was based on the acceptable grounds of forcing the man to fulfill his vow rather than his being crazy, violent, or impotent. Impotence did not always lead to a charge against the woman for promiscuity, but in these cases it did provoke the adversarial aspects of consummation and sexuality, especially the potential for husbands to use cruelty when it was they who were incapable of functioning sexually.

Adultery as a State of Mind

Cases of adultery, especially those in which children were produced while a woman was married to another man, offer a similar range of ambivalent responses by men. As the Bible offers a test for virginity at the time of marriage, it also has one for a married woman who secreted herself with another man, without witnesses, and was not

⁸⁶ Moses Provençal, *She'elot utshuvot*, 1–2, ed. Avraham Yosef Yani (Jerusalem: Mak-hon or-hamizrah, 1989), nos. 102, 103, and 77.

⁸⁷ JTSA 1625, no. 95.

⁸⁸ JTSA 1636, fol. 11a, *heh, shin, tet, vav, peh, yod, nun, yod, yod, vav*.

caught. It also raises the possibilities that she betrayed her husband and became impure, or did not become impure, and he became jealous.⁸⁹ Hence, this is a situation of sexual ambiguity in which the boundaries between the woman, her husband, and the man she was with are not clear. The biblical text offers a magical test to seek clarity in the matter. The husband brings her to the priest who prepares a special sacrifice and concoction. In the course of the procedure, her hair is mussed up or uncovered (*peri'at roshah*). She must drink a potion made from holy water, bitter water, dust from the ground of the sanctuary, and the text of an oath containing her fate. If she is impure, her thigh will sag and her belly distend and she will be cursed among the people. If she is pure, she will retain seed and give birth. The magical and procedural aspects of this test raise more questions than they answer. At the heart of the matter is the question of whether this ceremony is a way for a jealous husband to humiliate his wife in public, or if it is a way for a priest to intervene and to offer an ambiguous, perhaps benign, procedure to shelter her. Significantly, the husband is no longer involved in the procedure, and the priest brings her to the holiest precincts next to the altar, another significant blurring of religious boundaries for a woman, perhaps one who is impure. Subsequent rabbis are aware of the difficulties with taking the suspected woman to this prominent location and in their presentations they have her instead brought to the altar at the Nicanor Gate, between the Women's Court and the Court of the Jewish People and then removed from the courtyard altogether lest she begin to menstruate. In its treatment of this procedure, the Mishnah adds more ambiguity to the procedure. On the one hand, it tries to limit the applicability of the test by introducing witnesses, warnings, and judicial procedures. The procedure is further ameliorated by the protective power that the merit of Torah study offers a woman. For this reason, some rabbis (Ben Azai) wanted women to learn Torah. Further, it minimizes the punishment of a wife suspected by her husband of secreting herself with another man because, when he divorces her, he grants her ketubbah amount, granting her freedom and full assets. The Mishnah undermines the procedure by stating that just as the bitter waters test the woman, they test the man, in effect questioning the double standard. Finally, the

⁸⁹ Numbers 5:11–31.

Mishnah announces that the entire test had become obsolete because so many people were committing adultery (*mena'afim*). On the other hand, other rabbis try to heighten the severity of the punishment of a woman for adultery. Some (Rabbi Eliezer) were afraid that if men taught women Torah they would use it as a prophylactic against divine punishment for adultery which would be tantamount to encouraging their promiscuity. The mishnaic procedure also involved emphatic humiliation of the woman for her promiscuity: the priest grabbing her clothing, perhaps ripping or unbuttoning them and exposing her breast, messing up her hair, covering her in black, removing all jewelry, putting a rope around her breasts, and exposing her to public view, a procedure which culminates with her thigh and belly exploding before she dies. Her presence is a curse among her people which must be extirpated.⁹⁰

This ambiguity continued in Italy. On the one hand, men, husbands and rabbis, acquiesced with knowledge of adultery by women, and used various fanciful stratagems to protect their honor and to save face by remaining silent about what they suspected or knew. These stratagems included blurring the boundaries of marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth, by recalculating the length of pregnancy—it could last up to a year;⁹¹ debating the exact dates of betrothal, marriage, and pregnancy; raising their wives' illegitimate children as their own; redefining adultery; questioning Jewish control over such matters; raising doubts about the witnesses; and quietly bribing promiscuous women to change their behavior. These men highlight an awareness of the lack of rabbinic authority in the Jewish community, the relaxed relations between the sexes, and the coping strategies adopted to cushion the community and the family and to prevent the legitimacy of the marriage or children to be called into question and perhaps lead to apostasy.⁹²

Jewish men in early modern Italy continued to work hard to maintain magical and fictional stratagems in order to avoid direct confrontations about adultery. A man could interrogate his wife while she was sleeping by putting the tongue of a live frog between her breasts

⁹⁰ M. Sotah 1:5, 6:1-4, 3:4, 5:1, 9:9, cf. MT Sotah 3:3-4.

⁹¹ Katzenellenbogen, no. 33.

⁹² Provencal, no. 114.

which would elicit a confession from her.⁹³ Or he could hide a mantel (*clamita/chlamita*, perhaps *alchemilla*) and put it under his wife's head or in her cap (*miznefet*) at night. If she had committed adultery, she would flail about in her sleep until she fell off the bed. If not, she would draw near to her husband, hug him, and not let him go until he made love to her.⁹⁴

In a similar vein, rabbis dealt with the legalistic question of whether a married woman who had relations with a gown between her vagina and her lover's penis was guilty of adultery and prohibited to her husband forever. To this discussion, rabbis brought other definitional considerations about adultery: must the man reach an orgasm, what if he were impotent, did his penis have to fully penetrate her, or did it matter if the robe was thick or thin—Italian rabbis used Hebrew terminology borrowed from Latin discussions of the Church about complete and incomplete adultery.⁹⁵ Rabbis who engaged in this line of questions, including in the Talmud,⁹⁶ despite solemn moral condemnations, were reluctant to offer a binding definition of adultery because they did not want to be in a position to have to proscribe a woman from her husband or declare children to be *mamzerim*, the result of an impermissible union who would be forever forbidden to marry in the Jewish community.

On the other hand, fathers, brothers, and husbands, either enjoying absolute power or pretending they did, called for rigid boundary definition, zealously calling for extreme penalties against adulterous women, in order to protect the honor and purity of the family, community, the people, and the earth which could only be restored when the source of the evil was totally extirpated. These men saw adulterous women as having been independent, disobedient, rebellious, and having “violated the boundaries for Jewish women.” As with opposition to premarital intercourse, there is little concern expressed for immorality, but rather impurity and going against authority. The punishments suggested included beating, whipping, dismembering, blinding, excommunicating, killing, exterminating, expropriating, banning, cursing, burning, pursuing, divorcing, turning over to the secular authorities,

⁹³ JTSA 3859, fol. 4a; JTSA 1625, no. 70.

⁹⁴ JTSA 1636, fol. 14a.

⁹⁵ Eurgan A. Forbes, *The Canonical Separation of Consorts* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1948), 152–155.

⁹⁶ Pes. 115b, San. 58b.

mutilating, including cutting off her nose, punishments that had biblical and talmudic precedents.⁹⁷ Indeed, these rabbis invoke the same kind of biblical and rabbinic passages as extra-legal precedents as those rabbis arguing for zealous summary execution of women who had premarital intercourse.⁹⁸

Conclusion

Why would a man level an accusation against his bride's chastity? By raising the issue, or by not acting to prevent it from being raised, especially when there were common forms of fictive behavior to eliminate virginity as an issue such as importing blood to the marriage bed, documenting instances of *mukkat ez*, or birth on a Friday, and ruling out concern for virginity for girls usually over the age of thirteen, a man was putting his honor on the line. As he shamed his new bride, he could lose his own face in the community, or perhaps save it. He was unnecessarily announcing to the community that he was cuckold and his new bride was a whore. Hence, these dramas are not necessarily about virginity, but they are also about honor, economic bargaining, sexual adversity, and pollution.

By contributing to such a public drama the morning after his wedding, the man may have been a panicked sexual ingénue. Rather than the public display of expertise, he may not have had any idea of what was going on. Physiologically he may have been as lost concerning his own body as his bride's, emotionally he may have been confused, and any insight that his bride may have offered further undermined his sense of her innocence or of his own control. In Jewish texts, men saw intercourse with a sexually experienced woman as a source of danger, a blurring of boundaries between different partners, a sense of contamination, the possibility for an invidious comparison, especially if they were incapable of performing at all. Such fears are expressed regularly in literature over remarriage, which Christians tried to eliminate entirely (digamy), a supererogatory attitude accepted by Jewish pietists, especially involving the wives of martyrs, which rabbinic practice tried

⁹⁷ "Be'ilah shelo kedarkah," "Gilui arayot," Paḥad Yizḥak.

⁹⁸ Numbers 16 and 26; Judges 21; San. 74a; San. 45b; Yev. 90b; San. 46a; MT AZ 4:6.

to limit by imposing various types of waiting periods and which street gangs, *charivari*, tried to control by rites of humiliation. A man's concerns about a woman who might demonstrate that she was sexually experienced could quickly lead to an adversarial relationship between them because he sees another man as having crossed his boundary. The sequence of the biblical scenario illustrates this: a man takes a woman, has intercourse with her, hates her, issues a charge against her (*alilot devarim*), and besmirches her name by asserting that he had intercourse with her but did not find tokens of virginity. Intercourse leads to hatred.

Jewish household formation involved negotiating a financial package of contributions made by each side in which passion may have played a minimal role, if any at all. The terminology, the components, the amounts, and timing of each element—dowry, counter-dowry, main ketubah amount, *nikhsei malog*, *nikhsei zon barzel*, and gifts—were unclear and reflected a blurring of boundaries between systems of household formation based on local customs, alternative readings of rabbinic texts, ethnic traditions, family practice, and bargaining designed to protect both assets and honor. Among Jews, some components, especially what is called the main ketubah (*ikar*) amount is higher if the female was considered a virgin and such information is duly recorded in her ketubah document, usually signed at the time of her betrothal. By raising questions about a woman's virginity, a man could be attempting to renegotiate the entire financial package to his benefit on the grounds that the transaction was fraudulent (*mekah ta'ut*). Had he been incapable of performing on his wedding night, not only was his accusation a preemptive strike to save his honor but also a calculated move to get the best deal in divorcing his wife, with the possibility of her promiscuity providing a lower settlement rate for him and certainly a way to shift the blame from him. Such a drama, or the threat of it, might be fended off by some further private negotiations between the groom and his father-in-law. Such strategies of negotiating after the wedding were a continuation of those that often continued up to the moment of the wedding.

Finally, the belief that one's bride is not a virgin may have produced a sense of wrong, evil, and betrayal as well as a stain on a man's honor and purity that caused him to act instinctively to save his face, especially if others may have known that his wife was not a virgin, or only to extirpate evil from the community, as some men show also in cases of adultery.

The body, especially but not exclusively the woman's, becomes the site of the negotiations. These negotiations often also involve accepting cultural concessions concerning the body. The ambiguous qualities of the body make it most susceptible to proposals for territorial compromise for the sake of the honor of the individuals involved, the man, the woman, their families, and any children, a process that involves adjusting knowledge about biology in order to determine a definition of adultery and the length of pregnancy that is convenient for all parties involved.

As difficult negotiations took place involving the woman's body, especially when the honor of the participants was at stake, rather than refining an understanding of the body and developing a better understanding of bodily functions to facilitate clear resolution of conflict, the natural functioning of the body is obfuscated, misrepresented, and denied. An operation to save face may involve loss of the integrity of the rest of the body.

When the blood of virginity may be confused with menstrual blood despite elaborate procedures to avoid consummation at the time of menstruation and when the presence of either kind of blood may be the size of a mustard seed which might not be seen, the concept of profuse bleeding on consummation is further diminished. Moreover, if women who have already lost their virginity might bleed and virgins might not bleed, then the connection between blood and virginity is further minimized as the gap between biological and cultural categories expands. These limitations on the idea of virginity ultimately collide with the standard formulas for virginity and *mukkat ez* in which the young woman is described as bleeding profusely and as a result limit the ability of men to remove ambiguity and mark clear boundaries.

Most significantly, this elaborate discussion about virginity may nullify almost the whole idea of it. The biblical text uses the term *na'arah* for the new wife suspected of promiscuity and the applicability of subsequent rabbinic tests of virginity ends with sexual maturity. If a *bogeret*, basically a girl at the age of puberty, is not necessarily expected to bleed on the consummation of her marriage and her vagina is already considered to have become so enlarged that her husband may experience no physical resistance and she no pain, then a significant number of women who marry are no longer eligible for the standard tests of virginity, that is bleeding or offering vaginal resistance, and certainly not a positive result in the wine barrel test, after they have intercourse, presumably for the first time. Scrupulous attention to the legal subtleties

of virginity has enabled Jews to cope with the ambiguities of a definition of virginity and of premarital activities. In fact, the explanation for the legalistic approach towards virginity offered by Mary Douglas' taxonomy undermines the apparent coercive intrusive authority of tests for virginity and points to freedom of men and women, indeed sexual license, in the Jewish community.

The number of females subject to tests for virginity is further limited if *bogrot*, *mukkot ez*, and girls born on Friday are excluded. In fact, such limitations undermine the idea that there can be valid signs of virginity at all. At the same time, some rabbis expanded the categories of women who must separate from their husbands after consummation, including pre-menstrual, widows, post-menopausal, *bogrot*, *mukkot ez*, and widows, in some cases invoking what seems to be either anecdotal evidence or miraculous events, such as the ideas that sexual passion may arouse menstrual blood and that the hymen may regenerate after sexual activity. There is a fluidity in the applicability of criteria for establishing virginity and separating from their husbands for the week after consummation their marriage. Charges and counter charges are based on the needs of the moment and supported by a shaky array of evidence and challenged by similarly tenuous principles. Ultimately, therefore, in matters of virginity and consummation, biology is guided by imagination and fantasy and the woman's body has become a state of mind for all concerned.

MENTAL AND BODILY MALFUNCTIONING
IN MARRIAGE: EVIDENCE FROM SIXTEENTH- AND
EARLY SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY RESPONSA FROM
THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND POLAND

RUTH BERGER

Introduction

This study will explore how bodily or mental states caused by illness could render a person unfit for the socioreligious role Jewish society saw as normative for every Jewish human being: that of a partner in marriage. It will also ask how people were viewed and treated who fell below the minimal standards of health required for a spouse, and what this tells us about mental models of marriage and of the Jewish body in the Early Modern Period. To find people who were judged too ill to be a spouse, I have turned to one of the best sources for the history of Jewish marriage as lived in real life: responsa, or legal opinions.

The Sources: Possibilities and Limitations

Like all historical sources, responsa filter reality in their own particular way. They highlight some aspects of people's lives, conflicts, and concerns, namely those that are halakhically relevant to the case at hand, and gloss over or ignore others. They also acquaint us selectively with those people who became litigants before a court of law or consulted a legal expert. Thus, the material presented below does not prove that the chronic illness of a spouse, whether physical or mental, always led to marital crisis. It did so in most cases of chronic illness preserved in the responsa literature, but there may easily have been a much larger percentage of marriages struck by illness which nevertheless stayed intact. Illness of a spouse will not become the subject of a responsum when the couple is able to accommodate the changes engendered by it without outside intervention. How often that happened, we have no way of knowing.

Still, as in medical research, in the social sciences, too, the malfunctioning organism (here: the malfunctioning marriage) can sometimes be more revealing about its normal functions than normality itself. While providing information about prevalent halakhic and non-halakhic attitudes toward ill-health, the texts expose certain perceptions of the authors and of the litigants about what a marriage should *normally* be, which functions a spouse can be expected to fulfill and which are less essential. Halakhah evidently plays a role in shaping these perceptions, but is not necessarily congruent with them. And the influence is not one-sided: Extra-halakhic values and considerations in turn affect individual halakhic decisions, as we shall see.

To make the material and its complex halakhic context amenable to presentation, I will discuss a relatively small number of seminal texts in greater detail and mention other relevant texts, as well as existing studies, mainly in the footnotes, to provide background information or to point out general trends. Differences and similarities between the two major legal traditions of Judaism, the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi, will form part of the discussion.

That more Sephardi than Ashkenazi responsa are cited is due to the fact that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the cultural center of Judaism was in the Ottoman Empire. Sephardi authors were much more numerous and prolific than their Ashkenazi counterparts. In fact Poland, then the main Ashkenazi center of halakhic learning, was the only Ashkenazi region that produced responsa collections at all during the sixteenth century, at a rate of about one tenth of the Sephardi production. All relevant Ashkenazi cases from the period have been used for this study.

Legal Background

Most responsa that deal with prolonged bodily or mental illness of any kind do so in the context of divorce or its possible substitute for Jewish men: bigamous remarriage. Any discussion or assessment of that fact has to take into account certain medieval developments in Jewish marital law.

In the early Middle Ages, divorces could be initiated and obtained unilaterally by any one of the spouses, even against the will of the other party. Husbands (not wives) could, and did occasionally, contract bigamous second marriages. But in parts of Northern Africa and the

Levant, husbands' (although not wives') rights to a divorce or to bigamy were even then often restricted by marriage contracts imposed on them by wealthy in-laws.¹

By the late Middle Ages, such restrictions had become almost universal. Unilateral coercive divorce was no longer legal for either sex in the two dominant legal traditions of Judaism, i.e., the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi school. Bigamy, a tempting option for husbands whose wives refused their consent to a divorce, was likewise banned.

The scholarly literature stresses the differences between Sepharad, where most of the changes were achieved by private law and *minhag* (custom), and Ashkenaz, where public "bans" existed. But the effect was in many respects strikingly similar in both worlds. Wives, as well as husbands, now had to seek their spouse's consent when they wanted a divorce—*except for those cases where acceptable grounds for divorce or for allowing bigamy existed, and a dispensation from the restrictions was accordingly granted by a court of law.*²

Physical or mental malfunctioning of one of the spouses could sometimes count as grounds for coercive divorce or for the legalization of bigamy. That precisely is the halakhic background of most of the material presented below.

The Unmarriageable Body

I would like to begin with one of the rare texts that do not fit the pattern. It describes a petition to coerce, not a divorce, but a marriage.

Toward the end of the year 1557 or early in 1558, Rabbi Shmu'el de Medina of Salonika (from now on: Rashdam), one of the great luminaries of Sephardi rabbinic scholarship, was approached by an

¹ Mordechai A. Friedman, *Jewish Marriage in Palestine: A Cairo Genizah Study* (Tel Aviv–New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1980), vol. 1, 327–346; S[helomo] D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), vol. 3, *The Family*, 143–144.

² The standard text on grounds for divorcing wives is Elimelech Westreich, *Transitions in the Legal Status of the Wife in Jewish Law* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2002) (Hebrew). For procedural aspects (medieval and modern) and gender questions, see Ruth Berger, "Feminismus vs. Dispensation durch hundert Rabbiner: Historische Realitäten, ideologische Mythen und das moderne jüdische Scheidungsrecht in Nordamerika," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 32 (2005): 115–205. For a survey on grounds for divorcing husbands, see Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2001), 413–422, 425–426 (Hebrew).

anonymous client the responsum³ calls Naftali. This Naftali asked the Rashdam to try to help “Zevulun,” apparently his younger brother, who, according to Naftali, had been wronged by their aunt. The aunt’s husband, Zevulun’s father’s brother, had died several years ago. In his will the uncle had decreed that his daughter and Zevulun should marry on the girl’s coming of age.

Marriage between cousins was, and has been, until only a few decades ago, common practice in the Sephardi world. Among other things, it was a way to keep the dowry capital in the family. “In this way,” explains the Rashdam, “his [the dead man’s] soul will find rest, knowing that the fruit of his toils will not be consumed by strangers.”⁴

Unfortunately, when the girl came of age, meaning when she was twelve or twelve and a half, her mother refused to let her marry her cousin, claiming that she was “sickly,” “epileptic” and generally “unfit for a man” (i.e., to have sexual intercourse with). Zevulun’s family, who knew the girl and were determined to go through with the marriage in spite of the bride’s disabilities, pressured the widow to sign an engagement with the provision that the marriage would be postponed, but would definitely happen in twelve years’ time.

Two years had passed⁵ since the widow had committed herself to this compromise. Zevulun, now over 18, was no longer willing to wait. The halakhic question put to the Rashdam was: Can the widow go on withholding her daughter from Zevulun?

The Rashdam did what Zevulun’s family hoped he would do: He wrote a legal opinion which puts the widow in the wrong and Zevulun in the right. He states that to let the young people marry at once would be a triple *mizvah*: honoring the will of the dead, marrying off a girl when she comes of age, and to marry at eighteen (the recommended age of marriage for men). The widow’s arguments are nil according to the Rashdam: The girl may be sickly and epileptic, but epileptics are considered legally competent when not under the direct influence of a fit, and there is certainly no halakhic obstacle to her marrying as long as the groom does not object to having her. She may need someone to look after her, but who could be a better caregiver than a husband? There may be an agreement that the marriage is to take place at a later

³ *Resp. Rashdam*, Hoshen mishpat 310.

⁴ *Ibid.*, as all other citations in this section.

⁵ This I infer from the fact that in one place the Rashdam states that the widow’s promise will force her to allow the marriage ten years later.

date, but that cannot override the dead man's will. It only binds the widow not to prevaricate even longer than stipulated. The sooner the cousins marry, the better it will be from a halakhic and from a moral point of view.

The Rashdam even suggests that the girl should be taken from her home by court order and placed with "an honorable woman," so as to guard her from any undue influence of the mother. (*De jure*, it is the girl who has to agree to the marriage, not her mother.) The marriage, and presumably also the financial matters associated with it, should then be undertaken by a court of law that assumes guardianship for the girl.

Clearly the Rashdam believes to act in the girl's best interest. Elsewhere he states that a woman with a defect as serious as epilepsy would never dare refuse an offer of marriage because in all likelihood she will never receive another.⁶ The mother, however, has only her own interest in mind (says the Rashdam): She does not want to part with the money she would have to give as dowry.

But at the end of the responsum, we find a later addition, "scribbled down hastily." News of the gist of the Rashdam's argument had reached the widow before the text had been delivered anywhere officially. One day she turned up on his doorstep, extremely upset. Her daughter, she cried, was "a complete idiot (*shotah muhletet*) who cannot even keep on her feet for any length of time! She is like an animal (*behemah*), how can she marry?"

The widow then brought two witnesses who knew the girl and attested that she was "very strange (*meshunnah*) indeed." She also insisted that the Rashdam visit her to judge for himself. He did so on the second day of Adar 5319 (Feb 19, 1558). Finally confronted with the person whose fate he had presumed to decide without consulting her, he was shocked:

Upon my soul and the souls of my fathers: What I saw convinced me that the intention of Naftali and his brothers was only to get their hands on the money earlier, and their intentions are bad without the slightest doubt because under normal circumstances nobody would consider marrying [or: having sex with] (*le-hizdaveg im*) such a creature.

It was the widow herself, now called "the lady" (*gevirah*), who insisted that he add all this to the responsum, even though the Rashdam assured her that he had in any case recommended the marriage only

⁶ *Resp. Rashdam*, Hoshen mishpat 346, final paragraph. (*oto holi* is a euphemism for epilepsy). The case is in many respects similar to the one under discussion here.

on the assumption that her daughter was legally competent. In case she was a *shotah*, what he had written would make clear to any local court of law that the widow had been right in her refusal.

Nothing further is said about the agreement she has signed to allow the marriage later. She might still honor her promise: Her daughter is severely disabled,⁷ and like all parents of handicapped children, she will be eager to make some provision for the time she is no longer able to take care of her. Marriage to the cousin at the later date might serve that purpose. In fact, no official body prevented the legally incompetent from marrying,⁸ and such a marriage was not illegal. It was simply of doubtful validity and some of the financial obligations deriving from it could be contested if any of the parties desired to do so.⁹

The Rashdam's major, decisive arguments in this responsum are not halakhic at all. They consist of a moral evaluation of the litigants' motives, or of what he interprets their motives to be. As he saw it first, the widow was wrong in preventing the marriage because "it is her intention to keep her hands on [her late husband's] possessions, and to keep them from [her daughter's] fiancé who is the heir" and who accordingly has a moral right to them.¹⁰ After seeing the girl, his impression was "that the intention of Naftali and his brothers was only to get their hands on the money earlier, and their intentions are bad without the slightest doubt."

Nothing is said about what these "bad intentions" might mean for the girl should she marry Zevulun, and we can only speculate whether

⁷ The reference to mental and locomotor impairments in combination with epilepsy suggests that she may have suffered from cerebral palsy.

⁸ One did not even have to resort to clandestine marriage (prohibited by numerous community regulations, but nevertheless binding after the fact). It seems that rabbis or other community leaders normally did not interfere when people of doubtful mental competence married. In the case under discussion, it was the mother, not a rabbi, who protested. There is a Russian case from the nineteenth century where the rabbi who had officiated at the marriage later claims he had known all along that the groom was legally incompetent. He had not liked it, but neither had he thought it appropriate to oppose the match. (*Resp. Maharsham* [Shalom Mordekhai Schwadron] 6, 159).

⁹ b Yevamot 113a; Tosefta Ketubbot 1,3; *Mishneh Torah*, Ishut 4:1, 11:4, 11:6.

¹⁰ From the provisions of the will it seems reasonable to assume that the girl will get her dowry irrespective of whom she marries (e.g., the dowry capital is not part of an eventual inheritance of the dead man's brothers). Laws of inheritance mainly benefit male family members, while females get their share as dowry or *ketubbah* (a sum to be paid out of the husband's assets at divorce or after his death). In any case, the widow had been made sole administratrix of the estate by the testator (quite a common provision) so that she could keep the business going without undue claims on the capital until the daughter married.

her situation was a factor that seemed important to the Rashdam and influenced the negative decision he gave in the end.

What is explicitly at issue is his conception of marriage. It is at odds with the fiancé's perceived intentions, and that is the crux of the matter. Seen from the biased perspective of modern marital ideology, the whole arrangement was of course problematic even in the slightly censored version presented to the Rashdam by Naftali in the first place. But the Rashdam, being a child of his time, could have no problem with child marriages of first cousins decreed by their parents. Nor did any of the persons concerned, as far as they were in a state to voice their opinion. Zevulun, as we know, was eager to fulfill the dead man's wish and marry his very young cousin, an invalid and epileptic even according to Naftali's report to the Rashdam. Epilepsy counted as a serious defect in a wife, serious enough to warrant coercive divorce in both Sepharad and Ashkenaz when it developed after marriage.¹¹ It was thus clear to the Rashdam from the start that money was a motive for Zevulun and his family in promoting the match despite the girl's health problems. This he found not only acceptable (financial considerations being a normal part of matchmaking), but even morally praiseworthy, as Zevulun's wish to get the usufruct of the dowry concurred with the dead man's wish to dispose his worldly possessions with a close male relative.

Thus the Rashdam could find no fault at all with Zevulun's financial designs—as long as they seemed to be part of a planned normal marriage. But when confronted with the girl, he knew that whatever would ensue when the two married, it would not be normal married life, for “nobody would consider mating with such a creature.” It is surely not a coincidence that here of all places he uses the ambiguous root *zvg*, literally “coupling,” “mating,” while elsewhere in the responsum he prefers *ns'* which means to marry as a judicial act and can in no way be construed to mean sexual intercourse.

For the Rashdam, there is no doubt that any man and any woman united in marriage will be able to and even want to have sex with each other. But the girl is not a woman, she is a “creature” (the Rashdam's

¹¹ Based on an Ashkenazi precedent, the Rosh's decision in *Resp. Rosh* 42,1 (cf. *Shulhan arukh*, Even ha-ezer 117,11). On the epilepsy as grounds for divorce in the Middle Ages and the gender questions involved, see Ruth Berger, “Die Verstoßung der epileptischen Ehefrau: Eine Studie über die Geschlechterdifferenz im ashkenazischen Scheidungsrecht des Mittelalters,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 30 (2003): 103–146, for sixteenth-century cases see *Resp. Maharam Lublin* 1; *Resp. Radbaz* 1,53.

words), she is “like an animal” (the mother’s words), and this is where he draws the line between possible and impossible in sexual attraction and between good and bad in matchmaking. It is perfectly all right to marry someone for money. But to marry someone for money who cannot be considered a functional sex partner is morally reprehensible. Evidently, the sexual function of marriage is a *sine qua non*.

There is another case of the Rashdam’s which illustrates the primacy of sex as a function of marriage, and not only from the Rashdam’s perspective.¹² A wife became ill with consumption.¹³ After years of suffering, her condition deteriorated so far that she was no longer “fit for a man,” i.e., to have sex with. At that precise moment the couple jointly took judicial steps to allow the husband to marry a second wife bigamously, should the first not have recovered sufficiently for marital sex at a certain stipulated date. The second marriage eventually did take place.

Shortly before her death, the first wife changed her mind and lodged a complaint contesting her husband’s second marriage, mainly on the grounds that her marriage contract prohibited the husband from taking a second wife even with her consent. The questioners ask whether her complaint is justified, meaning that the second marriage was halakhically unacceptable in the first place and will accordingly have to be terminated by divorce. They themselves are clearly against such a step, considering it inappropriate to divorce the second wife, who now has small children, against her will. (As a matter of fact, the first wife was no longer even alive at the time the question was written.) The husband’s arguments are presented at length and, figuring prominently among them, is his claim that he had married his first wife “to be fruitful and multiply ... and to draw apart from all temptation to sin.” Sex is necessary not only for procreation, but also in itself, to provide a legal outlet for one’s sexual desires. A marriage that cannot provide the husband with it is so dysfunctional that measures to alleviate the situation for him, even in violation of contract stipulations meant for a *normal* marriage, are acceptable. The Rashdam, of course, agrees.

There is a notable absence in both responsa: The obvious fact that the handicapped girl and the consumptive woman were unable to fulfill the wifely duty of doing housework plays no role whatsoever. Inability to do work, apparently, is a much more acceptable trait in a wife

¹² *Resp. Rashdam*, Yoreh de’ah 107.

¹³ *Hōli ha-etika*, cf. span. *hètico/hètica*.

than inability to provide sex. Clearly, the Jewish body, and particularly the female one, is constructed here in a way that makes its sexuality and its suitability for sex its centerpiece. As it turns out, this is not in any way unusual.

The Bleeding Wife

A sixteenth-century Polish case also deals with a marriage where sex has become impossible. A question addressed to R. Shlomo Luria of Lublin (the Maharshah) begins:

Someone who has had a wife for many years and they [always] had normal sexual intercourse. But then she was struck by heavenly judgment and became cursed to such a degree that she bled after each and every intercourse, until she was considered prohibited to him forever.¹⁴ Is he allowed to divorce her against her will, provided he gives her the *ketubbah*¹⁵ payment due to her?

The text is an example of rabbinic intervention in marriage. Halakhah provides for prohibitions of intercourse between spouses and even for divorces forced upon unwilling couples in cases where a continuation of the marriage violates halakhic principles—in particular when intercourse between the spouses would constitute an infringement of sexual prohibitions.¹⁶ These prohibitions typically focus on the female body. The female can become “defiled,” or ritually unfit to have intercourse with, and not only by uterine or vaginal blood flow, as in our case. Adultery defiles the female body, but not the male, and an adulterous wife has to be divorced (while a husband who has had intercourse with another man’s wife may stay married). Prior sexual intercourse renders the divorcee or unmarried woman unfit to be the wife of a *kohen* and if he has married her nevertheless, the marriage has to be terminated.¹⁷

¹⁴ Because it has to be assumed from past history that she will begin bleeding during intercourse.

¹⁵ The *ketubbah* (the main provision of Jewish marriage contracts) is a sum payable by the husband to the wife if he divorces her, or from his assets after his death.

¹⁶ Of all halakhic rationales to separate a couple against the wish of both spouses, only childlessness is unrelated to sexual prohibitions. But the rule that a court of law has to divorce a couple that has not produced a pregnancy after ten years of marriage with regular sexual intercourse was hardly ever put into practice. (Rabbenu Gershom’s responsum in *Hagahot Mordekhay*, Yevamot 113, is not an example, as I have explained elsewhere, cf. Berger, “Feminismus,” 3.2. [C]).

¹⁷ This is an oversimplified statement that disregards much of the legal minutiae, but

Obviously, some of these inequalities result from the Bible's patriarchal preoccupation with paternity and patrilineal descent. But that explanation does not work for laws associated with female genital blood. While the impurity of the male after emissions of semen or during genital "flux" from venereal disease has little bearing on marital relations in Halakhah, menstrual impurity does, and strongly so.

In the Polish case of the bleeding wife, the rabbinic intervention was not unsolicited. The rabbis would not have known about the woman's recurring hemorrhages unless one of the spouses or a zealous *mikvah* assistant told them.

Average sixteenth-century Jews cannot have been completely untroubled by the ritual implications of a bloody vaginal discharge during, or immediately after, intercourse. The prohibitions associated with menstrual blood were a part of everyday life for anyone brought up in a Jewish family, especially in Poland, where the strict purity regulations of the medieval German pietists were taught and, presumably, at least partly observed. As a child, you would know when your mother was *niddah*. You would see her dress differently and see your parents avoid each other. You might even be told to avoid bodily contact with your mother yourself at these times, or with any *niddah* lest her impurity endanger you.¹⁸ Apart from being religious precepts and a hallmark of group identity, the impurity of the *niddah* and the prohibitions following from it seemed entirely rational: Menstrual blood and also "impurity" as such were associated with illness or harm in folk religion as well as in elitist texts, in Ashkenaz as well as in the Orient.¹⁹ The theoretical

it does describe the principle on which the laws seem to be based. See *Shulḥan arukh*, Even ha-ezer 6, cf. b Ketubbot 77a.

¹⁸ E.g. some texts written or read in Ashkenaz in the sixteenth century: *Shulḥan arukh*, Yoreh de'ah 195; *Brant shpiegel*, ed. S. Riedel (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1993 [Prague, 1572]), 25, 246, 249ff.; *Menorat ha-ma'or* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1961), 376ff.; *Reshit hokhmah* (Jerusalem: Or ha-musar, 1980), vol. 2, 217, 541–542; *Reshit hokhmah*'s Zohar-based tendency to literally demonize impurity was highly influential in Ashkenaz, as can be seen by later texts, cf. *Kāzzur shenei luḥot ha-berit* (Offenbach, 1724 [Frankfurt an der Oder 1681]), fol. 23d; *Kav ha-yashar* (Frankfurt am Main, 1704/5), chapter 17. All these texts are prescriptive, not descriptive, but we do have some indication that in the case of *niddah*, the rules they lay down were widely observed. Glikl of Hameln reports that she could not help her husband or say goodbye to him properly during his fatal illness because she happened to be *niddah* at the time (*Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln*, trans. B. Pappenheim (Weinheim: Beltz, Athenäum, 1994), 189).

¹⁹ See preceding note and Ruth Berger, *Ehe, Sexualität und Familienleben in der jüdischen Moralliteratur (900–1900)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 182–183; cf. Rachel Wasserfall, "Menstruation and Identity: The Meaning of *Niddah* for Moroccan Women Immi-

models behind such beliefs varied, but their gist, i.e., that menstrual impurity could harm a male who came into contact with it, or a potential child conceived in an impure state, was well-nigh universal.

It is improbable, then, that the spouses in our text would simply have ignored the bleeding. Sooner or later, a rabbi would have been consulted, and this most likely is what happened here.

Whether there were additional motives for telling an expert about the problem we will never know. The wife might or might not have hoped for the verdict they got because intercourse was painful for her. The husband might have wanted a divorce anyway and hoped that a prohibition of intercourse would increase his chances of obtaining one. But he might just as well have dreaded such a prohibition, hoping instead that the blood would be declared “pure” and he permitted to go on sleeping with his wife.

A clear rift between the spouses appears only *after* the rabbinic decision that prohibits all further sexual intercourse between them. *Then* the husband decides to end the marriage—probably in order to remarry. This at least is what the questioner and the Maharshah both imply in the following discussion. The husband’s motive is either to have (more?) children or to have regular sex, or both. It is clear that he cannot have either with his present wife, and whatever affection he might feel for her is not enough to outweigh such serious drawbacks. Nor does the money he will have to pay her on divorce²⁰ suffice to deter him.

But his wife opposes the divorce. Whether she loves her husband or not, she has little to gain and much to lose from it, notably the relative financial security she now enjoys. With her condition known, it will be hard for her to find another husband. The stakes, then, are clear.

What did the rabbis make of this impasse (that they had helped to bring about) and what can the case tell us about their attitudes toward marriage and toward malfunctioning bodies?

Let us return to the text. Modern students confronted with it usually react to the words that describe the onset of the woman’s hemorrhages: “She was struck by heavenly judgment.”²¹ They are uncomfortable

grants to Israel,” in *The People of the Body*, ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 309–327, for a twentieth-century version.

²⁰ On the *ketubbah* payment see above, note 15. The husband will also have to return her the dowry.

²¹ My translation of *ba ‘aleha middat ha-din* (*Resp. Maharshah* 65). *Resp. Divre rivot*

with the idea that the woman's affliction is apparently interpreted as rightful heavenly punishment for a former transgression. Although the Hebrew phrase is first and foremost an idiom for affliction that has lost much of the force of its literal sense, it does indeed reflect underlying assumptions about the reasons for misfortunes of all kinds, and illness in particular. In late medieval and early modern Judaism, illness was seen as the effect of ritual-religious transgressions, but also of "natural"²² causes, or both.²³ To give an example: Ethical texts instructing parents how to avoid child death (a harrowing 30% or more of children died before they reached puberty) list cursing, contagion, asphyxiation, sins in general, impure or missing *mezuzot*, the breaking of vows, nursing after intercourse and unchasteness, among others, as possible causes of children's deaths.²⁴ Complementary religious, medical and magical explanations of life events provided what human beings apparently need very badly: A feeling that misfortunes do not occur arbitrarily, but for certain reasons, and that one accordingly has some control over one's fate.

But of course nobody is without sin or immune to mistakes or accidents, and it was presumed, especially in the kabbalistic and demonological modes of thinking more and more current from the sixteenth century onwards, that the slightest, inadvertent negligence could produce catastrophic results. If misfortunes did occur, they inspired compassion at least as much as sneers.

Based on my experience with early modern Jewish texts, I would argue that the passage quoted above does not stigmatize the wife as *morally* responsible for her physical problem, even though she might have brought it on in some way. Certainly, she is not held responsible in the halakhic sense of the word: A woman who becomes impure for marital sex through her own fault, e.g., by refusing to take her ritual bath, loses her right to a *ketubbah* payment on divorce. But loss of *ketubbah* is never even remotely considered in this responsum.²⁵

294 (discussed below, p. 239) uses a similar phrase to introduce a woman's mental illness.

²² "Natural" as perceived at the time, i.e., including the evil eye or witchcraft. Cf. the contribution by Nimrod Zinger in this volume.

²³ Cf. *Amtahat Binyamin*, clearly expressed there on fol. 16a (Wilhermsdorf, 1716), but also obvious *passim*, as in other works of Jewish folk medicine, e.g. *Sefer zekhira* (Hamburg, 1706).

²⁴ Berger, *Sexualität*, 272–275.

²⁵ One might, of course, argue that this is due to talmudic law and cannot be taken

Still, something else is. The question posed to Shlomo Luria suggests that the woman can be divorced against her will because of her physical problem, even though normally a wife's consent is needed for a divorce. Is this, then, a sign that she is after all seen as the guilty party here, so that she loses her right to refuse a divorce, if not the right to her *ketubbah*?

The anonymous author of the question adds his own halakhic reasoning to the question proper which shows him in favor of a coerced divorce. But his argument has nothing to do with seeing illness as rightful punishment. He writes:

Even though Rabbenu Gershom Me'or ha-Golah [the alleged author of some of the medieval Ashkenazi reforms in marital law] ruled not to divorce [a wife] against her will, in such a case [as ours] he would certainly allow it. For he did not intend to hinder [the precept of] "be fruitful and multiply."

Note that according to rabbinic exegesis, propagation is a male and not a female duty.²⁶ The husband will not be able to fulfill that duty if he is forever chained to a wife he cannot have intercourse with. This, says our author, is a consequence neither halakhically acceptable nor intended by the medieval authors of the divorce restrictions. Whether the wife is at all responsible for her condition is irrelevant in that context.

In his answer, the Maharshah ignores the questioner's pro-divorce arguments. He cites a medieval Ashkenazi precedent where a husband of a wife declared unfit for intercourse was refused both a divorce and a bigamous remarriage.²⁷ The reasoning of the medieval text only partly applies to the case at hand because there the wife was insane and divorce from the mentally incompetent poses very specific halakhic

as evidence for early modern views of illness. But interpretations and applications of talmudic divorce law have changed considerably over time. Had there really been a stringent belief that women such as the wife in our responsum are fully responsible for their condition, these women could have been classified as *moredot*, and the principle *nistahafah sadehu* would not have applied.

²⁶ M Yevamot 6,6, b Yevamot 65b, *Mishneh Torah*, Ishut 15; *Shulhan arukh*, Even ha-ezer 1,1.

²⁷ *Resp. Ravyah* 921 (printed edition: *Sefer Ravyah—teshuvot*, ed. D. Dabliski [Bne Brak: D. Dabliski, 1998]). The wife was insane and the rabbis decided that she could not be trusted to observe the laws on menstrual purity. The Talmud (b Niddah 13b) states only that an insane woman should be helped with her purification by another woman (and so does the Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Issure bi'ah 8:15). That the German rabbis issued a prohibition of intercourse seems unnecessarily strict.

problems. But the Maharshah sees an important parallel: The mishnaic/talmudic principle “his field was devastated” applies to both cases. The Mishnah uses this simile to differentiate between wives with a “defect” who nevertheless have a right to their full *ketubbah* payment when the husband divorces them and those who do not. Those who had their “defect” before marriage lose the *ketubbah* if the future husband had not been informed of the problem. But if a wife develops a defect during marriage, she is likened to a field of her husband’s that was devastated by flood, hail or some other natural catastrophe: It is simply bad luck and he cannot hold anyone responsible for his loss, certainly not the person who had originally sold him the field—or the woman who had, in a way, “sold” herself to him as a wife.²⁸

The principle of the devastated field is relevant to our case only when one assumes, as the Maharshah did (but others did not), that the medieval ban against forced divorce parallels the Talmud’s rules for *ketubbah* payment.²⁹ To wit: Whenever the wife retains her right to receive her *ketubbah* on divorce under talmudic law, she cannot be divorced against her will.

The Maharshah’s conclusion is that the bleeding wife cannot be divorced. As regards the question of guilt, he could not be clearer: The woman in our case is not the guilty party in the attempted divorce; she cannot be held responsible for her health problem.

*Between Ashkenaz and Sepharad:
Models of Marriage, Models of Halakhah*

The decision would have been a different one had the couple lived in Salonika and not somewhere in Poland or Lithuania. Judging from comparable cases (an exact analogon does not exist), a Sephardi husband in the same situation would probably have received permission to marry a second wife, with or without consent of the first, depending

²⁸ M Ketubbot VII, 8; I, 6.

²⁹ The idea that a dispensation from the divorce restrictions is contingent upon loss of *ketubbah* was not current either in medieval or in early modern sources. Moreover, it contradicts the medieval *takkanah* that specifies when and how to permit a second marriage as an alternative or a prelude to a coerced divorce despite the ban (text in Louis Finkelstein, *Jewish Self-Government in the Middle Ages* (New York: Feldheim, 1964), 139ff.). See also *Resp. Rosh* 42, 1, where coercive divorce was permitted although the wife had clearly not lost the right to her *ketubbah*.

on the wording of the marriage contract and the relative power of the spouses and their respective families to influence a court of law or a legal consultant.³⁰

It has been argued that the greater reluctance of German/Polish rabbis to grant dispensations from the divorce and bigamy restrictions in cases like ours is a sign that they, different from their non-Ashkenazi colleagues, saw marriage as a “microcosm of society” and the “basic unit of its structural stability” that had to be protected from dissolution at all cost.³¹ In contrast to that, non-Ashkenazi rabbis supposedly saw marriage as a purely private agreement to provide each other with legal sex (among other things), so that failure to provide intercourse automatically meant the “destruction of marriage.”³²

The hypothesis, when tested against the sixteenth-century cases under discussion, proves correct insofar as the Sephardi cases decided by the Rashdam clearly demonstrate a) the contractual nature of marriage and b) the primacy of sex as a criterion for deciding whether a marriage was at least minimally functional or not. However, it is doubtful whether the preferred Sephardi solution to cases like ours, bigamy, should count as destruction of the marriage. After all, the first wife retained her rights as a wife, among them that to be financially supported by the husband and to have sex with him, her condition permitting.³³

As regards the Ashkenazi attitude, I find no textual indication that the Maharshah's motive here, or that of the medieval Ashkenazi predecessors he cites, was to safeguard the “stability” of marriage, either individually or as a social institution. One might just as well claim the contrary: The responsum gives two instances of Ashkenazi rabbis destabilizing or sundering an existing marriage for ritual reasons, one of them even preemptively and without any halakhic imperative to do

³⁰ The position of Sephardi (and generally Oriental) rabbis here is well known (see e.g. the chapters on Sepharad in Westreich, *Transitions*, and in Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious*) and is illustrated by all Sephardi cases of sexually dysfunctional wives discussed in this study.

³¹ Michael Berger, “Two Models of Medieval Jewish Marriage,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 52, 1 (2001): 59–84, here 79.

³² Cf. M. Berger, “Two Models,” 67–68, 73–74, on rabbinic and medieval Oriental marriage. The sixteenth-century Sephardi position here is close to that of talmudic (“rabbinic”) and medieval Oriental rabbis.

³³ The only (partial) exception being the Rambam's decision on insane wives, see below, p. 235.

so.³⁴ Nor would I assume from the Maharshal's decision on the bleeding wife that he, in contrast to Sephardi rabbis, did not see sex as a *sine qua non* of marriage.

There is a passage in the text that, to my mind, precludes such an interpretation. After stating that the husband cannot coerce a divorce, the Maharshal ends thus: "It would, however, at least be appropriate for the rabbis of that town to take the matter into their hands and find a way to entice her to agree to a divorce with all kinds of trickery and subterfuge possible."³⁵

"Trickery and subterfuge" would hardly seem appropriate if the Maharshal wanted to assure the continuing existence of the sexless marriage. A marriage, by the way, in which the couple will probably be forced by the rabbis to live in separate abodes to prevent all danger of illicit sex.³⁶ From a moral point of view, the Maharshal evidently does think the husband should be permitted to leave his wife, and he believes her to be in the wrong when she refuses to be divorced. Halakhically, though, he does, in his own words, "not have the power to lift Rabbenu Gershom's ban" (prohibiting forced divorce of women and polygyny).

For the Maharshal, then, there is a clash between his pragmatic evaluation of the case and halakhic necessities. The latter alone dictate the answer to the question whether a coerced divorce should be permitted or not. In stark contrast, in the Rashdam's two responsa discussed above, a pragmatic moral evaluation of the cases was explicitly cited as an argument that influenced the outcome. Apparently, to the Rashdam, Halakhah is relatively flexible and has to be interpreted to fit each case individually. Non-halakhic considerations are paramount in deciding between different possible halakhic solutions to a given problem, an approach also visible in the responsa of other Sephardi authors of the period.³⁷ To the Maharshal, in contrast, Halakhah is inflexible and has to be applied without regard to extrahalakhic considerations. What we witness here may be a systematic difference in attitude between

³⁴ See above, note 27.

³⁵ *Resp. Maharshal* 65 (last sentence).

³⁶ This at least is what Maharam Padova prescribes for a marriage with a hemorrhaging problem (*Resp. Maharam mi-Padova* 9).

³⁷ For other examples, see Shmuel Morell, "Darke ha-shikkul ba-meziut ha-spezifit bi-fsiqat ha-Radbaz," in *Atara le-Hayyim: Studies in the Talmud and Medieval Rabbinic Literature in Honor of Haim Zalman Dimitrovsky*, ed. Daniel Boyarin (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000), 413-438.

Sephardi-Ottoman and Polish-German Jewry, but more research is certainly needed to validate this hypothesis.

Another Ashkenazi idiosyncrasy in our case is more tangible and more important for the matter at hand: Neither the questioner nor the Maharshal consider bigamy as a solution. Bigamy might have provided a compromise that would have safeguarded the married status and continued support of the bleeding wife without ignoring the husband's legitimate interest to have sex and possibly children. But for the Maharshal (as well as the questioner), it is either divorce or no divorce, with no middle ground in between.

From an Ashkenazi perspective, there was no middle ground. Since the thirteenth century, no husband who was still living with his first wife had ever been allowed to marry a second wife by Franco-German or Polish rabbis, not even for levirate marriage. That is not to say that bigamous remarriages did not exist in Ashkenaz. On the contrary, the ban on bigamy was lifted quite frequently, for example when the first wife had left the husband and converted. But in each and every case where the husband was permitted to remarry bigamously, this served only to give legal sanction to an existing definite separation between the husband and his first wife (without granting her the benefit of a writ of divorce).³⁸ It never created a *ménage à trois*.

That kind of threesome marriage, perfectly respectable under certain circumstances in Spain and the Ottoman Empire (and also in sixteenth-century Italy),³⁹ was simply not seen as an acceptable form of Jewish marriage in Poland and Germany.

But why wasn't it? Why did Ashkenazi tradition depart that far from the polygynous basis of Jewish family law?

One might point to Christian influence.⁴⁰ But on closer inspection, the idea that the Christian environment played a major role in shaping the extent of Ashkenazi monogamic norms becomes much less plausible than it would seem at first glance. It is true that the extremely strict

³⁸ See Berger, "Feminismus," 2.2–2.4.

³⁹ On the development in Italy, see Westreich, *Transitions*, 208–220.

⁴⁰ The medieval bigamy restrictions themselves have been linked to Christian influence (e.g. by Ze'ev [Wilhelm] Falk, *Marriage and Divorce: Reforms in the Family Law of German-French Jewry* [Jerusalem: Mifal ha-shikhpul, 1961], 31 [Hebrew]), possibly wrongly. Today, scholars prefer socioeconomic explanations, cf. Abraham Grossman, "The Historical Background to the Ordinances on Family Affairs Attributed to Rabbenu Gershom Me'or ha-Golah," in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Stephen J. Zipperstein (London: Halban, 1988), 3–23. My own position is that they were part of a larger legal reform effort (beginning

interpretation of the bigamy restrictions (namely, that real bigamy was out of the question even in exceptional cases) was endemic to Christian environments. But it is not true that it was a necessary outcome of a Christian environment. For Jews in Catholic Italy, actual bigamy was acceptable in the sixteenth century, as it had been in Catholic Spain. Before the eighteenth century, there is not the slightest indication in Polish-German sources that the fear of interference by Christian authorities was any consideration at all in deciding against true bigamy in cases where Ottoman rabbis would have allowed it. As regards the purely socio-ideological influence of Christianity, that seems to have been non-existent as regards divorce: Ashkenazi Jews had high divorce rates all through the Middle Ages despite a Christian environment that considered divorce illegal as well as immoral. It is not obvious why one Christian legal norm should have become so influential in Halakhah, when the impact of other, related ones was nil.

So what remains? I would not discount Christian influence altogether (it is difficult to prove one way or the other). But I would suggest that another factor was much more important: A tendency of some influential German rabbis from the twelfth century onwards to exceptional ritual strictness in matters of family law as a whole, including a tendency to go further than actually warranted by law. Manifestations of that tendency are the extremely strict Ashkenazi interpretations of the purity regulations for menstruating women⁴¹ (cf. also the medieval case mentioned above where an insane wife was separated from her husband against the will of both parties for fear that she might possibly not observe the purity regulations correctly)⁴² and the abolishment of *me'un* in the fifteenth century. *Me'un* (or *mi'un*) is the easy way out of a marriage for a girl married off as a minor by her relatives who, if

with the institution of *ketubbah*) that progressively adapted Jewish family law to a dowry-based financial system of marriage very different from the bride-price system of biblical times. That is why such restrictions appeared not only in the Christianized Rhineland, but also in Egypt and the Levant where the Muslim environment was not at all hostile to polygyny. See Berger, "Feminismus," 140–145; cf. also Berger, "Verstoßung," 126–130, for a detailed discussion of Grossman.

⁴¹ For a general discussion, see Israel Ta-Shma, *Ritual, Custom and Reality in Ashkenaz* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996), 280–288 (Hebrew); Judith Baskin, "Sexual Politics and Ritual Immersion in Medieval Ashkenaz," in *Der Differenz auf der Spur*, ed. Christiane E. Müller and Andrea Schatz (Berlin: Metropol, 2004), 51–67. See also Hirsch J. Zimmels, *Ashkenazim and Sephardim: Their Relations, Differences and Problems as Reflected in the Rabbinical Responsa* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1996), 188–204.

⁴² For details, see above, note 27.

certain conditions are met, does not need a writ of divorce. That legal exception was abolished in Ashkenaz, according to the rabbi instrumental in doing so, for fear that people who see a girl remarrying after *me'un* might overgeneralize that any married woman can marry someone else without a regular divorce from her first husband.⁴³ (*Me'un* had of course existed for a millennium or longer without that happening.) Exactly the same notion is reflected in the medieval Ashkenazi precedent for a strict stance in the interpretation of the bigamy restrictions. According to that text “it is better that one person perish [by not being able to have children] than to cause sin (*kilkul*) in the generations to come,”⁴⁴ meaning that people who see a man living with two wives (who was allowed to do so because of exceptional circumstances) might come to think that having two wives is legal under all circumstances.

In contrast to other scholars, I propose that German-Polish forms of piety that equate piety with extreme halakhic caution and conservatism have at least as much to do with the Ashkenazi unwillingness to allow real bigamy than either Christian influence or the wish to protect women or the family. The irony is that it was exactly that conservatism which made Ashkenazi practice depart farther from talmudic and gaonic precedent than other legal traditions of Judaism.

Insane Wives

It was the Maharshal's stated belief that Rabbenu Gershom's ban—the Ashkenazi version of the divorce and bigamy restrictions—prevented all possibility of coercing a divorce (or allowing a bigamous second marriage) when the wife had become dysfunctional through no fault of her own. That belief was quite current in Ashkenaz from the late twelfth to the end of the fifteenth century. But it was not undisputed,

⁴³ *Resp. Mahari Minz* 13.

⁴⁴ *Resp. Ravyah* 921. In Berger, “Verstoßung,” I very tentatively proposed a slightly different alternative interpretation (*kilkul* = proliferation of bastards in coming generations, the sentence would then have referred to the divorce and not to the bigamy part of the decision). I no longer stand by that interpretation, having realized that *kilkul* consistently refers to the possibility that prohibitions might be forgotten in the future if one sees people not adhering to them. The net result is in any case the same for both interpretations: Fear of possible transgressions in coming generations prevented the Ravyah from giving dispensations even where they would in fact have been warranted.

lacked a firm halakhic basis, and had apparently run counter to the moral perceptions of even its proponents for some time.⁴⁵ When the Maharshal wrote in the mid- or late sixteenth century, it was no longer very much *en vogue* anywhere. In fact, he was its last proponent.

As we have seen, the questioner in the case of the bleeding wife thought coercive divorce possible halakhically. The Maharshal conceded to him that in an earlier Polish case the husband of an insane wife had indeed been granted dispensation from Rabbenu Gershom's ban (to the Maharshal's disapproval).⁴⁶ The sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries Ashkenazi commentators on the *Shulḥan Arukh* in most instances accept mental and some bodily defects in a wife as grounds for a relaxation of the divorce restrictions. When divorce was impossible for some reason, bigamous remarriage, Ashkenazi style (i.e., after separation from the first wife), was cited as the alternative.⁴⁷

In 1627, Yo'el Sirkes (the Bah) of Lublin was asked to give his opinion on a case from Budapest, then under Ottoman dominion. The case concerned an Ashkenazi *kohen*⁴⁸ who was married with two children. The Bah's summary of the question:

The wife became very much insane, to such a degree that she has to be locked into an inner chamber [*heder be-tokh heder*, maybe a boxroom]. Occasionally, she becomes lucid for a week or two. He cannot possibly live in proximity to her,⁴⁹ and because of that the woman is now staying with her father and her brother while the husband lives in his house with his two sons in great unhappiness, waiting for her to be cured. For several years he has lived in loneliness and chained [to the dead marriage] and [now] asks for permission to divorce her against her will through a messenger in one of her lucid intervals, or to marry a second wife [bigamously].⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Cf. *Resp. Maharil ḥadashot* 202 and Westreich, *Transitions*, 138–139, 332–333; cf. also Rabbenu Simḥa's stance in *Resp. Ravyah* 921, in *Sefer Ravyah—Teshuvot*, 21 ff., and *Resp. Rosh* 42:1. See also above, note 29.

⁴⁶ *Resp. Maharshal* 65. Possibly that was Shalom Shakhna's case referred to in *Bayit ḥadash* on *Tur*, Even ha-ezer 119.

⁴⁷ E.g. the gloss on *Shulḥan arukh*, Even ha-ezer 1,9, *Bet Shemu'el* and *Ḥelkat meḥokek* on *Shulḥan arukh*, Even ha-ezer 119:6.

⁴⁸ I.e., someone of priestly lineage. Although marriage law is slightly different for *kohanim*, that turned out not to be halakhically relevant to the case at hand.

⁴⁹ Literally: "in one cage with her," cf. b *Ketubbot* 72a: "Nobody can live in the same cage with a serpent," i.e., nobody can be expected to live with a blatantly obnoxious spouse.

⁵⁰ *Resp. Bah*. 93.

The narrative presumes that although a father and brother may put up with an insane daughter/sister in the house, and even have the duty to do so, the same cannot not be expected of a husband.

Halakhically, there is disagreement among the decisors regarding the responsibilities of a husband toward an insane wife. Certainly there is no rule that a husband can just hand her back to her parents (although these may care for her and take her into their house during her illness even against his will if they think it appropriate).⁵¹ Some argue that an insane wife has to be housed, clothed and fed, ransomed, and provided with medical treatment by the husband just like any other wife.⁵² Others rule that a husband can neither be compelled to support an insane wife from his own means, nor to have sex with her. He may use his wife's possessions (dowry and *ketubbah* which he sets aside for her) to pay for her upkeep.⁵³

With physical ailments, there is no such rule that diminishes the husband's duties deriving from the marriage contract.

Is that evidence for a particularly negative, discriminatory attitude toward mental disorders among some rabbinic scholars? Maybe not in the case of Maimonides, the original author of the ruling. In the context of his work, the decision to curtail the rights of insane wives is presented as a consequence of the fact that an insane wife cannot be divorced at all, even with her consent, because of her mental incompetence. The rule was meant to apply only to a husband who wants to divorce his wife and would be able to do so if not for her insanity, i.e., when the wife's mental disorder is the *only* legal obstacle to a divorce.⁵⁴ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with their ubiquitous divorce restrictions, such a situation would have been rare indeed. But the sixteenth-century compendium *Shulḥan Arukh* gives a simplified and generalized summary of the Maimonidean decision, absolving all husbands of insane wives of most of their marital responsibilities.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Resp. Rambam* (ed. Blau) 2, 234.

⁵² *Tur*, Even ha-ezer 119; *Bet Yosef*, Even ha-ezer 119, *Shulḥan arukh*, Even ha-ezer 70.4; *Ḥelkat meḥokek*, Even ha-ezer 119:10 (where Maimonides' ruling is deemed inapplicable in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ashenazi environment).

⁵³ *Mishneh Torah*, Ishut 10:23; *Shulḥan arukh*, Even ha-ezer 119:10.

⁵⁴ Clearly stated in *Resp. Rambam* (ed. Blau), vol. 2, no. 234, less clearly in *Mishneh Torah*, Ishut 10:23. Obviously, I agree with the *Ḥelkat meḥokek*'s interpretation of Maimonides (*Ḥelkat meḥokek* on *Shulḥan arukh*, Even ha-ezer 119:10).

⁵⁵ *Shulḥan arukh*, Even ha-ezer 119:10.

The *Shulḥan Arukh's* verdict was, of course, halakhically controversial. The Bah, for one, had misgivings.⁵⁶ But it does fit an apparently prevalent attitude, visible also in the Bah's responsum, according to which it was simply too much to expect of a husband to bear full responsibility for an insane wife.

The pre-twentieth century responsa literature gives quite a few cases where married insane persons were cared for by their blood relatives rather than their spouses.⁵⁷ These arrangements were mostly the result of informal negotiation between the parties without recourse to the courts. In our case, there is no indication that the husband still supported the wife financially, whether from her share of the couple's joint estate or from his own. He certainly had delegated the daily care to her father and brother, which seemed entirely appropriate to his contemporaries.

The "care" given by the blood relations in this particular case consisted of locking the person up and presumably, feeding, clothing and washing her. If one believes Foucault, who assumes a highly tolerant attitude toward "mad" behavior up to the time in question,⁵⁸ one wonders why the locking-up was deemed necessary. One might see the responsum as evidence that the absence of state-regulated asylums in pre-modern times does not necessarily indicate a higher level of tolerance for deviant behavior. One might add that keeping a person isolated in a small room cannot have seemed a particularly shocking or cruel measure at a time when children were whipped for slight misdemeanors and grown-up people were publicly quartered, broken on the wheel or impaled for any number of crimes. In the text, the locking-up is adduced as proof, not of the father's, brother's or husband's cruelty, but of the severity of the woman's condition. A less severe case of mental illness apparently would not have warranted such a measure.

From the Bah's summary of the question, his evaluation of the husband's request becomes obvious: He "cannot possibly live in proximity

⁵⁶ Judging from *Bayit ḥadash* on *Tur*, Even ha-ezer 119, I would say he opposed it. But in fact in our responsum he did not compel the husband to pay alimony in addition to the *ketubbah*, quite in keeping with the *Shulḥan arukh's* interpretation of Maimonides.

⁵⁷ As apparently in the earlier Polish case mentioned by the Maharshal (the young husband of an insane wife had emigrated, leaving her behind) and definitely in *Resp. Maharsham* 6, 159.

⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique: Folie et déraison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961).

to her," he is "chained," "lonely," and "unhappy." Presumably, something should be done to help him.

But the halakhic problem that has so far prevented the husband from divorcing his estranged wife is not only the ban against coercive divorce. Whether the woman opposes a divorce or not is by no means clear. In any case, a further and perhaps the more serious obstacle is that divorce from an insane wife is impossible according to the Talmud.⁵⁹ Talmudic law is much more binding than medieval community regulations and cannot simply be waived on the decision of a court of law.

So is divorce impossible in our case? Not according to the Sephardi scholars from Salonika who have already been consulted by the husband. They have decided "to divorce the woman, all according to religion and Halakhah [i.e., according to the normal procedure that must here include her *ketubbah*], in one of the lucid intervals when she is *compos mentis*, whether she accepts the divorce or not [i.e., ignoring the medieval ban], and to let him marry another wife [only] after that because that is better than to let him marry another [bigamously] and leave her chained [to a dead marriage]."

We have seen above that when a wife became dysfunctional, bigamy was an acceptable solution in the Sephardi world. But this did not seem appropriate to the Salonika rabbis in our case. Bigamy in Sepharad normally meant actual bigamy, with the husband living with and bearing full responsibility for two wives. In our case, though, the first marriage was already dead, with the woman living in her father's and brother's house. Under these circumstances, the Salonika rabbis deemed it unfair on the wife to give the husband permission to remarry without divorcing her first, as this would leave her an *agunah*, a woman chained to a marriage from which she derives no benefits.

The Bah, consulted to give an Ashkenazi approbation to the decision, cannot follow this all too pragmatic Sephardi reasoning. "Their reason why this [the divorce] should be better than that [permission to remarry] I did not see. On the contrary, my humble opinion is quite the opposite."

The reason why he begs to differ is purely halakhic and perhaps one instance of a greater Ashkenazi strictness in ritual-procedural questions of divorce: Divorcing a periodically insane woman during a lucid

⁵⁹ b Gittin 71b; b Yevamot 113b.

interval, according to the Baḥ, may be halakhically incorrect despite the fact that she is completely sane at the moment of divorce. There are indeed voices among the rabbinic scholars of the Middle Ages who say so. Their basis is the Talmud: According to one talmudic opinion, men would be tempted to exploit an insane divorcee sexually, and divorcing an insane woman is prohibited mainly to prevent such abuse.⁶⁰

If protection from sexual exploitation were indeed the rationale behind the talmudic prohibition (as some claim, but others deny), it would be at least grossly negligent to divorce a lucid woman of whom one has to assume that she will soon relapse into insanity.⁶¹ In our particular case, of course, that hardly applies because the father and the brother will prevent any sexual license of the patient with possible rapists or seducers. Locking her up during her episodes should certainly suffice for that.

However, the Baḥ does not consider these practical aspects. For him, the halakhic doubt as to principle forbids a divorce during a lucid interval (even with the woman's consent) in our case. The husband, however, can be helped. He can remarry without divorcing his first wife—after depositing the money due to her on divorce with the communal authorities. Several other Polish sources specify that in such cases, a writ of divorce should also be deposited to be delivered to the woman on recovery from her mental illness (should she ever recover completely), thereby ending all ambiguity as to her status vis-à-vis her ex-husband.⁶²

Clearly, this solution to the husband's plight was bigamy only in name. The early modern Ashkenazi way of dealing with insane wives was a novelty in the Ashkenazi tradition only insofar as insanity was now a ground for the relaxation of both the bigamy and the divorce restrictions (it was neither in the Middle Ages). But the solution devised

⁶⁰ b Gittin 71b; b Yevamot 113b, and see Rashi and Tosafot ad loco. The sexual interpretation of the expression "people would treat her as ownerless property" is in fact Rashi's. See Tal Ilan, "Folgenreiche Lektüren: Gender in Rashis Kommentar zum babylonischen Talmud," in *Der Differenz auf der Spur*, ed. Christiane E. Müller and Andrea Schatz (Berlin: Metropol, 2004), 21–50, on Rashi's predilection for reading sex into texts where it may not have been present for the rabbis.

⁶¹ *Resp. Baḥ*, 93. His wording refers to the Yerushalmi's discussion in Yevamot 14,1 (fol. 76a). *Gerirah* (or *gedirah*, as some read) in that text is traditionally interpreted in the light of b Yevamot 113b and Rashi ad locum; see preceding note.

⁶² The earliest witness is the anonymous questioner in *Resp. Maharshah* 65; cf. also *Helkat mehokek* on *Shulḥan arukh*, Even ha-ezer 119:10, *Bayit ḥadash* on *Tur* Even ha-ezer 119; *Resp. Shevut Ya'aqov* 1, 29 and the debate in *Resp. Panim me'ivot* (Maharam Ash) 1, 4.

by the Baḥ stayed true to tradition in that the form of bigamy it allowed was a fictitious one where the husband did in fact not live with two wives, but with one.

Sex is not mentioned explicitly in the Baḥ's responsum. But what does the husband's "loneliness," i.e., the reason given as his motive for remarriage, consist of? It would be more than far-fetched to assume that in an early modern halakhic context, "loneliness" refers to the lack of a soul mate. "Loneliness" here is more probably the state of being without a sexual partner.

In a similar case involving an Askhenazi living in Salonika whose wife had become insane, the question states: "He is a Torah scholar and pious and fears that, God forbid, he might come to have sinful thoughts,"⁶³ an expression which refers mainly to sexual fantasies and masturbation (a grave sin). Here, the wife still lived with her husband, but is described as someone with whom daily life is trying: "She is foolish and crazy, and there is no understanding in her for good [actions/words], only bad all day long."

It seemed obvious to the questioner that one would or could not have sex with her. In this case, which was decided by a Sephardi rabbi in a Sephardi environment and without consultation of Ashkenazi rabbis, the solution was bigamy without the trappings of quasi-divorce required by the Baḥ and other Polish authorities.

Impotent and Otherwise Insufficient Men

Being a woman, the wife of an insane husband would not have been able to remarry bigamously, even if it had been bigamy only in name. Bi-andry was not a legal possibility anywhere in the Jewish world. So if a wife had a malfunctioning husband and wanted a fully functional one, divorce was her only legal option. Not that this was easy to achieve against the husband's will. With an insane husband, divorce was usually out of the question anyway because only legally competent men can effect a divorce. And lucid intervals would not necessarily have helped: In a decisive medieval precedent, the Rosh ruled that a husband's insanity does not entitle his wife to force a divorce.⁶⁴ *Epilepsy of a*

⁶³ *Resp. Divre rivot* (Isaac Adarbi) 294.

⁶⁴ *Resp. Rosh* 43:3; 106, 4.

husband, too, did not count as grounds for coercive divorce, while a wife's epilepsy did.⁶⁵

The rabbis on both sides of the cultural divide were more reluctant to permit coercive divorce of husbands than they were to allow coercive divorce of wives, and not only for possible misogynist reasons. Women are the passive part in divorce proceedings, and that made (and makes) things so much easier on the procedural level: Coercive divorce of a wife in practice means to simply give her the writ of divorce, or to throw it to her or even *in extremis* depositing it for her should she refuse to take it. A husband, however, has the active part (minimally: ordering the writ of divorce to be written, ordering the messenger to deliver it). Often physical force, like detention or whipping, was necessary to bring him to do that. Since the late Middle Ages, rabbis did (and do) not like to take such extreme measures, for practical as well as for halakhic reasons.

In practice, by far the most important dysfunction that early modern Jewish women could claim with any confidence of getting a court order for forced divorce was a husband's impotence.⁶⁶

In mishnaic/talmudic times, alleged sexual dysfunction of the husband enabled a wife suing for divorce to claim her *ketubbah* money. (She would normally not be entitled to it as the initiator of the divorce). After unilateral divorce became obsolete in the Middle Ages, the *ketubbah* was no longer the issue in impotence cases. Indeed, the wife's expressly claiming it counted as a point in her disfavor that "proved" the impotence claim was no more than trickery to enrich herself and then run off with another man. In most early modern instances, the main aim of the wife seems to have been to get her divorce at all. But attempts at forcing a divorce on grounds of impotence were not necessarily successful.

In a case of the Rashdam's, a young⁶⁷ woman asks for divorce, stating her husband suffers from erectile dysfunction. They have no children.

⁶⁵ *Resp. Maharikh hadashot* 24; *Resp. Maharam Rothenburg*, ed. Cremona, fol. 53b–54a (following no. 165); *Resp. hakhme provinzija* 76. A detailed treatment of the subject in Berger, "Verstoßung," 108–126.

⁶⁶ Roni Weinstein, "Impotence and the Preservation of the Family in the Jewish Community of Italy in the Early Modern Period," in *Sexuality and the Family in History*, ed. Israel Bartal and Isaiah Gafni (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1998), 159–176 (Hebrew).

⁶⁷ I deduce that from the fact that her husband is called *baḥur*. Married men of over twenty are not normally called thus.

But the husband denies being impotent at all, and furthermore claims that he had some time ago impregnated his wife, and that she then suffered a miscarriage.⁶⁸

Denial or at least half-denial was the usual reaction of husbands when wives sued for divorce because of impotence. The consequences of admitting to impotence, namely: liability to pay *ketubbah* in an unwanted divorce, and possibly public humiliation,⁶⁹ were hardly very tempting.

Asked by a local authority to decide our case, the Rashdam begins by saying that the halakhic sources on the subject are unclear and the positions of the medieval and early modern scholars contradictory. So much so that “there is no-one in our generation who could decide which side [is right]. As I see it, the best thing to do in the eyes of the Creator would be for the person of our time who is asked a question on this [impotence as grounds for divorce] to answer the questioner according to what he was taught by heaven[ly inspiration], and without adducing halakhic proof.” “Heavenly inspiration” apparently is the Rashdam’s description of what I, in a secular-rationalist vein, have dubbed “moral evaluation” and “pragmatism” above. That, again, seems the decisive factor here, even though it is accompanied by an erudite halakhic analysis that (at least partly)⁷⁰ supports the final decision.

The woman has made contradictory statements as to the time of the onset of the impotence. First she stated that at the beginning of their marriage, intercourse was normal, and that the husband became impotent later. Then she claimed that he had never once penetrated her, and that her non-existent virginity was due to crushing the hymen with a finger. (This was sometimes done to facilitate the penetration of a virgin.) The Rashdam deduces from these contradictions that she cannot be considered credible. Her credibility is further compromised by the alleged miscarriage, which she denies, but which is confirmed by female witnesses.

The Rashdam’s impression of the young husband’s statement is strikingly different: “All the youth’s claims are right.” If the litigants’ pleas have been relayed to him correctly, he concludes, then “all the

⁶⁸ *Resp. Rashdam* Even ha-ezer 103.

⁶⁹ The sources give little indication that humiliation was in fact involved.

⁷⁰ As he himself is honest enough to show, one could come to the opposite *halakhic* conclusion regarding the woman’s credibility (see b Yevamot 65b), and also whether a divorce without *ketubbah* payment is indicated.

woman's purposes are bad" and the young man should not be forced either to give his wife a divorce or the *ketubbah*. The rabbis instead should try to convince her to go on living with him, as there are no objective reasons that would disqualify the husband for that role.

If she refuses, she is to be treated as a *moredet*, a "rebellious wife," i.e., a wife who refuses to have intercourse with her husband. The *moredet* in early modern times lost all rights the marriage contract invests her with.

If she was lucky, her husband would oblige her with a divorce and even return all or part of her dowry. But in a worst-case scenario, a *moredet* might be left without either a writ of divorce or any means of support.

Despite the risk, there were women who consistently refused to have marital sex, for example the wife who declared that she would "much rather sleep [even] with a Turk or a Greek than with her husband."⁷¹ The conventional wisdom of the age of arranged marriages decreed that two healthy persons of opposite sex must be able and willing to copulate, but cases of extreme sexual non-attraction obviously did exist. One might speculate that the high frequency of impotence in young men, as judged by the many instances of that complaint documented in responsa and also other types of text (e.g., autobiography), might be partly due to this fact. At the time, of course, it was more often attributed to sorcery.

To return to our case, it may well be that the woman either invented the husband's alleged impotence or exaggerated what was essentially a mutual lack of interest to have sex with each other in the hope of getting a divorce. That the husband refused a divorce need not mean that he loved his wife: More probably, he could not afford to part with the dowry (not to speak of the *ketubbah*).⁷² Thanks to the Rashdam, he did not have to.

Another sixteenth-century Sephardi husband was less fortunate. His wife demanded that he be forced to divorce her after nine years of marriage, mainly on the basis of his alleged impotence (which he denied).⁷³ The couple had an eight-year-old son, but the husband had

⁷¹ *Resp. Ranah* 41.

⁷² In contrast to the wife's dowry, which at least theoretically has to be refunded at every divorce, the *ketubbah* is an additional indemnification payment due to the wife when she is divorced on the initiative of the husband or because she has legitimate claims against him (as in this case). See notes 10 and 15 above and *Mishneh Torah* 16:1–3 for a definition of both terms.

⁷³ *Resp. Divre Rivot* 402.

been bedridden for years and was partly paralyzed. According to the wife, he suffered from Syphilis, a contagious illness, one more reason why she thought she should not be expected to stay with him.

In the responsum dealing with the case, Isaac Adarbi of Salonika decides that the (undisputed) severity of the husband's illness makes the wife's claim of impotence credible. Furthermore, the illness seems incurable, as proven by the wife's many attempts to find a remedy which have all been in vain. Accordingly, Adarbi finds an immediate forced divorce warranted on the strength of the impotence claim—but the only kind of “force” he allows is telling the husband he will be considered a sinner if he does not grant the divorce. This caution is in line with a general tendency to restrict the power of female impotence claims noticeable since the Middle Ages. But in this particular case, Adarbi had no reason at all to be daring on the impotence issue because he had a halakhic ace up his sleeve that would assure the divorce anyway. It was not the danger of contagion from Syphilis, to which he does not relate at all. It was the fact, not even mentioned in the edited version of the question, that the husband had bad breath from ulcers in his mouth. The Mishnah lists “polypus” as one of the few defects in a husband that entitle a wife to forced divorce with payment of *ketubbah*, and the Gemara translates “polypus” as bad breath.⁷⁴ As the husband has polypus, states Adarbi, he can be forced to grant a divorce even by whipping.

In a way, this is a novelty: Despite the Talmud's ruling, halitosis was not normally a claim that could get you a divorce in medieval or early modern times. In our case, apparently, there was a combination of factors that made withholding a divorce seem unfair to Adarbi, of which the oral ulcerations were one. By their association with polypus, they provided the most elegant halakhic solution, even though they might not have sufficed on their own.

The responsum does not mention the *ketubbah*. The wife might have known that claiming money would adversely affect her chances of obtaining a divorce. But with the husband gravely ill for years, it is improbable anyway that there is much money left. Neither does the responsum discuss the husband's situation, which has not been enviable so far and might now become desperate. Who will nurse him after the divorce? How will he support himself? We do not know.

⁷⁴ b Ketubbot 77a.

Infertility

Failure of a wife to become pregnant for ten succeeding years is, according to the Talmud, a reason to force a married couple to divorce even against the will of both partners.⁷⁵ The biblical commandment to be fruitful and multiply seemed more important than legal, economic and emotional marital bonds to at least some talmudic rabbis.

But in early modern times (and the late Middle Ages), rabbis in both Ashkenaz and Sepharad found this rule unacceptable. They refused to sunder infertile marriages against the will of both parties, blatantly ignoring talmudic law, for motives that probably included a recognition of the importance of the economic and perhaps also the emotional bonds between childless spouses. Divorce was not even considered unless one of the partners *demand*ed a change in marital status to be able to have children. Childless wives could try to get a divorce by claiming impotence (with varying success). In Poland and Germany, authoritative early modern rabbinic voices declared it legal for a husband to forcibly divorce a supposedly infertile woman—*theoretically*. In Ashkenazi halakhic practice, however, childlessness was only ever brought up as an argument for divorce on the husband's side when the reason behind it was not infertility, but lack of marital sex. For infertility as such, the Halakhah allowing men unilateral coercive divorce was ignored in Poland and Germany during the period covered in this study because of a deeply entrenched tradition that one should not divorce an infertile wife against her will. Only later, toward the end of the eighteenth century, was there so strong a rabbinic reaction (with kabbalistic undercurrents) against what was now perceived as a secular popular custom that two learned and pious husbands were allowed to get rid of their allegedly no longer fertile wives.⁷⁶ (Both wives had earlier borne children who had died.)

Among Ottoman Jewry, failure to become pregnant for ten years never justified coercive divorce on demand of the husband. It did, however, count as a good reason to allow bigamy, preferably with consent of the first wife who had to be wooed into agreement by costly

⁷⁵ b Ketubbot 77a–b.

⁷⁶ *Noda bi-yehudah tin yana*, Even ha-ezer 102; *Resp. Rah ha-kohen* 328; and see *Resp. Me'il zedaka* (Yona Landsofer) 33 as an earlier precursor; see Westreich, *Transitions*, 316–331, for a detailed account of that development. He calls it “adoption of the Sephardi approach.” I would add that in allowing divorce it was in fact more radical than the contemporary Sephardi practice.

presents, but if persuasion failed also without it. In the latter case she could opt for divorce if she preferred to do so. Again, the first wife was often not infertile in any conventional sense at all: She was simply menopausal. In her fertile years, she had borne children, but they had died, or the surviving children were all of the same sex. With the death of an only daughter or son who had not yet reproduced, a father (not the mother!) was required to beget another child of that sex to fulfill the commandment.⁷⁷

Female “infertility” cases are in many ways atypical when compared to the others presented in this study. The first wife was not ill, and, especially in the Ottoman cases, everyday marital life functioned normally. Some texts even stress that the spouses got on very well and that divorce was out of the question for both. Here, then, bigamy is perhaps better interpreted as a religious requirement (similar to levirate marriage) than as a sign of marriage dysfunction. Whether that religious requirement might not have had enticing concomitants from the perspective of the husband, like a young face in the house and a bit of variety in sex life, is quite another question.

*Illness, Marriage and Halakhah in the Sixteenth
and Early Seventeenth Centuries: A Survey*

Under what conditions should spouses be protected from being divorced against their will? One answer could be that unilateral divorce should be possible in general, but that exceptions might be in order for the severely chronically ill who would be very badly off in a single state and cannot hope to remarry. Early modern Judaism, however, took the opposite view: While healthy and normally functioning persons could not be divorced against their will, the prohibition was sometimes relaxed in the case of chronically ill spouses. The rationale behind this was that the partner of a normally functioning spouse had no objective reason to want a divorce, but the partner of a malfunctioning spouse did. The healthy spouse’s interest in a functioning marriage took precedence over the ill spouse’s interest to retain the status quo. Clearly, the model of marriage behind all this was a sober and mechanistic one that took account of the contractual nature of marriage and of

⁷⁷ Many examples in Westreich, *Transitions*, 231–302.

the fact than most marriages were arranged and any deeper emotional attachment between the spouses could not be taken for granted.

The texts show that in some cases, ill persons had relatives they could fall back on for support when their partner left them. But in many more cases, no such option seems to have existed—or perhaps it was simply not mentioned. With very rare exceptions, the fate of the hapless divorcee-to-be was not an issue of discussion at all in the responsa.

Nevertheless, it may have been an implicit consideration that influenced halakhic decisions to some extent. For example, when the malfunctioning partner was the wife, bigamy could be a compromise that provided support to the sick wife while giving the husband a fully functional new partner. It may have been concern for the afflicted partner that made bigamy the preferred solution in cases of female marital malfunctioning, at least for Sephardi Jews, in the Ottoman Empire, as it had been in Spain. (But one should not ignore that bigamy might also have been easier on the husband: Divorce was expensive.) The first wife here retained all rights the marriage contract gave her, including that to marital sex. Her inability to have sex could well be the reason for permitting bigamy in the first place, but if her health improved after that the husband would have the right as well as the duty to sleep with both his wives.

In strictly monogamous Poland and Germany, bigamy was regarded as a ritual aberration that could not be permitted (and never had been permitted since the thirteenth century),⁷⁸ mainly for ritual-halakhic reasons and possibly to a smaller extent because of some influence from the monogamous Christian environment. The unavailability of bigamy as a compromise solution may have been one, or even the main, reason why Ashkenazi scholars at least during the fifteenth century and earlier were more reluctant than their Sephardi colleagues to grant exemptions.

Strikingly, in both traditions, psychiatric disorders were regarded as particularly hard to bear for the healthy partner. Especially so, it seems, when the healthy partner was male. Women with a psychiatrically afflicted husband stood little chance of getting permission for coerced divorce, remarriage, or even a refund of their dowry (and for the

⁷⁸ Not counting pseudo-bigamy where the partners had already separated and would stay separated, but forcing the *get* on the wife was impossible or had to be delayed for some reason, so that the husband received permission to remarry (cf. above, p. 231).

time under discussion, I know of none who tried, though some did earlier and later). For husbands in the same situation, the Halakhah was more favorable: Epilepsy was the only legal basis for legally separating from a wife against her will in Ashkenaz that had never been seriously disputed, and insanity became the most frequently claimed (and rabbinically accepted) one from the sixteenth century. An epileptic wife could even be divorced without her full *ketubbah* if the husband declared himself unable to pay. In Sepharad, too, the harsh and extreme measure of coercive divorce, usually shunned in favor of bigamy, was used on epileptic wives. Ottoman rabbis here relied on the same medieval German precedent as their Polish colleagues. With insane (not merely epileptic) wives, bigamy was more common, legal incompetence being a hindrance to divorce. In Ashkenaz, a fictitious form of bigamy where the spouses really lived apart from each other and no longer had any contact was used in such cases. Generally, the halakhic codes show a tendency to strip insane (but not bodily ill) wives of some of their marital rights, whether in monogamous or in bigamous marriages.

What emerges very clearly from the sources are images of minimal standard male and female Jewish bodies against which the unwell spouse was measured in each of the cases. The minimal standard Jewish male of the time was sexually functional, but not necessarily of sound mind or of good health. The minimal standard Jewish female was an acceptable sex partner, which in her case prominently included that she be ritually pure and of sound mind (because sex with an insane or epileptic wife was seen as either impractical or as disgusting). Fertility, however desirable, was not part of the minimal standard female model: It was halakhically next to irrelevant in Ashkenaz, and even in the Sephardi world a wife's infertility did not render her an unfit spouse either halakhically or in people's minds, although it might, under certain circumstances, impose the duty of marrying a second wife on the husband—a duty that only rich people would contemplate because it involved costly concessions to the first wife, either to make her accept the second wife under her roof or to finance a second, independent household to keep the rival out of her sight. Another factor is again strikingly missing from the minimal female standards, as it was missing from the male: Physical health. Neither good health as such nor the most obvious practical benefit it confers, namely, the ability to do physical work, were part of the minimal standard model of the female Jewish body. However, there were some minimal health requirements:

Types of ill health that affected one's sexual functioning—even (for the time) relatively minor health complaints like genital ulcers—definitely did make one fall short of the minimal standard.

One major way in which illness, whether bodily or mental, adversely affected sex life was by making the body of the afflicted partner repulsive. Few texts state that explicitly, but it is present as an undercurrent in many. I would like to end with an example where that aspect is very clearly discernible. A woman in the Ottoman Empire pleaded to force her husband to divorce her, claiming he occasionally wet his bed because of a chronic urinary tract infection. She was not granted a divorce for a number of halakhic reasons—and also for a pragmatic one: “What does it matter to her, as when he is awake he is like everyone [i.e., not incontinent]. So he can have intercourse with her, and afterwards both can go to sleep in different beds if she cannot bear it. And when he has intercourse with her naked, there is no smell.”⁷⁹

⁷⁹ *Resp. Radbaz* 4,260.

PART III

BODY, MIND AND SOUL

ON THE PERFORMING BODY IN
THEOSOPHICAL-THEURGICAL KABBALAH:
SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS

MOSHE IDEL

The Performing Body: Between Book and Body

Two different, and to a great extent, diverging understandings of Judaism have been competing in the last generation: Jews are described, in a more traditional manner, as the people of the book, be it the Bible or the Talmud on the one hand, and, more recently, the people of the body on the other hand.¹ Both evaluations are as illuminating as they are distorting. If the former approach refers more to the centrality of text in the elite culture of the Jews through generations, the latter is connected—as I shall try to clarify below—to the performance of the commandments. The more recent overemphasis on the centrality of the body, salutary as it may be as part of a temporary corrective move toward reaching a more balanced attitude toward Judaism is, in my opinion, not quite a balanced description of the comprehensive and complex historical phenomena known as traditional Judaism. In any case, there are few Jewish literary parallels to the esthetics of the body found in Greek culture.

In terms of what I see as two very different extremes of the wider and more diversified phenomena belonging to this religion, I would

¹ See, for example, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, ed., *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), Charles Mopsik, “The Body of Engenderment in the Hebrew Bible, the Rabbinic Tradition and the Kabbalah,” in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. M. Feher (New York: Zone Books, 1989), I, 49–74 and Daniel Abrams, *The Female Body of God in Kabbalistic Literature* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004) (Hebrew). In a different manner, the emphasis on the body is evident also in the phallogocentric theory of Elliot R. Wolfson, to which he dedicated several voluminous studies, which envisions a part of the body as the centre of gravity in Jewish tradition, and more explicitly in Jewish mysticism. See, for example, his *Circle in the Square, Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995) and *Language, Eros, Being, Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

say that both the preoccupation with study and the concern with the body should be seen to a very great extent as necessary for what was the main religious *modus vivendi* in traditional Judaism: the performance of the commandments. Without a body one cannot observe the commandments, which is the aim of much personal investment in religious studies, according to rabbinic thought. Thus, an academic discourse regarding the perception of the Jewish body in Judaism should, ideally, involve, concomitantly, the role played by the religious actions dependent on it, and the manner in which the importance of those performances impact on the perception of this body.² Moreover, performance is not only a thing done by the body, or impacting on its perception by observers, rather the body itself is changed by the performance of rituals. Suffice it to mention circumcision in Judaism, the coverings characteristic of different religions, the postures and gestures during rituals, and the various ways in which hair is dealt with in various religious groups, in order to understand that performance shapes the body as well as is shaped by it. Also, individual bodies, discrete entities as they may be, have been perceived as part of much bigger bodies, social or religious—*Corpus Christi* in Christianity, or *Kelal Yisrael*—the entire Jewish nation in Judaism, and this integrated vision determined forms of behavior in the individual.³ Thus, perception of the individual body depends on the perception being integrated into a broader context in this world, or imitating other more “sublime” bodies in the supernal world. To take a famous example: stigmata reflect the interiorization of the events related to one divine body in the remote past, the wounds of Jesus, by a body in the present. The famous theory of astral body, or the king’s two bodies also reflect complex theories that complicate a homogenous discussion of the meaning of the body. The performative approach created different forms of corporeal habits that contributed to the anatomical aspects of the body. The shaking of the body during prayer or study of the Torah is just one example that has been transferred also to other intellectual activities.

The performance of the commandments, or of any other religious action, is not only a matter of the active body, but it also shapes some

² Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 22, 24, and idem, “Eros in der Kabbala: Zwischen gegenwärtiger physischer Realität und idealen metaphysischen Konstrukten,” *Kulturen des Eros*, ed. Detlev Clemens and Tilo Schabert (Munich: Fink, 2001), 59–102.

³ See Byron L. Sherwin, “*Corpus Domini*: Traces of the New Testament in East European Hasidism?,” *Heythrop Journal* 35 (1994): 267–280.

forms of experience. The daily repetition of the same rituals over years triggers deeper responses, cognitive, emotional or corporeal. In some cases, an approach that may be described as *ergetic*,⁴ namely acquiring knowledge or experience by doing, is related to the commandments, and to mystical or magical techniques. In other words, in Judaism in general, and in Jewish mysticism in many of its major forms, there are many instances in which spiritual achievement is not a matter of transcending experience within the body, but may be achieved by means *of* the body. In fact, as we shall see toward the end of the article, the isomorphism between a human and a supernal body serves as a condition for an experience of the spiritual by the corporeal.

This vision does not represent, to be sure, the entire spectrum of approaches concerning the bodies for all Kabbalists. So, for example, the importance of the shape of the body and of ritual performance as described by rabbinic Judaism was strongly attenuated in ecstatic Kabbalah, in comparison to the main schools of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah.⁵ It is in the latter that the anthropomorphic, both andromorphic and gynomorphic, images are abundantly found. Though anthropomorphic imagery is used, many Kabbalists also denied them as a gross representation of the divine realm. However, what is of special importance for us is the fact that in these main schools the vision of the various divine powers as *Evarim*, limbs, or members of the supernal man, *Adam Elyon*, plays an important role, not only as part of a depiction of that world but also in order to articulate the affinities between the performance of commandments by human limbs and supernal limbs. The kabbalistic dictum that “one limb sustains—or strengthens—another [supernal] limb” became a widespread statement by the end of the thirteenth century⁶ and, in some instances, phrases like “the limb in the Merkavah” or the “limb of the Shekhinah” also recur.⁷ This is part of a more comprehensive theory, whose sources are rabbinic, which established a correspondence between the 613 limbs

⁴ See Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), XXVI–XXVII.

⁵ For the divergences between these two forms of Kabbalah insofar as the way in which the Torah is described in terms of a body, see my remarks in *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. Menachem Kaluss (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), XIII–XV.

⁶ See Iris Felix, “Theurgy, Magic, and Mysticism in the Kabbalah of R. Joseph of Shushan” (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2005), 37–143 (Hebrew).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

of the human body and the same number of commandments, both positive and negative. It is hard to overestimate the contribution this correlation makes—that envisages the anatomy of the body in the light of ritual—to the development of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah. Unlike the more general and vague isomorphisms of the human shape and that of the divine, according to Genesis 1:26 and rabbinic texts, in the main schools of Kabbalah we can discern a much more detailed, and ritually oriented vision of both the bodies of Jews and of God.⁸ The fact that in the main school of Kabbalah the human body became one of the most important symbols of the entire divine structure is a telling development, and one that continues earlier anthropomorphic thought. The peak of this development is found in Lurianic Kabbalah, which resorted to plenty of corporeal and anthropomorphic imagery, much more so than any other kabbalistic school. However, the symbol could play such a central role only because it was a dynamic entity, complex and flexible. This complexity and flexibility constitutes one of the main topics of this study.

On the other hand, the human body is conceived of not only as a reflection of the divine sphere, but in some cases in the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, the extension of the divine body, or as the locus where the divine elements dwell. Likewise, even the soul has been described sometimes in concrete terms as possessing some form, like a sphere, or even a human body.⁹ Thus while adopting many of the philosophical theories about the deity or the soul known in the Middle Ages, many of the Kabbalists did not renounce the traditional depiction of these two topics in bodily imagery.

Zoharic Interpretations of the Husband's Three Obligations

In some of the following paragraphs we shall inspect the way in which the husband's attitude to the body of the wife reflects the importance of the body in general, and is related to some form of spiritual experience. However, I am concerned here not so much with the marital, erotic or sexual aspects of the topic, which certainly are present in the following

⁸ See Yair Lorberboim, *The Image of God: Halakhah and Aggadah* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2004) (Hebrew), who pointed out the importance of the extension of the divine form by procreation.

⁹ Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 73–75.

discussions, but much more in the assumption that relations between bodies may be intended to improve the status of the feminine body, not just that of the male one.

The starting point of some discussions in Kabbalah are the biblical instructions regarding the way in which a husband should treat his promised spouse in case he takes another wife:

If another (woman) he takes for himself, her flesh, her covering, and her *onah* he may not stint. And if these three he does not do for her, then she may depart gratis: there is no silver.¹⁰

These obligations were intended to safeguard the interest, and to a certain extent the status, of the earlier wife or promised spouse, so that the male would not desert them in case another woman was brought into the family. Though polygamy is at least implicitly assumed, its abrupt impact on the status of the first wife was attenuated. In a significant way, the obligations are part of the effort to defend the weaker party and much less an attempt to create a happy family or to enhance love between the two parties, though also these aims should not be overlooked. These obligations are, however, expressly related to different aspects of the body of the woman, not to her feelings, or even to her sense of honor. Needless to say, these obligations have been accepted and elaborated in rabbinic literature, where additional instructions as to the positive attitude to the body of the woman may be found.¹¹

A major shift in the understanding of these three obligations as part of a kabbalistic understanding of Judaism is found in the Zoharic literature. Written at the end of the thirteenth century in Spain, this huge and diversified literary corpus includes developments of early Kabbalah in Provence, Catalonia, and Castile, and also much earlier concepts and themes, all attributed to an important figure, R. Shimeon bar Yoḥai, who flourished in the second century C.E.¹²

¹⁰ Exodus 21:10. See William H.C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40, a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 103. For his comments on the biblical text, see *ibid.*, 200–205.

¹¹ See Abrams, *The Female Body of God*, 152–161, 180.

¹² On this kabbalistic literature, see Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, trans. D. Goldstein (London and Washington: Littman Library, 1991), three volumes; Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993); Charles Mopsik, *Chemins de la Cabale* (Paris and Tel Aviv: Éditions de L'Éclat, 2004), 163–307; and Elliot R. Wolfson, *Luminal Darkness: Imaginal Gleanings from Zoharic Literature* (Oxford: One World, 2007).

The secret that we found in the book of Rabbi Hamnuna Sabba,¹³ that interpreted this verse as [dealing with] *Keneset Yisrael*, as it is written, “Her food, Her clothing, Her duty marriage shall he not diminish.”¹⁴ And if he prevents Her, what is written: “then She go out free without money”¹⁵ as it is written, “where is the bill of your mother’s divorcement.”¹⁶ And it is written,¹⁷ “you have been sold for naught and you shall be redeemed without money.” And whoever prevented Torah from Her is as if he took the duty [of] marriage from the wife and prevented it from her. [Then] She remains like a widow, but not [really] a widow.¹⁸

Here we have an interpretation that changed the course of the understanding of this verse in the history of Kabbalah. The anonymous Kabbalist attributed to the mythical book of R. Hamnuna Sabba a vision that sees in the biblical verse a hint primarily to the divine feminine power. While the identity of *Keneset Yisrael* in this passage is clear, namely it refers to the last *sefirah*, less clear is who the husband is: the human Kabbalist or the divine *sefirah*, *Tiferet*. I would opt for the first alternative, because of the occurrence of the verse from Isaiah, where the mother is mentioned. If this interpretation is chosen, then the feminine power is described as both wife of Israel and as mother. However, the three biblical obligations have been reinterpreted in accordance with a new religious value, i.e., the rabbinic study of the Torah, which are understood, at least implicitly, in a theurgical manner, namely by assuming that their performance will induce the sexual union of the divine feminine power with her supernal husband.¹⁹

As in other cases in this layer of Zoharic literature, the precise theosophical symbolism was not made explicit. We do not know, for example, what the symbolic relationships of the three obligations are. However, if the husband or the student of the Torah, and the three obligations are not treated here symbolically, the elevation of the human wife to the status of a supernal power seems to be conspicuous.

¹³ This is an imaginary book quoted in several instances in the Zoharic literature.

¹⁴ Exodus 21:10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21:11.

¹⁶ Isaiah 50:1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52:5.

¹⁸ *Zohar*, III, fol. 268a. I cannot address here the possible sources of this statement, but they deserve a separate investigation.

¹⁹ I cannot address here the issue of the intention of the wife during the sexual rapports, according to some Kabbalists. See, meanwhile, Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 247–250.

In the later stage of this literature, known as *Tikkunei Zohar*, a more explicit symbolic interpretation is offered.

They²⁰ are demanding food, covering and *onah*, that is the time of his sexual relation, because it is said about Her: “Her food, Her covering, and Her *onah* will not be diminished.” There is no one that demands the food, that is the Torah, [which is the] food of the *Shekhinah*, and She is the supernal Mother, that is said about Her “Do not desert the Torah of Your Mother,”²¹ “Her covering”—this is the garment of *zizit*, and his covering, and the phylacteries of the hand ... and her *onah*—this is *Keryat Shema*, at its [proper] time. “And if he does not do these things to Her”—to the *Shekhinah*—“She will be sold for naught and you shall be redeemed without money” he will exit without shame from the *Shekhinah*, he is insolent.²²

It is evident that the author is building upon the Zoharic passage quoted above: what was described there as *Keneset Yisrael* becomes here the *Shekhinah*. The discussion is now supplemented by additional details: while earlier the food was Torah, now the covering is the *tallit* and phylacteries, while the *onah* is related to the central prayer known as *Keryat Shema*. Thus, the biblical obligations toward the corporeal wife have been supplanted by the three main rabbinic commandments, which are directed to the supernal divine power. Or, to put it another way, the pattern of the approach to the human wife became the exegetical pattern for understanding the attitude to the supernal feminine power. From my point of view, the process of “elevation” means the dominance of the ordinary directives intended in the Bible to persons active in this world, over what happens in the supernal world, even if some of the Kabbalists would argue the contrary. Let me clarify by saying that the entire passage has to do with those persons who are not doing for the sake of the *Shekhinah* what they should do.

In another passage in *Tikkunei Zohar*, one more step in specifying the precise symbolic “meaning” of each of the three obligations has been

²⁰ Namely those who are insolent.

²¹ Psalms 1:8.

²² *Tikkunei Zohar*, no. 6, ed. Reuven Margalio (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1978), fols. 22a–22b.

It should be mentioned that in late Midrash and some early kabbalistic literatures the expression *Guf ha-Shekhinah*, the body of the Shekhinah, occurs. See Moshe Idel, “The World of Angels in Human Shape,” in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Joseph Dan and Joseph Hacker (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), 23–32 (Hebrew). The term *Guf* recurs in the book of the *Zohar* in many forms and meanings. See Yehuda Liebes, “Sections of the Zohar Lexicon” (Ph.D. diss. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1976), 168–290 (Hebrew).

taken. After adducing an interpretation based on metempsychosis, the anonymous author attributes to R. Shimeon bar Yohai the following exclamation:

R. Shimeon said: Sabba, Sabba!²³ Open the words more since your words are obscure. That Sabba said to him: “*She’erah*—this is the food from the side of right, since all food emerges from there, as it is written ‘He opens his hand and supplies to all livings, good will.’”²⁴ Her covering—from the side of left that is the covering of eyes, since there is the incest on the left, since the left side is damaging there, as it is written: “From North the evil will open itself.”²⁵ And this is the reason why it is said about Isaac: “And it came to pass that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see”²⁶ and the covering is needed there ... and this is the reason the *zizit* and the phylacteries are Her covering ... and *Onatah*—from the side of the median pillar, that is Israel, namely “Hear, O Israel” because there Her unification is found.²⁷

A similar view is found in the Hebrew treatise written by the same Kabbalist, presumably before he wrote the Aramaic literatures that became canonical.²⁸ Here the three obligations are identified as corresponding to three sides, which are the three *sefirot*: *Hesed*—Food, *Gevurah*—Covering, and *Tiferet*—Unification. The three supernal powers were interpreted in terms of their contribution to the *Shekhinah*, not the other way around. It is She that turns to be the center of the discussion and of the performance of the three major commandments. Their performance, related to the three higher *sefirot*, is subordinated to the special status and vicissitudes of the lower feminine *sefirah*, which preoccupied this trend of Kabbalah. This theosophical interpretation is presented here, just as in the main layer of the *Zohar*, as if it is a profound secret, which is disclosed by the mysterious Hamnuna Sabba. The topic has been presented in the two cases in a manner that reflects a special reverence toward it: even the revered R. Shimeon, the most important figure in the *imaginaire* of Jewish mysticism, needs the disclosure of this topic from the mouth of the mysterious and authoritative figure.²⁹

²³ Here again the Sabba is R. Hamnuna, like in the book of the *Zohar*.

²⁴ Psalms 145:16.

²⁵ Jeremiah 1:14.

²⁶ Genesis 27:1.

²⁷ *Tikkunei Zohar*, no. 69, fol. 100b.

²⁸ Efraim Gottlieb, ed., *The Hebrew Writings of the Author of Tikkunei Zohar and Ra'aya Mehemna* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2003), 163. See also my Introduction, *ibid.*, 29–35.

²⁹ On the importance of this figure in the various parts of the Zoharic literature, see

The views found in the last layer of the Zoharic literature did not leave a special impression on Kabbalists until the generation of the expulsion from Spain. It is only after 1492 that this layer started its career as a major source of inspiration for many Kabbalists. One of those who also adopted the view about the *Zohar's* three obligations is R. Meir ben Ezekiel ibn Gabbai, active around 1530 in the Greek zone of the Ottoman Empire. After quoting the first passage from *Tikkunei Zohar* cited above in translation from the Hebrew, the Kabbalist interprets it as related to the theurgical concept of *zorekh gavoah*, the supernal need, which means that someone performs the commandments for the sake of the divinity, and not for his own sake, described expressly also in this specific context as *Zorekh Hedy'ot*, though the fulfillment of the former has an impact on the latter. In the specific context this discussion is found, as well as in the more general theosophy of ibn Gabbai, the concept of *Kavod*, Glory, as a term representing the last *sefirah*, plays a central role.³⁰ The theosophically-oriented theory of ibn Gabbai follows the Zoharic discussions, and in more general terms Spanish Kabbalah.³¹

R. Moshe ben Jacob Cordovero and R. Abraham Azulai

Though a continuation of the main trends of Spanish Kabbalah, the Safedian Kabbalah adds interesting dimensions specific to this development. It is difficult to discern those additions, but over time and in general we may distinguish between two main additions to Spanish Kabbalah in this way: in Safed more comprehensive theosophical and cosmogonical schemes have been delineated, and on the other hand, a more individual approach to Kabbalah has been articulated.³² Here, we are concerned with the second dimension of this phase of Kabbalah, since this emphasis on the individual also implies an attitude to the body.

Yehuda Liebes, "Zohar and Tikkunei Zohar: From Renaissance to Revolution," in *Te'uda XXI–XXII: New Developments in Zohar Studies*, ed. Ronit Meroz (Tel Aviv University, 2007): 279–285 (Hebrew), where the earlier bibliography has been adduced.

³⁰ *Avodat ha-Kodesh* (Jerusalem, 1973), II:32, fols. 49c–d. See also *ibid.*, III:69, fol. 112a.

³¹ See Roland Goetschel, *R. Meir Ibn Gabbai; Le Discours de la Kabbale espagnole* (Leuven: Peeters, 1981).

³² Moshe Idel, "On Mobility, Individuals and Groups; Prolegomenon for a Sociological Approach to sixteenth-century Kabbalah," *Kabbalah* 3 (1998): 145–173.

Two influential Kabbalists expatiated on the role played by the Kabbalist way of performing the three obligations in order to help the *Shekhinah*. Moshe Cordovero's very popular booklet *Tomer Devorah* and, following him, R. Abraham Azulai's *Hesed le-Abraham*, who wrote as follows:

[a] Whoever wants to have intercourse with the Daughter of the King, so that She will not depart from him forever, should first embellish himself by many ornaments and nice garments, which are the performances of all the commandments,³³ as mentioned above. And after he had prepared himself in such a manner, he should intend to receive Her onto him while he is preoccupied with the Torah and bears the yoke of the commandments according to the secret of the intention of the unification, always. And he should perform three things and then She immediately marries him and does not separate Herself from him, with the condition that he purifies himself and sanctifies himself. [b] And after he is pure and holy he should intend to perform for Her food, garments and sex, which are the three things that a man is obliged to [do] to his wife. The first one is to cause the descent of the influx from the right [side], which is Her food. The second is to cover Her *vis-à-vis* the side of judgment, so that the external powers will not rule over Her, and this is by all the things related to the side of evil urge, that should not be involved in his performance of the commandments, for the reason of the body or in order to be praised, and so on, that the evil urge is found in that commandment, [since] She flees away from him as She is naked. This is the reason why Her nakedness should be covered and hidden, so that it³⁴ will not always rule over Her. How are all his deeds [performed] for the sake of heaven? [It is by performing them] without the part of the evil urge. And also the phylacteries and the *zizit* are guarding Her greatly, so that the external powers will not rule over Her, and he should be accustomed with [to] them. The third [obligation] is to unite Her with the *sefirah* of *Tiferet*, during the time of pronouncing *Keriyat Shema*, by establishing fixed times to [study] Torah. And when he will establish fixed times to everything he should intend by it to the sexual needs of the *Shekhinah*, the sexual needs of the Daughter of the King.³⁵

The passage contains two different centers of gravitation: the individual one [a], and the theosophical-theurgical [b]. Let me turn to the gist of the latter part: The triadic structure of the discussion is obvious: the

³³ In *Tomer Devorah* the version is *Tikkunei ha-Middot*, and I choose the version of Azulai, *Tikkunei ha-Mizvot*.

³⁴ The subject is not clear.

³⁵ *Tomer Devorah*, chapter 9. See also *The Palm Tree of Deborah*, trans. L. Jacobs (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1960), 177, copied in Abraham Azulai, *Hesed le-Abraham* (Lemberg, 1863), fol. 54a.

three biblical obligations of the husband toward his wife are described in terms of the relationship between the *Shekhinah* to three divine *sefirot*: *Hesed*, *Gevurah* and *Tiferet*. The obligation to provide food is understood as related to the first of these *sefirot*, the garments are related to the protection against the evil powers, related to the second of these *sefirot*, while sex is related to the *sefirah* of *Tiferet*. These obligations are understood as the meaning of the commandments and the special manner of their performance: while the first one is related to theurgy, namely to the drawing influx from the higher *sefirah* to the lowest one, the second type of performance is related to some form of devotion, which means that whatever someone does from the religious point of view is to be performed for the sake of the *Shekhinah* alone, with any intention to the well-being of the performer. This approach can be described also as apotropaic, since it defends the *Shekhinah* from the evil powers. This is the reason why the donning of the *Tefillin* and the *Zizit*, understood as covering, function as a way of covering the *Shekhinah* from the deleterious impact of the evil powers. This covering may sometimes also imply a dimension of hiding the *Shekhinah*, in order to prevent the impact of the evil powers.³⁶ How exactly these two commandments that, according to rabbinic instructions, concern only males, are relevant for the guarding of *Shekhinah* is not quite clear to me.

The last form of performance, the *onah*, is related to inducing the *Shekhinah*'s sexual union, achieved especially by the liturgical recitation of the verses in the Bible that were understood by numerous Kabbalists as dealing with the unification of the divine powers. This way to construe the aim of the rituals is focused on the various aspects of the relationship between the *Shekhinah* and the three other divine powers, but it is quite evident that the prime centre of gravitation is the well-being of the divine feminine power, and only secondarily also Her relation to the Kabbalist, or the changes to be induced in the three *sefirot*.

This second center of gravitation in this passage [a] deserves also an elaborate analysis. The Kabbalist's intention is referred as a permanent sexual relation with the divine feminine power, and this is the reason he is requested to perform the three actions that are identical, terminologically speaking, to what he is obliged to do in relation to his human wife. However, while the three obligations toward the human wife also

³⁶ *Pardes Rimmonim* (Jerusalem, 1962), XXIII:5.

concern his own material wellbeing, the contact with the *Shekhinah* is established by the more complex range of religious deeds, and aims to some form of spiritual experience described as intercourse. We may regard the substitution of the three obligations with the three other commandments as some form of “refinement” of the material deeds with more “spiritual” ones, without however assuming that the material ones are in any way obsolete.

The permanent presence of the *Shekhinah* over the mystic is conceived of as an erotic experience, which the Kabbalist would like to keep, and it is conditioned by his performance. The three biblical obligations of the husband to his wife became therefore the paradigmatic understanding of these Kabbalists of a wider range of commandments. Thus, unlike other forms of explaining the commandments as primarily intended to unify the ten powers that constitute the divine system, or to unify the male and female divine powers here it is the centrality of the *Shekhinah* in that system that inspires the explanation of those commandments. From my perspective this strong affinity between commandments and *Shekhinah* is a major indicator of the central status of the later, more than purely theosophical, statements to this effect.

We may assume that the Kabbalists mentioned above assumed that there are two sets of religious deeds designated by the three obligations: the regular behavior recommended to the husband toward his wife, and the attitude of the Kabbalist toward the supernal feminine power, which involves other ritual actions: Torah-study, phylacteries, and *Keriyat Shema*, which are all envisioned as reflecting these three obligations. Unlike the emphasis we have seen above in ibn Gabbai on the theosophically oriented understanding of the three obligations, in the Cordovero/Azulai text the starting point is the establishment of a permanent relationship between the Kabbalist and the *Shekhinah*, conditioned by the performance of the three obligations, as they were described in the theosophical-theurgical school. Though conspicuously drawing from the texts discussed above, Cordovero’s starting point is the experience of the Kabbalist. It is the “sexual rapport” between him and the *Shekhinah* which commences the passage, and the prolongation of this experience as a permanent one, that recurs in the above passage. Though the theosophical-theurgical aspects are not mitigated, the central role they occupied in the earlier kabbalistic literature has been nevertheless attenuated by adding the ideal of being in constant contact with the *Shekhinah*. Only if the *Shekhinah* has first been treated by the

Kabbalist by means of his devotional performance of the commandments, may She dwell upon him.³⁷ In a way, the rabbinic system of commandments has become a manner of living in communion with the feminine divine power, just because they first functioned theurgically. Let me emphasize that it is the body that serves as the locus of the encounter with the spiritual.

Let me turn to the description of the ideal Kabbalist, as implied in the passage from *Tomer Devorah*. The ornaments are intended to follow the view of another passage from the same book, to imitate the splendor of the divine male: “And the *Shekhinah* cannot come to him unless he resembles the Supernal Splendor.”³⁸ This is an interesting statement since it assumes some form of anthropomorphism, combined with a vision of the ritual as part of the preparation of the male human body to receive the divine feminine one onto it. The Splendor is not just a form of light, but the *sefirah* of *Tiferet*, which stands in many cases in kabbalistic symbolism, for the masculine power, described as a man.

Elsewhere in his writings the same ideal of *imitatio dei*, again in the context of the three obligations:

Man stands between two females, the physical female from below who receives food, covering and conjugal rights from him, and the *Shekhinah*, who stands above to bless him with these which he, in turn, gives to the wife of his covenant. This is after the pattern of Splendor, which stands between two females: the Higher Mother, which pours out all it requires, and the lower Mother, which receives from it food, covering and conjugal rights, namely loving kindness, justice and pity.³⁹

First and foremost let me point out the relational concept of the statement that the male stands between two females. This means that the male body is not described in itself, as self-contained, but in relation to two other bodies: a corporeal and a spiritual one. This is the case also of the female, as we shall see below. The higher mother mentioned in this passage is the *sefirah* of *Binah*, while the lower one is the *sefirah* of *Malkhut*. The situation of the masculine entities that they stand between two female entities is holding on both the theosophical and

³⁷ For the nexus between theurgy and *devekut* since early Kabbalah, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 53–58.

³⁸ *The Palm Tree of Deborah*, chapter 9, 117.

³⁹ Translated by Jonathan Garb, “Gender and Power in Kabbalah: A Theoretical Investigation,” *Kabbalah* 13 (2005): 88–89.

human level.⁴⁰ In fact, in the two cases referred to in this passage it is assumed that the supernal female is the source of the influx received by the male, and he transmits it to the lower female power, be it divine or human. The question is whether the supernal male, *Tiferet* or Splendor, is performing the three obligations toward what is designated as the Lower Mother, *Malkhut*. However, for the time being I could not find such a vision of the divine male as performing the three obligations, for the sake of the Lower Mother. In other words, we may ask what is the meaning of two different aspects of some of the discussions of R. Moshe Cordovero: that of the human-divine sexual rapport on the one hand, and that of the Kabbalist toward a higher power that is expressly described as Mother, in addition to its being envisioned as divine, on the other. Are those two aspects significantly combined, and allow a vision that the human/divine sexual relations may sometimes at least be described also in incestuous manners? Those are quite interesting questions that should be addressed in order to better understand Cordovero's attitude to femininity, though we cannot do so in this context.

The Rapport Between the Human Male and the Divine Female

Let me address now in some detail the opening statement of the quote from Cordovero's *Tomer Devorah*. This towering Kabbalist resorts to the verb *le-hizdaveg*, which means to have a sexual rapport with the *Shekhinah*. This experience is described as available to everyone who purifies himself and performs the commandments, not just the paragons of Jewish culture, such as Moses, as it is the case in the Zoharic literature. This is quite an evident instance of the popularization of the elitist views found earlier in Kabbalah by a Safedian Kabbalist. What is the picture that we may elicit from the above passage as well from other instances in Cordovero's books? Is this a bodily experience, a spiritual one, or a combination of the two? What may be the specific meaning of the presence of a feminine divine power onto the Kabbalist?

The Hebrew term that refers to the dwelling of the *Shekhinah* is "he should intend to receive Her onto him while he is preoccupied with the

⁴⁰ On the Zoharic view of the man's relationship to two females, see Yehuda Liebes, "Zohar ve-Eros," *Alpayim* 9 (1994): 101–103 (Hebrew); Abrams, *The Female Body of God*, 167–174.

Torah.” Therefore the last passage deals with the descent of the divine feminine upon the Kabbalist while he studies the Torah.⁴¹ However, this situation of reception of the supernal female by the human male is supposed to qualify the verb *le-hizdaveg*, and must reflect strong erotic and thus corporeal connotations. An interesting parallel to such a view is found in Cordovero’s *Commentary on the Zohar*:

And despite the fact that the *Shekhinah* is found upon all the people of Israel, the *Shekhinah* is essentially dwelling upon him,⁴² and from there she spreads to the entire world. And the reason is that he is a righteous, and despite the fact that the entire world [namely all the people] are unifying the [divine] unity, it is his unification that excels over all. This is the reason why the *Shekhinah* will adhere to him in her [very] essence, while her branches are upon all. And he is the well of the blessings upon the world, as it is said:⁴³ “The entire world is nourished because of Hanina, My son etc.,” and he is the chariot for the *Shekhinah* ...⁴⁴ He causes the existence of the *Yesod* and *Tiferet* in the [lower] world, bound with the *Shekhinah*. And this is the reason why the *Shekhinah* adheres to him, as she is pursuing [*rodefet*]⁴⁵ for *Yesod* and *Tiferet* and does not find them but with him.⁴⁶

The theme of the Kabbalist’s body as the chariot to the *Shekhinah* reflects a Midrashic view, according to which the forefathers have been described as such,⁴⁷ and it parallels the reception of the *Shekhinah* by the Kabbalist who performs the three obligations. However, here the elite figure is described in quite phallic terms, as some form of surrogate for the two divine *sefirot* related to masculinity. No change of the gender is involved here or in the first passage of Cordovero: the supernal

⁴¹ See also Sack, *Sha’arei ha-Kabbalah*, 265.

⁴² Namely the righteous Kabbalist.

⁴³ *Ta’anit*, fol. 24b.

⁴⁴ *Merkavah la-Shekhinah*. In fact, Cordovero speaks elsewhere in the commentary on the *Zohar* about the human righteous as becoming the chariot for the *sefirah* of *Yesod*. See *Or Yakar*, vol. 4, 1–2, 4–5.

⁴⁵ This is an example for the more active aspect of the *Shekhinah*. On this issue see also Garb, “Gender and Power in Kabbalah.”

⁴⁶ *Or Yakar*, vol. 12, 192–193; see also Sack, *The Kabbalah of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero*, 53, 218–219.

⁴⁷ See *Genesis Rabbah*, 47:6, 475; 82:6, 983. On the mystical interpretations of this dictum, see the learned studies of Georges Vajda, *Le commentaire d’Ezra de Gerone sur le cantique des cantiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1969), 339–351, and Micheline Chaze, “De l’identification des patriarches au char divin: recherche du sens d’un enseignement rabbinique dans le midrash et dans la Kabbale pré-zoharique et ses sources,” *REF* 149 (1990): 5–75.

feminine power remains feminine and functions as such, just as the human male functions as a male. Thus, we may assert that positing a female entity at the extremity of the divine realm, changed not only the way in which the divinity has been understood to reveal to the humans, but kept for the Kabbalists, males without exception, their masculine gendered self-awareness.⁴⁸

Moreover, according to this passage, it is not the human male, but the divine female, that looks for a sexual counterpart. Also here the process of intra-divine unification, conditioned by what I propose to call theurgy, comes before the experience of communion between the human and the divine. This experience, however, is depicted in Cordovero also in strong sexual terms, which include the identification of the Kabbalist with the divine male potencies, *Tiferet* and *Yesod*, so that the union between the male and female divine powers, that does not take place on high because of the exile of the *Shekhinah*, may take place below, due to the activity of the Kabbalist. In a way, the communion with the *Shekhinah* becomes here not just part of attainment of perfection of the individual, which is prominent in the quote from *Tomer Devorah*, but also recreates the lost union between the male and the divine female, in this world. This may be the way in which Cordovero understood the midrashic statement “the [presence of the] *Shekhinah* in the lower world” as a divine need.⁴⁹ Individual perfection is therefore strongly connected to the improvement of the divine. A comparison between the view of ibn Gabbai and those of Cordovero reveals the shift that happened in Safedian Kabbalah: religious achievements are not only a matter of theosophical processes, *zorekh gavoah*, but also of the need of the Kabbalist. Ornaments are mentioned, and their nature has been specified: phylacteries, *zizit* and *tallit*, all of them dependent on the body. The main activities are related to another part of the body, the mouth, as they are vocal: prayer and study of the Torah. Thus, according to this passage, it is not the exit of the soul toward the divine realm that ensures the contact with the spiritual world but, on the contrary, the dwelling of the spiritual

⁴⁸ If my analysis of Cordovero’s views about the contact between the human male, basically the Kabbalist and the supernal woman, is correct, it problematizes the totalizing statement formulated by Elliot R. Wolfson, who asserted in his *Through a Speculum that Shines* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 396, that “[i]n the Jewish mystical texts it is always the male mystic visually confronting the male deity.”

⁴⁹ See, e.g., *Pardes Rimmonim*, VIII:14.

onto the human body.⁵⁰ It should be remarked that the kabbalistic approach differs from the famous assumption found in the treatise *Avot*, where it is said that the *Shekhinah* dwells among those who study the Torah.⁵¹ While in the early views, the divine presence is felt among a group of scholars, while the body does not play a central role for such a dwelling, with the Kabbalists, this more vague formulation has been articulated in a more specific form. I assume that in general the more positive attitude to the body as a locus for the encounter with the spiritual feminine that descends because of the preparation and isomorphism has something to do with the impact of the astro-magical or the hermetic traditions dealing with the causing of the descent of the divine realm upon the material, as we shall see in the passage to be cited below.⁵²

Isomorphism and Theosophical-Theurgical Kabbalah

Another question related to the centrality of the body and mystical experience is the isomorphism of the human and the theosophical, quite explicit in Cordovero's last quoted text. Its sources, found in early Kabbalah, were the assumption that the 613 commandments correspond not only to the limbs of the human body, but also to the divine chariot, namely the structure of ten *sefirot*, or the divine Glory.⁵³ In some instances the commandments are described as emanated from, or dependent upon, the divine structure. These views are part of what I propose to describe as part of a process of comprehensive ritualization of the divine world.⁵⁴

Let me address another instance of isomorphism, found elsewhere in the same text:

⁵⁰ For a similar assumption, see already R. Joseph Gikatilla's influential introduction to his book.

⁵¹ *Avot* 3:2.

⁵² See Moshe Idel, "Hermeticism and Kabbalah," in *Hermeticism from Late Antiquity to Humanism*, ed. P. Lucentini, I. Parri and V.P. Compagni (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 389–408.

⁵³ See, e.g., R. Menahem Recanati, *Commentary on the Pentateuch* (Jerusalem, 1961), fol. 23c, R. Meir ibn Gabbai, *Avodat ha-Kodesh* I:8, I:21, II:16, IV:34.

⁵⁴ See Moshe Idel, *Enchanted Chains: Techniques and Rituals in Jewish Mysticism* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2005), 215–220.

It is well known that the desire of the supernal entities to cleave to the lower ones is in accordance with the preparation of the latter. A great proof for it is found in the construction of the tabernacle⁵⁵ since its members as a whole and in their details correspond to the supernal matters, namely to the supernal chariots.⁵⁶ This is the reason why the [supernal] worlds and those chariots are drawn to and pour the influx upon those materials. And since those materials were dead, from their actions there is a hint that the supernal was drawn upon them, and this is the reason why the *Shekhinah* was dwelling onto them and the Glory of God was filling the palace. This is the matter of the body that is similar to the spiritual, and it is incumbent upon the spiritual to adhere to the material out of the strength of its desire to it. And the reason is that the lower entities constitute the substratum of the supernal ones.⁵⁷

This passage is of vital importance to the point above: here it is explicitly stated that the spiritual is in search for the material, just as the feminine power in another passage of the same Kabbalist cited above, was in search for the human male. In both cases, a preparation of the body by means of actions is strictly necessary: it is not the body alone, the passive preparation or the form, that counts but “their actions.” This awareness of the anatomico-physiological whole is essential for understanding the basic structure that inspires the basic approaches of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah. Anatomy alone, just as theosophy, is the starting point for the understanding of this complexity, human and divine, as envisioned by many Kabbalists. Fathoming the analogous structures alone does not suffice for a more profound analysis of the main kabbalistic schools, and the awareness as to the centrality of the supernal dynamics is as necessary as the understanding of the way in which the limbs function on the human level.

However, even in instances when the human body is not conceived as isomorphic to the divine, its role is paramount since without performance there is no intention, which represents the spiritual surplus created during the moment of that performance. Let me offer an example in which the term “body” serves as the substratum for the development of the spiritual, but also as its necessary condition. Thus, we read in Cordovero’s book:

⁵⁵ *Mishkan*. It should be mentioned that in many other cases this term means in Cordovero also “substratum.” See, e.g., in the text to be cited below.

⁵⁶ Chariots may point here to the divine powers.

⁵⁷ *Pardes Rimmonim*, XXXI:8. For a fuller context and analysis of this passage, see Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 190–191.

When man performs the corporeal commandments, they become a body and a substratum to the spirituality of his intention that stems from his soul. And his intention clothes itself in the deed of the commandment. This is the reason that when there is no intention [accompanying] the commandment, it is truly like a body without a soul.⁵⁸ We may infer from it that at the extent that the intention of man related to the deed of the commandments grows, its spirituality will be enhanced and will ascend on high through the ranks ...⁵⁹ Behold that when a man has a [sexual] union with his female partner in a proper manner, with the perfect intention to worship Him, blessed be He, in order to unify the bridegroom and bride,⁶⁰ and in order to cause into existence onto him a soul from the [supernal] the indeed the Holy One, blessed be He, will cause into existence a soul from the holy souls.⁶¹

Here the very performance of the commandments is described explicitly as being corporeal and as serving as a body to the spiritual dimension of the performance. The reference to the holy soul is meaningless without the prior conception of the fetus, and the act of sexual union is therefore indispensable for the emergence of the intention, that it alone will draw that soul down from the divine realm. However, this supernal soul is also the result of an act of copulation on high, which is, at least to a certain extent, induced by the lower activity, when understood theurgically. Though isomorphism is not mentioned explicitly, the very appearance of the two couples and their similar activities, point in this direction. However, what is of quintessential importance for understanding the above passage is the fact, mentioned here explicitly, as it is the case in many other kabbalistic discussions, that the sexual relation is not a matter of a bodily perfection of the male, human or divine, but is intended to procreate, namely to generate another body, which is also capable to perform the commandments.⁶²

Though the dichotomy between soul and body is quite evident in this passage, a sharply negative attitude towards the body is missing although such a position is found in many kabbalistic discussions.

⁵⁸ That the prayer without intention is like a body without soul is a well-known dictum in the Middle Ages.

⁵⁹ Namely the *sefirot*. The ascent of the spirituality is conceived to be a major religious event in Cordovero's view.

⁶⁰ Namely the *sefirot* of *Tiferet* and *Malkhut* respectively.

⁶¹ *Pardes Rimmonim*, XXXI:9.

⁶² For the paramount importance of procreation in theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, see Charles Mopsik, *Le sexe des âmes: Aléas de la différence sexuelle dans la Cabale* (Paris and Tel Aviv: Éditions de L'Éclat, 2003), 107–148 and Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, index, under item procreation.

Moreover, following some earlier kabbalistic traditions sometimes Cordevero described the male and female principles in the divine realm as equals.⁶³

Some Concluding Remarks

Bodies were conceived of by the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists not as self-contained entities but much more as strictly necessary instruments for the performance of the commandments and for procreation. As such bodies were understood in their dynamic dimension, just as the divine realm was conceived not just as a frozen scheme of divine powers, but as a dynamic realm where the processes are as important as the divine manifestations. Those Kabbalists dedicated two literary genres to the two aspects of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah: the commentaries on the ten *sefirot* and the commentaries of the rationales of the commandments.⁶⁴ The neglect of the context of any of the two, or the putting in relief of only one of them, may create a partial and thus a distorted picture of the main gist of this type of Kabbalah. By limiting most of the discussions to the theosophical dimension of Kabbalah, namely the configuration of the ten *sefirot*, a more theological picture of the main kabbalistic schools has emerged in modern scholarship.⁶⁵ This approach is paralleled by the emphasis on the human body as a topic in itself, separated from the forms in which it is activated. A static, self-contained scholarly perception of kabbalistic theosophy, in part influenced by Christian Kabbalah, parallels a static and self-contained anthropology. The very appearance of drawings of the *Adam Elyon* since the Renaissance in lieu of the much more widespread geometrical drawings in medieval Kabbalah points in this direction.

Thus, while terms related to the body are present in kabbalistic literature, especially in the book of the *Zohar*, the way to better understand them depends, in my opinion, on their being associated to the manner in which the body acts religiously, and in their relation to other bodies.

⁶³ See Moshe Idel, "Androgyny and Equality in the Theosophico-Theurgical Kabbalah," *Diogenes* 52, 208 (2005): 27–38, and Abrams, *The Female Body of God*, 164.

⁶⁴ See Gershom Scholem, "An Inventory of Commentaries on Ten Sefirot," *Kiryat Sefer* 10 (1930): 498–515 (Hebrew) and Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, XIII–XV.

⁶⁵ See Moshe Idel, "On the Theologization of Kabbalah in Modern Scholarship," *Religious Apologetics—Philosophical Argumentation*, ed. Y. Schwartz and V. Krech (Tübingen: Mohr, 2004), 123–174.

Based on the assumption that Jews constitute one big national entity, described by scholars of the Bible as corporate personality, or by the widespread assumption that the wife constitutes the second half of a larger entity, Kabbalists worked with a series of models of integration and imitation, which attributed to ritual operations the power to affect and create other bodies as part of the extension and the proliferation of the divine body in this world.⁶⁶ These models regarding the integration or reintegration of the bodies in wider structures are predicated not just on their original shape but on their ritualistic performance.

⁶⁶ On this issue see Lorberboim, *The Image of God*.

GIVING BIRTH TO THE HEBREW AUTHOR:
TWO COMPOSITIONS BY JOHANAN ALEMANNO

ARTHUR M. LESLEY

The coming into being of the notion of “author” constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences.

Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?”¹

I

Until the Early Modern Period in Europe, Jewish scholars did not consider human authorship to be important to the meaning and authority of texts. Like medieval Christian Bible commentators, Jews assumed that the human writers, prophets, merely transmitted God’s words and intentions. As divine statement, biblical texts were true, were internally consistent, and carried unlimited meaning. Lacking a double ancient heritage, Jews did not have occasion to organize study around particular books by identifiable authors. A talmudic discussion about the authorship of biblical books does not treat the authority of biblical books as dependent on their authors.

Who wrote the Scriptures?—Moses wrote his own book and the portion of Balaam, and Job. Joshua wrote the book which bears his name and [the last] eight verses of the Pentateuch. Samuel wrote the book which bears his name and the Book of Judges and Ruth. David wrote the Book of Psalms, including in it the work of the elders . . . Jeremiah wrote the book which bears his name, the Book of Kings, and Lamentations. Hezekiah and his colleagues wrote Isaiah, Proverbs, the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. The Men of the Great Assembly wrote Ezekiel, the Twelve Minor Prophets, Daniel and the Scroll of Esther. Ezra wrote the book that bears his name and the genealogies of the Book of Chronicles up to his own time.²

¹ Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?,” *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 101–120.

² Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 14b–15a, trans. Maurice Simon (London: Son-

The canon is fixed and God is the ultimate author, as well as the ultimate authority. Ancient rabbis recognized that biblical books had human writers, but considered Moses and other prophets to be transparent recipients and transmitters of divine revelation, who added nothing of their own. The rabbis reconciled contradictions among authoritative ancient statements by working from the assumption that all scripture is simultaneous and harmonious divine expression.

Like medieval Christians, Jewish scholars emphasized the chasm between ancient authors and themselves.³ “The work of an *auctor* was a book worth reading; a book worth reading had to be the work of an *auctor*. No ‘modern’ writer could decently be called an *auctor*.”⁴ Nevertheless, there were exceptions, so that attention to authorship arose several times, in different genres, encouraged by the practice of neighboring dominant cultures. For example, in *diwans* of Hebrew court poets in eleventh- and twelfth-century Muslim al-Andalus, Arabic introductions to poems explained the occasions for their writing. The poets also emphasized their distinctive characters and gave their poems inimitable styles.⁵ The Almohad invasion of 1148 abruptly destroyed the social setting for Jewish court culture and dispersed the participants. As a result, the self-conscious authorship exemplified by Judah al-Ḥarizi’s twelfth-century *Tahkemoni* did not much influence Hebrew writers in Christian Europe.⁶ Thirteenth-century Jewish scholars in Provence, Italy, and Iberia became aware of the study of authorship in Christian schools, notably in the *accessus ad auctores*, and adapted it to Hebrew Bible commentaries.⁷

cino Press, 1961). On this and authorship in general, see now Jed Wyrick, *The Ascension of Authorship: Attribution and Canon Formation in Jewish, Hellenistic and Christian Traditions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

³ Abraham Melamed, *On the Shoulders of Giants: The Debate between Moderns and Ancients in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Thought* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2003) (Hebrew).

⁴ A.J. Minnis, *The Medieval Conception of Authorship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 12.

⁵ Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

⁶ *The Book of Tahkemoni*, trans. David Simha Segal (London–Portland, Or.: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003), Gates 3 and 18, Afterword. Jefim Schirmann, *The History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, ed. Ezra Fleischer (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1997): 2:153–156, 188–192 (Hebrew).

⁷ Eric Lawee, “Introducing Scripture: The *Accessus ad auctores* in Hebrew Exegetical Literature from the Thirteenth through the Fifteenth Centuries,” in *With Reverence for*

A distinctively humanist conception of authorship appeared in Hebrew in 1488, when Rabbi Johanan Alemanno began writing a biography of an ancient author and an autobiography. The two Hebrew compositions treat their subjects as both historical persons and authors. They scrutinize and criticize the ancient author, no longer considered an unapproachable and irreproachable authority, by the same ethical and artistic standards as the modern; both are evaluated as self-conscious writers within a shared system of rhetorical practice. Assuming that ancient authors were fellow practitioners of the same rhetorical art made ancient performance accessible to modern criticism. In writing a biography and an autobiography, Alemanno was expanding current Hebrew practice to include rivalry of his biblical predecessors. Rhetorically guided composition, which became part of elite Jewish culture and education in sixteenth-century Italy, made Hebrew writers aware of themselves as individuals who could deliberately choose elements from a varied range of literary models, including foreign and vernacular genres. No longer limited to continuing traditional Hebrew genres, Alemanno and others could produce unprecedented compositions.

Alemanno explains why he invented biography of a biblical author, and his notes show how he adapted the same literary models to construct a third-person autobiography. This evidence should dispel the conventional assumption, based on insufficient information, that such innovations were “mere” imitations of Renaissance Christian writings. No single work existed for Alemanno to imitate, and he deviated in major ways from all his literary models, in Hebrew, Italian and Latin. Indeed, aware of his innovation, he expected the Jewish audience to be unfamiliar with the genre.

Alemanno’s *Shir haMa’alot liShelomoh* is a long and detailed life of King Solomon that introduces his long commentary on the Song of Songs.⁸ The title, understood as a quotation of Psalm 127:1, *The Song*

the Word, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 157–179; James T. Robinson, “Samuel ibn Tibbon’s *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* and the Philosopher’s Proemium,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 3, ed. Isadore Twersky and Jay M. Harris (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 92–93, 104–108, 132 ff.

⁸ Three manuscripts survive: Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS or. 1535, 2 (A); British Library, London, MS or. 2854 (B); Preussische Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, MS or. 143 (G). *Sefer Sha’ar haHeshek*, Livorno 1790 and Halberstadt 1862, were printed from the defective Berlin manuscript.

of *Solomon's Ascents*, emphasizes the author's development over time; in rabbinic Hebrew, however, the title means *The Song of Solomon's Virtues*, as static categories. An admirer of Florentine wit, Alemanno probably intended both senses. The other life he wrote about an author, *Toledot haAdam haYashar*, is a third-person autobiography that describes the development of the character of a person, illustrated by Alemanno himself, from conception until the age of thirty-five. The title also has two complementary senses: *The History of the Just Man*, if understood as in the Bible, or *The Character of the Upright Man*, if taken from ancient rabbinic Hebrew.⁹ Alemanno intended both books to teach Jews to liberate themselves from earthly and astral influences and to attain ultimate felicity and immortality in attachment to God. Manuscript evidence illuminates the circumstances that led to his writing the two compositions and indicates how he chose to shape them.

II

In the summer of 1488, Alemanno went to Florence, where Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was looking for a Jewish consultant to guide his study of the Bible.¹⁰ Pico became Alemanno's patron and, in an early conversation, the two agreed that neither Jewish nor Christian commentators had fully understood the Song of Songs. A thorough commentary on the Song of Songs was needed to correct mistaken interpretations of the book. To reinforce the commentary, Pico charged Alemanno to "examine it all from beginning to end according to the perfection of Solomon who gave birth to it, as is today in our possession in the Bible, midrash and scientific works that are

⁹ MS Mantua 21, fols. 12b–59a. "Toledot" means "history" or "generations" in Genesis 5:1 and "character" or "nature," an archaic sense that Gershom Scholem explained in "Hakkarat Panim ve-sidrei Sirtutin," *Sefer Assaf* (1953): 459–495; Lawrence Fine, "The Art of Metoposcopy: a Study in Isaac Luria's Charismatic Knowledge," *AJS Review* XI, 1 (Spring 1986): esp. 82–86.

¹⁰ Umberto Cassuto, *Gli Ebrei a Firenze* (Florence, 1918), 302–324; Arthur M. Lesley, "The Song of Solomon's Ascents: Love and Human Perfection According to a Jewish Associate of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1976), 27–29. It is unlikely that they were acquainted earlier. Cf. Saverio Campanini, *The Book of Bahir* (Turin: Nino Aragno Editore, 2005), 94–98.

attributed to him among those books, in Hebrew, Latin and Arabic, as you have intended to do for so long.”¹¹ The request is for an epideictic biography of the author, Solomon, based upon comparison of sources from various languages and religions. A biography in praise of Solomon would induce those who disparaged the biblical book to read the commentary. If the biography of Solomon showed that Solomon was indeed “the wisest of all men,” (IKings 5:11) it would confirm Rabbi Akiva’s judgment, that “The Song of Songs is the holiest of the holy writings.”¹² The virtues of the author “who gave birth to it,” in Pico’s phrase, would confer authority on the book he produced.

Alemanno identified the important criticisms of the Song of Songs and Solomon that would have to be refuted. In the *accessus* to the commentary, he raises questions about the Song by reference to the four Aristotelian causes:

Moses, in the “Song of the Sea,” (Exodus 15:1–18) composed a poem perfect according to its causes about Torah and belief, and David wrote psalms, about righteousness and hopes, which are perfect in their causes. Solomon wrote the Song of Songs about worship and love, but in a manner that does not appear to be perfect in its causes. There are seven objections to it: “The Song does not have a proper introductory premise, unlike the Song of the Sea and the Psalms.”¹³

Each psalm has a title and many name an author, and the “Song of the Sea” has an introductory verse, “Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord.” Nothing in the Song, however, explains the circumstances of the book or its author’s purpose. The constant flirtations and physical description of love-making in the Song offend some readers: “The matter of the song, the material cause, appears repulsive to the wise, who, as Proverbs shows, hate prostitutes and forward women, who are the apparent matter throughout Solomon’s Song.” “The Song’s formal cause is deficient. It appears to be naked of any garment of a literal sense, as if Solomon merely spoke whatever came off his tongue.” Pico originally complained to Alemanno that the literal sense in Latin and Greek appears to have no order, so he asked

¹¹ Lesley, “The Song of Solomon’s Ascents,” 29, 334; MS A, fols. 19b–21a.

¹² *Midrash Rabbah: Song of Songs*, ed. H. Freedman (London: Soncino Press, 1983, 3rd ed.), 1:11.

¹³ MS A, fols. 130b–132a; MS B, fols. 76a–77a; MS G, fols. 50b–51b.

if any order was evident in the Hebrew original, and if some Jewish commentator had explained it satisfactorily.

Alemanno then asks what evidence there is for the author's identity. "Efficient cause. I looked for any word that would indicate that this wise man was its author." Jewish sources did not make it entirely clear that Solomon was the author of the Song of Songs. For example, the talmudic discussion cited earlier does not mention Solomon as the author of any books.

Although rabbinic tradition elsewhere does ascribe the Song to Solomon, the apparent disorderliness of the book seems to contradict the author's reputation for wisdom. Did Solomon write it wisely? That could be judged by comparing the expression of the text with its overall meaning. "Final cause. I searched for whatever he intended to argue, from beginning to end of the Song." What do the obscure and indecent incidents and images combine to mean? "Order. I investigated the poems of the ancients to compare with this Song, to find if it is a dialogue like some of them, even though its speakers are not identified and seem to contradict each other."

Finally he asks whether the literal and metaphorical meanings of the verses match perfectly: "Proportion. I examined every side and every corner of the Song to find whether the poet who sings this song matches the literal sense, word for word and letter for letter, to the figurative sense that he invented in his mind, or whether he inadvertently added to it or subtracted from it, so that something in it is superfluous and nonsensical."

The flaws in the book contradict the biblical characterization of the author as "the wisest of all men," (IKings 5:11) so that justification of the author, the efficient cause, is decisive for interpreting the biblical book. Alemanno asserts that early commentators misunderstood the book, because they did not understand the author. In Bible commentary, Alemanno writes,

The statements should agree with the nature of those who utter or write them and of those who perform them, as was appropriate in that time, place, manner and thought, because this is the test of ancient words—not that they agree with the places of the commentators and recent generations, or new customs from nearby, that our ancient fathers never imagined.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Heshek Shelomoh*, MS B, fol. 163a. Compare Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, III, xii, 19–20.

Earlier commentators misunderstood the Song because they did not recognize the historical author's individuality. In the first verse, Solomon asserts ownership of the Song, even identification with it. The author, an historical individual, was not an impersonal cause, but had a definite character.

Every efficient cause inscribes its image and likeness in its action, in order to leave behind it a blessing in its kind, by nature, and its particularity, by choice. Why would he not have chosen freely and with great intelligence to compose this Song—about which he said that it is the supremely holy song, made by him for the sake of his name, as is said at its beginning, “which is Solomon’s,” something that he did not say explicitly in his other book, as if to tell everyone, “Look how this song has been copied with great wisdom, more than any before or after it.”¹⁵

Even after Solomon's authorship was established, his authority could still be doubted, because God blamed him for marrying many foreign women, from countries forbidden to Israelites. Even worse, “in his old age, his wives turned away Solomon's heart after other gods” and he built shrines to them. “The Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him ... not to follow other gods.”¹⁶

Christian Bible commentators had long challenged Solomon's authority because of these sins. Bonaventure asked whether Solomon's sins allowed him to be considered authoritative as the author of Ecclesiastes and decided that he was, “because, according to Jerome and Hebrew traditions, the Book of Ecclesiastes was composed not by a man in a state of sin, but by a repentant man who regretted his sins.”¹⁷ The authority of the book depended on the state of Solomon's soul at the time he composed the book, and the state of his soul depended on the chronology of his life, another innovation for Jewish commentary on a biblical text.

Early rabbis disagreed at what stage of life Solomon wrote each book, but later commentators tended to follow the opinion of Rabbi Jonathan:

¹⁵ *Heshek Shelomoh*, MS A, fol. 135a–136b.

¹⁶ 1 Kings 11:1–2, 4, 7, 9–10.

¹⁷ Minnis, *The Medieval Conception of Authorship*, 110–112.

R. Jonathan said: He first wrote The Song of Songs, then Proverbs, then Ecclesiastes. R. Jonathan argues from the way of the world. When a man is young he composes songs; when he grows older he makes sententious remarks; when he becomes an old man he speaks of the vanity of things.¹⁸

Alemanno argued instead that Solomon wrote the Song of Songs after renouncing all the good things of the world, in favor of “attachment to the Lord.” He endorsed a different rabbinic chronology of Solomon’s books: “R. Ḥiyya the Great taught: Only in the period of his old age did the holy spirit rest upon Solomon, and he composed three books—Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and The Song of Songs.”¹⁹ With Pico’s advice, Alemanno combined Rabbi Ḥiyya’s judgment of the chronology with Rabbi Akiva’s praise of the Song of Songs and harmonized them with the opinions of Origen and Gregory the Great, who considered the Song of Songs to be Solomon’s theoretical book, and therefore his most mature.²⁰

Earlier commentators on the Song of Songs, both Christian and Jewish, misinterpreted the Song in three ways, because they disregarded the character of Solomon that is expressed in it. Some understood it to be about “attachment of the nation to its God,” so they interpreted the woman in the Song to stand for the Jewish people or the Christian Church. A second group, speculative philosophers, decided that the Song was about “attachment of the human soul, either to the Active Intellect or to God, like any of the Greek, Muslim or Italian philosophers.” A third group “examined the Song as teaching mystical attachment to the highest essences in the world of the *Sefirot*.” That, in Alemanno’s opinion, is also inadequate.

They examined his Song according to the natures of other men, but none of them read and examined his book as something that “Solomon Your servant” created, formed and made for his glory, like the word of the Lord, Who in this manner formed His world. All authors of books, each according to his intelligence, announce their character to show that the book belongs to someone who intended to create something during his lifetime.²¹

¹⁸ *Midrash Rabbah: Song of Songs*, ed. H. Freedman, 1:11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:10.

²⁰ Origène, *Commentaire sur le cantique des cantiques*, vol. I, ed. Luc Brésard and Henri Crouzel (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1991) (Sources Chrétiennes 375), 128–129; Grégoire le Grand, *Commentaire sur le cantique des cantiques*, ed. R. Bélanger (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1984) (Sources Chrétiennes 314), section 9, 1–13.

²¹ MS A 136a, bottom; MS B 80a, MS G 54a, top.

The Song of Solomon's Ascents, an epideictic life of a unique author, seeks to correct these erroneous interpretations by recovering the historical author's specific intention for the book. As efficient cause of the work, like God as Creator of the world, the author impressed his essential character upon his creation. He conceived and gave birth to the work, so its interpretation must be reconciled with his historical character and behavior. The same character would be recognizable in his historical actions as in his writings. As a historical person, even an ancient author was a human being whose deeds could be compared to his words. Solomon's intention in the biblical text could be recovered.

Alemanno's reason for composing the book turns out to fit nicely the usage of his time in Italy: "What is new in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century humanist commentary is a marked attempt to controversialize the author's life so as to claim the text for some particular historical, political, philosophical, or ideological view."²² Alemanno paraphrases and comments in detail on the biblical verses that recount Solomon's life, especially 1 Kings, chapters two to nine. To that account Alemanno adds midrashic and other biblical passages that touch on the same topics. Other sources, including Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*, medieval Arabic magic and astrology, medicine and contemporaneous folklore furnish an immense body of material to connect to Solomon.

Alemanno fits those materials into a structure that results from combining two major works that are neither biographies nor Italian. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* organizes the categories of ethical and intellectual virtues that are to be praised. The temporal narrative of the development, from birth, of Solomon's capacities of body and soul comes from Abu Bakr Ibn Tufayl's philosophical fable, *Hay Ibn Yaqzān* (*Alive, Son of the Awakener*).²³ Solomon's *curriculum vitae* is thus an extended application of the Avicennan neoplatonic curriculum.

Because no prior Hebrew life of any author, ancient or modern, existed to serve as a model for the life of Solomon, Alemanno relied on Pico and his close friend, Angelo Poliziano, to acquaint him with biographies written in praise of authors.

²² W.J. Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 28.

²³ Franco Bacchelli, "Pico della Mirandola traduttore di Ibn Tufayl," *Giornale Critico della Filosofia Italiana*, 6th series, 13, 1 (1993): 1–25; Lawrence I. Conrad, ed., *The World of Ibn Tufayl* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); at the time of writing, I had not yet seen Aaron W. Hughes, *The Texture of the Divine* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).

Over the past century and a half, Italian writers had developed a range of genres, in Latin and Italian, for presenting a historical author: the academic *accessus ad auctores*; the self-commentary, such as Dante's *Vita Nuova* and *Convivio*, by writers who aspired to be considered authors; the collected letters of a single author, such as Petrarch's *Rerum Familiarum*; ancient and modern collections of lives of authors; and detailed commentaries on major works, such as Cristoforo Landino's Latin study of Virgil in the *Disputationes Camaldulenses* (1474) and his Italian *Commento* on Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1483). Landino set a stylistic standard for writing on scholarly topics for a new audience of Florentines, "a wide vernacular readership that is educated, but not necessarily erudite. . . . He also draws together Florence's humanist and vernacular cultures and attenuates their differences so as to place emphasis upon a common Florentine patrimony."²⁴ Landino's example of bringing scholarship to the masses to unify a general audience provided a model for Alemanno to emulate when addressing Hebrew readers.

In writing a Hebrew life of Solomon, Alemanno anticipated objections from the Jewish audience. They might consider an epideictic biography of Solomon to be an alien and tasteless popular composition in an unfamiliar genre, which inappropriately praises a mere human king by repeating the biblical account; only God would deserve such praise.

I am very well aware, my son, that you are a wise and understanding man, a Jew, who is not used to such long stories that tell the manners and deeds of a man, so that you might say, "The mind is wearied to death from listening to the bleating of this flock of Solomon's virtues. They are all written in the Book of Chronicles, so why are you retelling his laws and ordinances?—Praise the Lord with graceful, noble speeches, because He is greatly to be praised, but don't let your mouth praise earthly kings all the day!"²⁵

Alemanno replies that many long books have been written in other languages about much less worthy "idols, rulers and priests," so that he is not embarrassed to dedicate "two or three particles of glory" to King Solomon, "one of the great holy men of our people, . . . to show that we have heart like them."

²⁴ Simon Gilson, *Dante in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 169, 173.

²⁵ MS Oxford Bodleian 2234, fols. 72a–73a.

The effort to praise a Hebrew writer and king by the same standards as Italian biographers does not make Alemanno's book a mere imitation of fashions of Renaissance Italy. His Italian models provided a range of choices—not prescriptions—for a self-aware, rhetorical writer. Comparison of *Solomon's Ascents* with an Italian model of epideictic biography of a theological poet shows how independent Alemanno was. His purpose resembles that of Boccaccio's *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, written between 1351 and 1355, "the first biographical treatment of the life and works of Dante, or indeed any 'modern' author."²⁶ The *Trattatello* records "those things about which he himself preserved a modest silence, namely the nobleness of his birth, his life, his studies, and his habits." Boccaccio concentrates on topics of praise, and his epideictic purpose limits mention of Dante's faults and commonplace traits, much of his historical particularity.

I will omit all consideration of his infancy—whatever it may have been—wherein appeared many signs of the coming glory of his genius. But I will note that from his earliest boyhood ... he gave himself and all his time, not to youthful lust and indolence, ... lolling at ease in the lap of his mother, but to continued study.²⁷

Boccaccio mentions Dante's physical appearance and characteristic habits only briefly: He was "of moderate height" and tended "to walk somewhat bowed, ... His face was long, his nose aquiline, and his eyes rather large than small. His jaws were large and the lower lip protruded beyond the upper ..."²⁸ Dante's body is mentioned in only one other section of this and other lives of Dante: It was buried in Ravenna, in the exile for which his admirers blamed Florence. Biographers, from Boccaccio, in the 1350s, to Landino, in the 1480s, urged the city to return his bones to Florence, for a monument that would preserve the poet's literary immortality and honor the city.

Boccaccio finally reluctantly mentions Dante's faults, in order to make his praise credible.

I am certainly ashamed of having to blemish the fame of such a man with any defect, but the procedural order that I have embarked upon requires this, to some extent. For if I remain silent about the things

²⁶ Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence*, 25.

²⁷ Giovanni Boccaccio, "Trattatello in Laude di Dante," in *The Early Lives of Dante*, trans. Philip H. Wicksteed (London: Alexander Moring, 1904), 11.

²⁸ *The Earliest Lives of Dante* trans. James Robinson Smith (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1963) (Milestones of Thought in the History of Ideas), 15–16.

that were less than praiseworthy in him, I shall greatly undermine the credibility of the praiseworthy things that have already been discussed.

The most acceptable shadow to add to the portrait of a love poet was an excess of the quality that made him praiseworthy.

Amid such virtue, ... lust found most ample space; and not just in his youthful years, but also in maturity. Although this vice may be natural, common, and to some extent necessary, it cannot in truth be decently commended, much less excused.

Boccaccio mitigates the blame, first, by excusing his own similar inclinations and then by invoking misogyny and comparing Dante with excusable biblical poets and lovers.

O bestial appetite of men! What thing can women not work in us, if they wish to ... David ... And Solomon, to whose wisdom nobody, excepting the Son of God, has ever attained: did he not abandon Him who had made him wise and, to please a woman, kneel and adore Baalim?²⁹

The contrast between an author's admirable writings and his sometime less than admirable behavior was a common charge against Solomon.

The biography of Dante, the great modern poet of love and faith, served as only one among several models for the writing of an unprecedented Hebrew life of Solomon. Alemanno did not copy these models beyond the generic necessities, and he disregarded them in important ways. For example, Bathsheba has no dream of her son's greatness, and the blame for his biblically attested sins is not muted.

III

Unlike Boccaccio's Dante, Solomon's physical death is mentioned briefly in the Bible and goes without comment in *The Song of Solomon's Ascents*. His birth, in contrast, receives close and detailed attention, unlike its treatment in the Bible (2 Samuel 12:24). The *Song* must first overcome the shameful, violent story of David and Bathsheba that precedes Solomon's birth. His name alone hints that the newborn has the potential of becoming a praiseworthy author and king. Alemanno expands on

²⁹ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Short Treatise in Praise of Dante*, trans. David Wallace, cited from *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100–c. 1375*, ed. A.J. Minnis and A.B. Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, rev. ed.), 502–503.

the brief biblical account of Solomon's birth in a methodical, physiognomic reading of the newborn body.

At Solomon's birth, it is written about Bathsheba, "she gave birth to a son and she called his name 'Solomon.'" This preferred reading (*kere*) of the verse and the actual written text (*ktiv*), "he called his name 'Solomon,'" are not contradictory; they show that Bathsheba and David agreed in calling him "Solomon" (*Shelomoh*), because the child, whose limbs and organs were intact, was perfect (*shalem*). His mother saw his physical perfection, while his father, David, recognized that the child's physical perfection implied a perfect soul that would inspire respect. To learn God's judgment of the newborn, David brought Nathan the prophet: "The Lord favored him, and He sent a message through the prophet Nathan; and he was named Jedidiah, meaning 'The Lord loved him,' at the instance of the Lord," because the Lord loves perfect souls.

Everything about Solomon's birth that follows is based on one school of the discipline of physiognomy, which assumes direct connections between the body, the soul and the intellect, by which the practitioner can discern character at birth.

Aristotle, Ghazzali and others who discuss physiognomy say that the eyes and facial expression are accurate signs of what is in the soul, although only adepts in this difficult subject can be sure to distinguish the combination of regal beauty and awesomeness from vulgar beauty. At Moses' birth, for example, it was written, "She saw that he was good and hid him" (Ex. 2:2)—not "that he was pretty." His mother recognized that his kind of beauty inspired awe and that he was destined to govern successfully, as well as to possess wisdom and a prophetic spirit.³⁰

Unlike Bathsheba, Moses' mother was capable of discerning her son's awe-inspiring character and potential for rule and prophecy. Alemanno uses physiognomy and chiromancy, non-philosophical arts that read a person's unique character and fate from his face and hand, in his innovative interpretation of the judgment of Solomon, and probably in his own medical practice.³¹ The inherent character of Solomon becomes manifest through the course of his life, as others respond to him.

³⁰ Oxford, Bodleian MS 2234, fol. 93a, top left margin. Note the recent discussion of physiognomy in Florence at this time in Piers D.G. Britton, "The Signs of faces: Leonardo on physiognomic science and the 'Four Universal States of Man,'" *Renaissance Studies* 26, 2 (2002): 143–162.

³¹ Lesley, "Love and Human Perfection," 117–122.

Alemanno does not interpret the literary and historical context of the verses about Solomon's birth, but reads into the birth scene the character of the adult Solomon that the infant's physical appearance ought to have presented. The whole treatment of Solomon's birth expresses Alemanno's fundamental commitment to interpreting the body through physiognomy and chiromancy, which he thought derived from astrology.³²

The newborn Solomon, according to Alemanno, exhibits four intrinsic physical characteristics, beauty, health, natural strength, and the potential for long life. The only extrinsic physical characteristic is the baby's genealogy, although extrinsic spiritual qualities are also apparent. These spiritual qualities result from the father's intention at the moment of conception, from favorable astral influences, and from divine guidance. All three levels of existence, sublunary, astral and sefirotic, then affect the baby. It takes a cosmos to breed a child.

The first sign of Solomon's beauty indicates his perfection, the second indicates his regal dignity, combined with amiability, and the last sign of the great dignity in his regal beauty is King David's granting him rule before his own death.³³

As soon as he emerges from his mother's womb, the beauty of the newborn is apparent in his face, eyes, limbs, shoulders, broad chest, hips and thighs and in the erectness of his posture. The proportions of length and breadth of all the parts make up a beautiful, praiseworthy, and pleasant person. Beauty indicates his inner qualities and arouses loving admiration among those who see him. Solomon exhibited, not an effeminate beauty, but a virile beauty that indicated ethical lights in him and the splendor of his noble soul that radiated from his face and physical presence.³⁴

Alemanno applies Cicero's distinction between two kinds of beauty (*pulchritudo*): loveliness (*venustas*), he calls "feminine" or "vulgar" beauty, and *dignitas*, the ability to inspire awe.³⁵

Beyond the immediate physical condition of the infant, his body bears signs of the overall temperament that shapes his character.

Health, a second good quality, is partly visible at birth through (1) intact, unblemished limbs and organs, (2) a temperate complexion of the whole body, in every part of each organ, each with the appropriate

³² Oxford, Bodleian MS 2234, fol. 93a, top left margin.

³³ MS A, fol. 26a–b.

³⁴ MS A, fol. 25b.

³⁵ Cicero, *De Officiis* I, 130.

temperament, and (3) a temperament that conforms to the course of life to which his natal stars influence him, to the air of his country, its water, fruits, and foods, and to the people that inhabits it, its elders and its scholarship. Solomon's physical perfection manifested his soul's perfection.³⁶

Since a human being is a body and a soul, physical perfections are indivisible from the characteristics of the soul. Over time, the individual character inherent in the infant body becomes manifest, as possibilities of the body are either realized or not.

Bodily health, intactness of all organs, shows that no perfection is unattainable to his soul. Had Solomon been defective in some faculty, he would have been deprived of the means of seeking the sensations appropriate to that faculty, and consequently would lack that kind of knowledge. As the common people say, any person with a physical defect has a corresponding spiritual, ethical or intellectual defect.³⁷

Other biblical passages state that physical defects indicate and cause impairment of the intellect and moral character.

Our teacher Moses, peace upon him, says in the Torah that any priest "who has a defect shall not be qualified to perform a sacrifice, because he has a defect" (Lev: 21:21, 23) in his soul ... Whoever, then, has a physical defect, a sign of a defect in the soul, cannot devote himself to the true perfection, conjunction with the separate intelligences, because of his spiritual defect, whether in intellectual or moral qualities.³⁸

Physical perfection develops first and contains the possibility of intellectual and spiritual perfection. *Mens sana in corpore sano* extends to the healthy soul.

The temperament or complexion of the body predisposes the infant to specific ethical qualities.

A temperate complexion is a physical condition that indicates equanimity, right desire and accurate intelligence, which do not distort his ethical behavior towards impure extremes or distract his thoughts towards delusions. The practical intellect of someone whose desire is defective will be unable to judge rightly what action is virtuous, because he inclines to bad extremes. ... Only an intelligence that is devoid of any corrupt ethical quality can attain true wisdom; having received the light of knowledge, he behaves properly at all times.³⁹

³⁶ MS A, fols. 28a–29b.

³⁷ MS A, fols. 28a–b.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ MS A, fols. 28b–29a.

The third quality of perfect health is compatibility with one's environment, so that "his thoughts agree with those of wise men of his generation, the laws of his time, and the foods where he lives."⁴⁰

The character of Solomon was inherently capable of attaining any perfection, but could his physical strength sustain these attainments through his potentially long life?

The length of life apportioned to a man is not apparent at his birth, except, some say, through his natal stars. Solar influence confers the longest lifespan, but those who live more than a hundred twenty years receive that span from influences higher than the planets. ... Physicians could calculate exactly a person's lifespan, if they knew the quantity of original blood in the heart of the embryo. Like oil in a lamp, the original blood heats the ingested food until the natural heat is exhausted and the person dies. One may, however, live a shorter time than was appointed, as when God punishes a sinner. Solomon was one of these. Still, if a life is judged by the truths it discovers, the incomparably wise Solomon may be considered to have lived a long life.⁴¹

Solomon's life demonstrates how individual character is shaped by, and operates within, a cosmos that constantly influences every human organ, and in which divine influence helps him to choose the good and punishes him for choosing evil. From birth Solomon's unique character held the potential for the lifetime development that the first book of Kings narrates. His body showed his potential for all intellectual and spiritual perfections, and he accomplished great things as king and author. Despite astral fortune and innate physical perfection, however, the grave sins he chose to commit provoked divine punishment, an early death.

IV

Even when correctly understood, the Song of Songs explains only obscurely the way to achieve attachment, *devekut*, to divinity, and Solomon was not the man to exemplify ultimate felicity. To teach the lessons he found in the Song of Songs, Alemanno had to write another book. This became *Hay ha'Olamim (The Immortal)*, a systematic exposi-

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ MS A, fols. 31a–32a.

tion of Alemanno's thought, which exists in an incomplete autograph manuscript.⁴² He describes the earliest version of *The Immortal*:

I would seem to these people like a prophet or son of a prophet with this commentary, or a visionary, dreamer or mere storyteller; or even a madman or pathetic delusionary, unless I wrote my book, *The Immortal*, ... to serve as an introduction to the understanding of this Song; all the means of perfect union and true felicity that emerge through the Song of Songs in a confusingly brief manner would come happily and smoothly and quite amply in my book, *The Immortal*.⁴³

The introduction to the book explains that he writes rhetorically in order to teach the whole Jewish audience how to attain immortality.⁴⁴ Alemanno regrets being unable to write in the same way as Moses, the supreme prophet and orator, who addressed the Torah to all the Israelites. "My master, the first Moses, securely founded the Torah and taught correct opinion in a single statement, (addressed simultaneously) to the mass of the people and to the wise, understanding man. From each single statement that he spoke from the mouth of God, we understand two."⁴⁵ As Pico explained in the second proem of the *Heptaplus*, in Genesis Moses perfectly addressed all topics to all audiences, in the same words.⁴⁶ In contrast, the modern writer must teach by addressing the separate parts of the audience in different statements that are appropriate to each.

The second section of *The Immortal* presents the life of an author, not Moses, but Alemanno himself, who writes in Hebrew the composition he delivered orally to a general audience in Italian. The title, *Toledot haAdam haYashar*, refers simultaneously to both the "history" and "character" of himself, insofar as he is a potentially immortal man.⁴⁷

The original draft of the composition, written in 1488–1489, is found in a couple of pages of Alemanno's notebooks.⁴⁸ A series of short para-

⁴² Mantua, Bibliotheca comunale, MS 21. The most recent and complete study of the manuscript and its contents is Michael Reuveni, "The Physical Worlds of Jochanan Alemanno in *Hai Ha'Olamim*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Haifa, 2004) (Hebrew); see Jochanan Alemanno, *Hay Ha-'Olamim (L'Immortale) Parte I: la Retorica*, ed., trans. & comm. Fabrizio Lelli (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1995).

⁴³ Lesley, "Love and Human Perfection," 35–36.

⁴⁴ Lelli, (*L'Immortale*) 80–81, 127–129.

⁴⁵ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS or. 849, fol. 6b.

⁴⁶ Pico Della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, trans. Douglas Carmichael, in *On the Dignity of Man* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965), 80, 82.

⁴⁷ See note 9 above.

⁴⁸ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS or. 2234, fols. 67a–68b.

graphs in a distinctly oratorical style, addressed to a general public, describes figuratively each stage of the formation of an individual, beginning with conception. Marginal explanations amplify the oratorical statements by referring to scholarly books and personal experiences. When Alemanno revised and expanded the book in 1500, he revised the oratorical statements into speeches of “The Honest Orator” and expanded the marginal explanations into a learned commentary by “The Truthful Thinker,” as in Dante’s *Banquet*.

The first draft of *The Character of the Upright Man* describes the conception, gestation, and birth of a Jewish boy in the Diaspora who would become the author of this book and potentially attain immortality. His conception is described in the conventional metaphor of a seed planted in the ground:

A. Among the children with whom God graced His holy servants in the lands of the Gentiles, one delightful child among the Hebrew children is born to the remnants, the Jews, who yearn for children; and among the myrtles that sprout in every generation from the deep mire; a medicinal plant, to be a plant that would grow thick, the prime of the spice garden where all of His finest plants grow ... a sprout of the Lord from the branch of His plantings, and His produce. Thus He did to make this soul, planted by His fingers at the feet of His pious ones, bloom in it, a lily of the valley and a sprout from the stock of a righteous man, perfect in wisdom, understanding, knowledge and all precious virtues. God brought him to beget a son, a worthy young man, fertile of head and faith, understanding, intelligence and every kind of insight.⁴⁹

The metaphorical narration of the formation of the embryo and fetus invites comparison with Dante’s description of that stage of development, in *Purgatory* xxv,⁵⁰ and, like Dante, may be drawing upon Albertus Magnus. The mother’s womb and the embryo are physically pure and morally virtuous, as a Christian might describe Mary’s immaculate conception of Jesus.

B. He planted this lovely plant in a womb filled with kindness and justice, and all her perfect honor was to turn him towards every good virtue from gestation and from birth, with morality and great humility ...

C. He materialized him in pure, unsullied matter, to clarify and cleanse his flesh, to refine and purify his blood.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid., fol. 67a.

⁵⁰ Sonia Gentili, *L'uomo aristotelico alle origini della letteratura italiana* (Rome: Carocci, 2005), 95–125, chapter 3, “L’anima forma e immagine del corpo.”

⁵¹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS or. 2234, fol. 67a.

The vegetative soul of this Jewish child is conceived without sin. A marginal note explains, “The material root, which is derived from the blood of the mother, was honorable, because his mother’s matter was proper for making his matter good in its nature and naturally ready, without effort, for honorable and goodly virtues.”⁵² The description of gestation paraphrases both medical and ethical accounts.

D. He composes his temperament with a complexion that is seasoned and melded in a tempered mixture, the complexion of an upright man, to quiet the turmoil of dryness and the heat, cold and moisture from his liver and gall, the sinews of his loins and his body, to silence within him the boiling of his blood and calm his thoughts and actions, so that every good part is tranquil and quiet in its time and does not divert his feet from the path or make his course deviate.

E. He then puffed into him the breath of a living soul, lovely and pure, in a space where an understanding and pleasant heart would grow, ... luminous and pure of any dross or corruption, clean and immaculate, innocent, sinless within, devoid of guile, deceit or dishonesty.⁵³

The righteous father’s seed, planted in the physically pure soil of a pure and moral mother’s womb, steadily develops the embryonic temperament that will sustain a virtuous adult who has the physical, spiritual and intellectual potential to become immortal. The fetus develops under the influence of a different planet each month. Birth, at a moment to which divine providence has granted a propitious astral aspect, impresses signs of permanent character on the body.

In the margins directly opposite this stage of the infant’s birth, two entries record a chiromancer’s reading of Alemanno’s fate and a physiognomist’s reading of his inherent, individual character.

What my hand tells about me, as one of the servants of the most perfect man, Cou[nt Giovanni Pico], told me, from the past and for the future. It indicates a grievous pang on the occasion of a great honor without much use. An appetite to see every wonderful thing. Aches in the shoulders and knees. Great sickness of the belly. Two wives. Love of my wife before I married her. Knows how to do everything for others, not for myself. Bad impression on women. Many promises to benefit me, but they did not keep their promise. All these have come to pass.⁵⁴

Alemanno confirms that the chiromancer’s assessment of his character from his physical appearance is accurate.

⁵² Compare *Purgatorio*, xxv 37–65.

⁵³ Oxford MS or. 2234, fol. 68a.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, margin.

These are the ones that have not occurred until now: Grief in the breast. Long life. Wealth and honor. At the end of my life, fear of the prior death of my wife, since at the end of my life I will be very lonely and will become very pious. To die away from my place and my homeland. Further he told me ... a wonderful passion always to invent new things, in sciences and behavior and in all things.⁵⁵

In contrast with the chiromancer, a physiognomist named Agostino read character from Johanan's face:

The qualities which my physiognomy indicates about me, as a Gentile told me in Bologna, Agost.—. He had never seen or known me or spoken with me, but by chance I came to where he lived and he said, "My lord, you know that I do not know your name or title and I have never seen your reverend face. What, then, your physiognomy shows about your honored qualities is: You, my lord, are affected by the accidents that befall you for no more than three days. After that they pass from you. This is a consequence of art and effort, not your nature, but by an immense effort that you wisely make. In your youth you were hot-tempered to those who had authority over you and those who wronged you. You would hit them with a stone or with your fist. But now if you injure your adversary, you do not touch him with your hand, but instead controvert him in public, in writing or in speech. If a man comes to contend with you to strip you of your clothing, rather than contending with him you compromise with him, even though you know that he is abusing you; rather than letting a quarrel break out, you give him half your garment." ... He said more things that I have forgotten, but this is what I have been able to remember. And just as he said, so it is, not a word of what he said was vain.

The physiognomist's reading confirms that Alemanno has learned to control his natural irascibility; character is subject to free will. The correct readings of his character confirm the efficacy of the learned disciplines of physiognomy and chiromancy, accurate for the mature Alemanno as for the infant Solomon.

Why did Alemanno not publish these marginal readings, so that until now they have remained hidden in the notebooks?⁵⁶ It seems

⁵⁵ Ibid., margin.

⁵⁶ Lesley, "Love and Human Perfection," 6–7; see Fabrizio Lelli, "Biography and Autobiography in Yohanan Alemanno's Literary Perception," in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy, Jewish Culture and Contexts*, ed. David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 35–36.

likely that he and his audience considered personal experience to be significant only when it illustrated a valid general principle. Three centuries before Rousseau, he was not ready to expose to any public the intimate character of which he was aware. Even Montaigne, nearly a century later, could imagine complete self-revelation, but considered it an indecent possibility: “Had I found myself among those peoples who are said still to live under the sweet liberty of Nature’s primal laws, I can assure you that I would most willingly have portrayed myself whole, and wholly naked.”⁵⁷ Alemanno shows himself naked only as an unborn baby.

In the revision of the *Upright Man*, the Honest Orator describes the stage, immediately after he “emerges into the air,” when the infant becomes dependent on his mother’s nursing:

He (God) nursed him with the honey from the breast of his mother, a Hebrew woman—entirely pure of any of the corrupt, alien, foreign, cruel blood that produces food from any of the foods that is loathsome to Torah and *mizvah*—who fills his belly with the dainty nutrients and sweet milk for a Hebrew soul, sweet and soothing for flesh of the Hebrew nation, to purify all his essence, “like the essence of heaven for purity.” (Ex 24:10) He would not clasp an alien breast that was polluted and soaked with blood, bitter and “cruel like ostriches,” (Lam. 4:3) but instead, “Jews, (for whom) there was light and purity” (Esther 8:16) for their souls, which would not contaminate the sacred place within his spirit and soul.⁵⁸

Such praise would have been inappropriate for Bathsheba. The Diaspora Jewish baby, son of a modest and virtuous mother, is more fortunate than Solomon. The Truthful Thinker explains at length what the Honest Orator has told the general audience. After the fortunate astral influences at the child’s birth, the mother’s nursing of the infant is a second fortuitous circumstance.

Natural philosophers, medical experts, theologians and almost everyone explains that the most suitable nutrition for the newborn is the milk that is produced in his own mother’s breasts, where the blood that was his original nutriment within her is now transformed into the milk to feed him. . . . Ibn Sina wrote in clause 1, study 1 of fen 3, in chapter 2 of *The Direction of the Nursing Woman*: “His food: It is proper for him to nurse his

⁵⁷ Michel de Montaigne, “To the Reader,” in *The Complete Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London–New York: Penguin, 1991), lix.

⁵⁸ Mantua MS 21, fols. 48a–b.

mother's milk, as far as possible, because it is the best of nutrients, both because it was his nourishment while he was in the womb, and because it is of his essence, so that he absorbs it most fully."⁵⁹

Avicennan medicine concurs with the midrashic interpretation of Exodus, to recommend that the Jewish child should, like Moses, be nursed by his mother, to ensure that he will immediately begin eating food the natural qualities of which preserve his physical connection to divine influence.

For the best possible good, divine wisdom arranged for the master of the prophets (Moses) not to suck even a drop that was not from his mother's breasts, as is written, "Shall I go and get you a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child for you?" (Exodus 2:7) The rabbis said, "This teaches that she (Miriam) had surveyed all the Egyptian women."⁶⁰ It is also explained that the mother's foods should be appropriate to the nature of the nursling, because her milk is formed from them. . . . When he is fed it, it becomes part of him; so that his ethical qualities are good and honest, spiritual actions. The quality of the milk influences him to good or bad actions. . . . Therefore Avicenna said, "It is proper that his foods should be prepared from the best, that is, the best kinds of porridge and sheep's or kid's meat, and fish, the flesh of which is not rotten or tough." He also said there, "Her behavior should be virtuous and she should be a moral person."⁶¹

The mother's moral character, body, and diet are essential to the quality of nourishment she gives her child. Jewish mothers should fastidiously observe the dietary commandments to preserve the purity of their children's character, which enables them steadily to receive divine grace.

Christian preachers of the time cited classical writers and medical physicians to urge Florentines not to hire wet nurses for their children. "In the large city of Florence, nursing by a salaried nurse or by a slave woman became the dominant practice, at least from the middle of the fifteenth century onward."⁶² To the Florentines,

⁵⁹ Mantua MS 21, fol. 48b.

⁶⁰ Exodus Rabbah 1:25.

⁶¹ Mantua MS 21, fol. 48b.

⁶² Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "Blood Parents and Milk Parents: Wet Nursing in Florence, 1300–1530," in eadem, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 132–164. *Maphei Vegii Laudensis de Educatione Liberosum et eorum claris moribus libri sex*, ed. Maria Walburg Fanning and Anne Stanislaus Sullivan (Washington, D.C., 1933–1936), I, iv, 20ff.

The first criteria in the choice of a nurse were not her moral qualities. Girls who had been seduced, “bestial” Tartar slave women, or mothers who had abandoned their children all made good nurses if their milk was “young” and abundant. . . . Their employer seldom seems particular about the legitimacy of the liaison that made their breasts swell.⁶³

Although he admired many qualities of the Florentines, Alemanno insisted that Jews not follow this Florentine practice. Parents must safeguard the child’s potential to attain the intellectual and spiritual perfection that genealogy, observance of divine commandments, and astral influence make possible. Nature would then combine with Jewish observance of ritual regulations, to make Jews the people most apt to attain immortality.

Theologians and natural philosophers also explain that, among all peoples, none is prepared for attachment to the Name through the Active Intellect like the Hebrew nation, which was naturally marked by this quality from its very beginning, Shem and Heber and Abraham and all their followers, who became accustomed to the ways of divine attachment. Every means prepares this nation to reach this goal in all its actions, particularly in all its foods, which are to be refined, pure and clear, to engender in their heart the vital spirit, which carries the soul, clean and pure, “like the essence of heaven,” (Ex. 24:10) and is ready to be joined to the Active Intellect, which is its form, with regard to its subtlety and brightness, just as the essence of heaven cleaves to their intellect because of the subtlety and brightness of their matter.⁶⁴

The child begins as a body that bears an individual character with the potential to attain immortality. Alemanno’s conception of the human individual is reminiscent of the formulations of human dignity by Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico.⁶⁵

Soon after Alemanno drafted the two books we have been discussing, Laurentian Florence, the fortuitous setting for his writing and collaboration with Pico, collapsed. In 1494 Pico and Poliziano died, the French invaded, and Savonarola took power and expelled Jews from the city. Alemanno continued writing *The Character of the Upright Man*

⁶³ Klapisch-Zuber, “Blood Parents,” 141–142.

⁶⁴ Mantua MS 21, fol. 49a.

⁶⁵ Paul Oskar Kristeller, “The Dignity of Man,” in idem, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, ed. Michael Mooney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 169–181; Moshe Idel, “Man as the ‘Possible’ Entity in Some Jewish and Renaissance Sources,” in *Hebraica Veritas?*, ed. Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 33–48.

and *The Immortal* in Mantua, where he apparently stayed between at least 1495 and 1506; he may have lived until 1521 and died in the Land of Israel.⁶⁶ During the course of the sixteenth century, Hebrew writers who absorbed usages of Italian and Latin literature recapitulated Alemanno's adaptation of Jewish sources to that discourse. As a result of that development, his name was included among the authors who received a brief entry in Gedaliah Ibn Yahya's *Chain of Tradition*, published in Venice in 1587.⁶⁷

V

Like Alemanno's titles for the two unpublished compositions that introduce the early modern author into Hebrew, the title of our study is amphibolous. "Giving birth to the Hebrew author" was Alemanno's accomplishment in the two books, and in them the attention devoted to gestation and birth of the author is surprisingly prominent.

Alemanno's collaboration with Giovanni Pico implied a range of possibilities, most of which were not realized. Formulating early modern authorship from Hebrew sources was a stage in revising medieval Jewish scholarship to conform to new European rhetorical practice. Aristotle's efficient cause of a composition, the author, became a historical individual, and for the first time, the author became a distinct figure in the rhetorical relations of Hebrew composition and commentary. The two authors whose gestation, birth, and infancy Alemanno described at such length, Solomon and himself, were historically individuated characters who were physical beings and had the capability of attaining eternal *devekut*. In contrast with Job, about whom the rabbis said that he "never existed and was not created, but was only a parable (*mashal*),"⁶⁸ Alemanno first made a Hebrew author a reality, a *nimshal*, a real person, with physical organs and a history.

⁶⁶ Mantua MS 21, fol. 23a–24b. Moshe Idel, "Encounters between Spanish and Italian Kabbalists in the Generation of the Exile," in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391–1648*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 189–222; Lelli, "Biography and Autobiography," 25–38.

⁶⁷ Gedaliah Ibn Yahya, *Sefer Shalshet haKabbalah* (Warsaw, 1881), fol. 29b.

⁶⁸ Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Batra* 15a.

Boccaccio had deliberately withheld attention from Dante's birth and infancy, to protect the dignity of the great author from remembrance of the "mewling and puking" stage of life. In contrast, Alemanno examined the stage of infancy in detail, because the newborn body immediately manifested the distinctive character that would eventually shape the actions and writings of the man and author. The author's body and the corpus of his writings would express the same character. The whole course of a life ultimately expressed character as fate, which the physiognomist and chiromancer could immediately recognize in the body.

This early modern author was not, however, the author to whom, according to Barthes, modern readers try to reduce any writing: "The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author*, 'confiding' in us."⁶⁹ In contrast, Alemanno's human author is a microcosm, in whom the cosmic forces of physiology, external nature, the stars, and divine influences intersect, but who still has a free will with which to control their effects on him. To know this author, readers would need to understand the cosmos that operates in him.

Alemanno's conception of the author's person as a historically unique and indivisible combination of body and soul invites comparison with Daniel Boyarin's examination of rabbinic and Hellenistic attitudes towards the body and textual interpretation in *Carnal Israel*. Boyarin argues that the contrasting attitudes towards the body of the early Palestinian rabbis, on one hand, and of Paul, Philo, and Origen, on the other, corresponded to the contrasting methods by which they interpreted texts. The Greeks' "allegorical reading practice and that of their intellectual descendants is founded on a binary opposition in which meaning exists as a disembodied substance prior to its incarnation in language, that is, in a dualistic system in which spirit precedes and is primary over body." In contrast,

Midrash, the hermeneutic system of rabbinic Judaism, seems precisely to refuse that dualism, eschewing the inner-outer, visible-invisible, body-soul dichotomies of allegorical reading. Midrash and platonic allegory

⁶⁹ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," cited from *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London–New York: Longman, 1988), 168–169.

are alternate techniques of the body. ... For rabbinic Jews, the human being was defined as a body—animated, to be sure, by a soul—while for Hellenistic Jews (such as Philo) and (at least many Greek-speaking) Christians (such as Paul), the essence of a human being is a soul housed in a body. Rabbinic Judaism invested significance in the body which in the other formations was invested in the soul.⁷⁰

Alemanno's medical and physiognomic attention to the pre-natal and early life of the child, in which the body expresses the undeveloped individual soul, clearly puts him on the rabbinic side of this divide. Boyarin continues,

For the Jews of late antiquity, I claim, the rite of circumcision became the most contested site of this contention, precisely because of the way that it concentrates in one moment representations of the significance of sexuality, genealogy, and ethnic specificity in bodily practice.⁷¹

It is particularly surprising, then, that Alemanno does not mention circumcision in his detailed treatments of infancy, neither for himself nor for Solomon. I could find no ready explanation for this significant omission. All of the intellectual backgrounds to Alemanno's thought—philosophy, Kabbalah, Jewish ritual and medicine—would provide motives to discuss circumcision. Perhaps the immediate situation of speaking before a general public, which might include Christian laity and uneducated Jews, inhibited discussion of circumcision. For whatever reason, Alemanno's two newborns remain as uncircumcised as Michelangelo's David.

Boyarin's contrasting characterization of the interpretive methods of ancient rabbis and Greeks makes all the more prominent the convergence of Pico's and Alemanno's methods. Pico's Christian Hebraism expressed an effort to recover both the literal and the allegorical sense from the original Hebrew revelation. He began studying Hebrew and Aramaic in order to study Kabbalah, which he considered a kind of allegory, and also strove to understand the literal sense of the Hebrew text of the Bible. Following statements of Jerome, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and, most explicitly, Nicholas of Lyra, Pico studied Hebrew and consulted Alemanno to gain the necessary understanding of the literal sense of the original text, so that he could derive a valid allegorical sense from it.

⁷⁰ Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 9.

⁷¹ Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 7.

[T]hose who would profit from the study of sacred Scripture must begin from a grasp of the literal sense, especially since argument may be built only upon the literal sense and not upon the mystical sense ... according to Jerome in his second *Prologue to Genesis* and in many other places, it is necessary to have recourse to the Hebrew codices in order to establish the literal truth of the Old Testament.⁷²

He also directed Alemanno to examine the literal sense of the Song of Songs separately, before formulating the allegorical sense, and to combine them only afterwards. Alemanno explained his own method of combining *mashal*, the obvious meaning, with *nimshal*, the hidden sense, naming Rashi and the Muslim Sufi thinker, Ghazzali, in place of the Christian commentators, Augustine and Nicholas of Lyra, who were known for the same opinions.⁷³

Rashi ... constantly says, "It is my intention to explain the literal sense of the verse." Not only the Hebrew sages did so. Many of the Greeks also kept to the literal sense in commenting upon Scripture and did not follow exclusively the allegorical sense, discarding from the start the literal, apparent things. ... Just as the blind man cannot perceive appearances, as the natural philosophers say, nor the deaf, sounds, so he who disregards the literal sense will not accurately perceive the allegorical. ... As Abu Hamid (al-Ghazzali) said in his *Niche for Lights*, "neither the inner nor the outer meaning of a verse is to be considered exclusively" ... The follower of the exterior is crude, the pursuer of the interior is subtle, but whoever combines them is perfect.

Alemanno's undertaking of the biographical project at Pico's urging and under his supervision implies that they cooperated in order to reunite major elements of the exegetical traditions that had diverged in late antiquity. Heirs to separate traditions of religion, language, and commentary, Pico and Alemanno each strove to restore to his tradition what it had long lacked. Pico sought to recover the whole text, Alemanno, the historical Hebrew author.

⁷² Nicholas of Lyra, Second prologue to the *Postilla Litteralis*, 4; cited from Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory* (Kalamazoo, Mi.-Spencer, Ma.: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 385–386.

⁷³ Lesley, *The Song of Solomon's Ascents*, 43.

THE IDEA OF BEAUTY IN LEONE
EBREO (JUDAH ABRAVANEL)

SERGIUS KODERA

Largo discorso saria bisogno per
dichiarare o diffinire che cosa sia
bellezza, perché molti la veggono e
la nominano, e non la conoscono.

Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore* (ed. princ. 1535) belong to the vast genre of *trattati d'amore* (love treatises) with a predominantly neo-platonic bent—texts which found large readerships from the late fifteenth century to the end of the sixteenth century and beyond.¹ The third Dialogue begins with the kind of incident that even today could prove to be ruinous for a nascent love affair: Philone, the ardent lover, fails to take notice of his beloved Sophia when he happens to meet her on the street.

Sophia: Philone, oh Philone, don't you hear or don't you want to answer?

Philone: Who is calling me?

Sophia: Do not walk by so hurriedly: listen a moment.

Philone: You are here, Sophia? I did not see you, and passed you by without noticing you.

Sophia: Where are you heading with such attention that you neither speak nor listen nor see the friends around you?

Philone: For some unimportant errands.

¹ John Charles Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love: The Context of Giordano Bruno's Eroici furori* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958) and Sabrina Ebbesmeyer, *Sinnlichkeit und Vernunft. Studien zur Rezeption und Transformation der Liebestheorie Platons in der Renaissance* (Munich: Fink, 2002) are valuable general introductions to the topic of Renaissance theory on love. On the *Dialoghi* in general see: *Dialoghi d'amore*, ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Winter, 1924) (facsimile of editio princeps, Rome 1535); Heinz Pflaum, *Die Idee der Liebe. Leone Ebreo* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1926); Giuseppina Fontanesi, "Il problema filosofico dell'amore nell'opera di Leone Ebreo," *Archivio di Filosofia* 2 (1932); Susanne Damiens, *Amour et Intellect chez Léon l'Hébreu* (Toulouse: Edouart Privat, 1971); Theodore A. Perry, *Erotic Spirituality* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980); Andres Soria Olmedo, *Los Dialoghi d'amore de Leon Hebreo* (Granada, University Press, 1984); Sergius Kodera, *Filone und Sofia in Leone Ebreos Dialoghi d'amore. Platonische Liebesphilosophie der Renaissance und Judentum* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1995).

Sophia: Unimportant? That which robs the vision from your open eyes and the hearing from your unobstructed ears must be of some importance for you.²

In the ensuing discussion, Philone tries to explain his *faux pas* by maintaining that he had been distracted by the contemplation of Sophia's divine beauty: that is, by an image that had been "imprinted into his mind" (*per immagine impressa*). Philone says that such beautiful mental images have the capacity to override immediate sensory experiences, and that their beauty may therefore also divert attention from the actual, physical presence of the beloved. This is certainly not a very elegant excuse for a man who already (for two long dialogues!) has been trying to seduce a woman. Needless to say, such theories do not satisfy the mysterious woman, Sophia, whose name indicates that she is an allegory of wisdom. Indeed, the power of such *phantasmata* was a topical subject in Renaissance texts on love or medicine. Yet, the structure and the context of the *Dialoghi* suggest that Leone disagreed with many of these assumptions that had been developed in a Christian context.

Clearly (and unsurprisingly), the concept of beauty is a crucial issue in Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore*, a text renowned for an unusual emphasis on sensuality and the positive assessment of sexuality.³ In its many different manifestations, beauty brings about the mutual and physical love between the higher and lower parts of divine creation.⁴

² "Sofia: Filone, o Filone, non odi o non vuoi rispondere? Filone: Chi mi chiama? Sofia: Non passar così in fretta: ascolta un poco. Filone: Tu sei qui, o Sofia? Non ti vedevo: inavvertentemente trapassavo. Sofia: Dove vai con tanta attenzione, che non parli né odi né vedi i circostanti amici? Filone: Andavo per alcuni bisogni della parte che men vale. Sofia: Men vale? non debbe in te valer poco quel che priva de' tuoi occhi aperti il vedere e di tue orecchie non chiuse l'odire" (*Dialoghi* 171). In the following, all quotations are from Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, ed. Santino Caramella (Bari: Laterza, 1929). Translations are my own.

³ On Leone's kabbalistic sources for his cosmic eroticism, see Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 188–190.

⁴ "... perché tutte tendono ne l'amore divino mediante la parte intelletiva. Sì che l'opera e il risplendere de l'amore divino in noi è quella che prima ne guida in la nostra felice dilettazone, e dietro a quella va l'ardentissima opera de l'amore nostro in noi, che ne conduce a unirsi e bearsi con la sua somma bellezza. La qual cosa perché meglio l'intendi, mira la sua somiglianza fra dui perfetti amanti, uomo e donna, che se ben l'uomo amante ha ardente amore a la donna amata, non ha mai ardimiento né possibilità di fruire la delectabile unione di quella, che è il fine del suo amore, s'ella con li raggi degli occhi amorosi, con dolci parole, con soavi contegni, con piacenti segni e affettuosi gesti non gli mostrasse una tale complacenzia di corrispondenzia amorosa, che gli sollevasse e avvivasse l'amore, e lo facesse capace e audace a condursi esso amante ne la dilettevole unione de l'amata, fine perfettivo del suo ardentissimo amore" (*Dialoghi* 386).

Throughout the *Dialoghi*, there can be no doubt that Philone is yearning for the fulfillment of his erotic desire. Or to put it into today's language: the man wants to lay a ravishingly beautiful woman. Yet, the charming lady, a *belle dame sans merci*,⁵ wants lessons in the theory of love, and not in its practice.⁶

Until now the reader might have wondered what beauty and the topic of the present volume may have in common. As will become obvious from the following, beauty for Leone Ebreo is not only a spiritual principle that belongs to the highest echelons of being, it rather transcends the entire creation, universally acts as a mediating and moving agent and is therefore inextricably linked to the physical reality of the body.

For today's reader the *Dialoghi* are a veritable Renaissance encyclopedia; the text is a maze of allegoric interpretations of pagan mythology, rivaling cosmologies, biblical exegesis, and comments on Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy.⁷ Leone envisages God and His creation as a gigantic unity that is created and bound together by heterosexual and highly dynamic relationships. These emotional links share the idea that the longing for beauty (or for the good) engenders mutual love on all levels of creation: from the ineffable godhead down to the lowest ranks in the hierarchy of being. Various and reciprocal emotional relationships thus ensure the constant and dynamic exchange inside the hierarchy of being. In fact, love caused by beauty allows the universe to unfold, and thus to effect the divine plan of creation. Within this metaphorical framework, the intellectual or spiritual world is traditionally male, active and superior, whereas the material realm is female, passive, and therefore ontologically inferior. Philone's passionate love is thus merely one of the numerous manifestations of the universal attraction generated through beauty and love. Yet, for Leone, one aspect does not appear to work in a traditional arrangement: for Philone is a curiously passive lover, whereas Sophia often takes over an active role.

⁵ On courtly love in Leone Ebreo, see Perry, *Erotic Spirituality*, 29. On the uniqueness of this female voice in contemporary Jewish discourses, see Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 242.

⁶ "... non vedi tu [che] ciò ch'io voglio da te è la teorica de l'amore, e quel che tu vuoi da me è la pratica di quello? Non puoi negare che sempre debbe precedere la cognizione de la teorica all'uso de la pratica ..." (*Dialoghi* 200).

⁷ Veltri has beautifully described this aspect: Giuseppe Veltri, "Philo and Sophia: Leone Ebreo's concept of Jewish Philosophy," in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 55–66.

Much to her teacher's dismay, it is through Sophia's insistent questions that the three dialogues on love (totaling nearly 400 pages in the modern edition) unfold. As Perry was first to suggest, this literary frame of an arguing amorous couple exemplifies Leone's ideas about the mutual attraction that permeates the entire cosmos.⁸ The accustomed roles of men as active and women as passive lovers are thus subverted in the *Dialoghi*—a strategically important choice, as we shall see.

Given the negative attitude that Maimonides displays towards the body in his *Guide*⁹ the most surprising aspect of the *Dialoghi* is, perhaps, that they were written by a prominent Jew.¹⁰ The *editio princeps* of the *Dialoghi* appeared in Rome in 1535 and quickly became a frequently translated bestseller in the sixteenth century.¹¹ It seems, however, that the text was mainly read by Christians, while Jewish scholars often reacted in a hostile way (if at all) to Leone's attempts to comment and incorporate humanist and Platonic strands of Renaissance Italy into the Jewish cultural context.¹²

⁸ Perry, *Erotic Spirituality*, 29, was the first author to discuss this topic.

⁹ See *The Guide of the Perplexed*, especially III, 8. On Maimonides, see Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 57–59, with references. On Leone Ebreo's position to Maimonides, see Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 90; Shlomo Pines, "Mediaeval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb? Some Jewish and Arabic Sources of Leone Ebreo's Dialogues," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard Dov Cooperman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 365–398, here 367–369; Aaron W. Hughes, "Transforming the Maimonidean Imagination: Aesthetics in the Renaissance Thought of Judah Abravanel," *Harvard Theological Review* 97 (2004): 461–484, 465; Sergius Kodera, "Masculine/Feminine. The Concept of Matter in Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'Amore*," *Zeitsprünge. Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit* 7 (2003): 481–517, here 499–503.

¹⁰ On the ways in which Italian Jews were influenced by contemporary Renaissance Humanist culture, see Arthur Lesley, "Jewish Adaption of Humanist Concepts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Italy," in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 45–62, here 51–52 and *passim*. He describes the emergence of "a new and distinct Italian Jewish culture, which involved several genres of Hebrew composition, notably rhetorical and ethical, and everywhere was recognized as supreme in every kind of Hebrew prose." (49). On the kabbalistic sources of Leone Ebreo, see Moshe Idel, "Kabbalah and Philosophy in R. Isaak and Judah Abrabanel," in *The Philosophy of Leone Ebreo: Four Lectures*, ed. M. Dorman and Z. Levy (Haifa: Ha-Kibbutz Hameuchad, 1985), 73–112.

¹¹ Gebhardt, *Dialoghi d'amore*, lists 25 sixteenth-century editions, including translations into French, Spanish, Latin. The Hebrew translation is from the nineteenth century.

¹² See 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 B. Ruderman (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 184–185. This does

In all probability Leone did not live to see the first printed copies of the *Dialoghi*. As a descendant of Portuguese Jewry, he was born in Lisbon around 1460. In the aftermath of a political conspiracy, Leone's father Isaac Abravanel, the famous scholar and statesman, had to flee with his family to Spain in 1483. In his *Elegy against Time*, Leone says that he had to leave his son in Portugal; his only child had been forcibly converted to Christianity, a traumatic experience from which Leone and his wife never recovered.¹³ In 1492 the Abravanel family had to leave Spain for Italy, where, as a physician, Leone served important and powerful persons such as the Spanish Viceroy in Naples. It seems that Leone died some time before 1523.¹⁴ Apart from these sketchy facts we know very little of Leone's biography. He allegedly also wrote a book entitled the *Harmony of the Heavens*; but this work might also have been the separate edition of the second part of the *Dialoghi* which appeared only once.¹⁵

Today, we know of three manuscripts of the *Dialoghi* that predate the printed text.¹⁶ Much ink has been spilled in the history of scholarship on the question of whether Leone originally wrote his *Dialoghi* in Italian.¹⁷ Another (more) interesting problem is the extent to which the editors of the *princeps* interfered with the original text.¹⁸ Moreover, the third dialogue ends rather abruptly and a fourth part "on the effects

not mean that the Gentile readers of the *Dialoghi* were always and overwhelmingly positive: Montaigne for instance mocks the text, see Caramella, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 435.

¹³ *Elegy against Time*, vs. 21–42 in Gebhardt, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 3–4 and 9–10 and vs. 73–84, pp. 12–13.

¹⁴ For a more detailed biography, see Gebhardt, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 5–34; Pflaum, *Die Idee der Liebe*, 42–63 and 75–86.

¹⁵ See Kodera, *Filone und Sofia*, 10, note 29; Giacinto Manuppella, *Leone Ebreo. Dialoghi d'amore*, 2 vols. (Lisbon: Instituto nacional de investigação científica, 1983), 555–564.

¹⁶ On the date of the composition of the *Dialoghi*, see Barbara Garvin, "The Language of Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore*," *Italia. Studi e ricerche sulla Storia, la cultura e la letteratura degli Ebrei d'Italia* 13–15 (2000): 181–210, here 207–210. *Dialoghi* 245 indicates the year 5262 (1502) but the manuscripts name different dates. Also Perry, *Erotic Spirituality*, 9; Carlo Dionisotti, "Appunti su Leone Ebreo," *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica* 2 (1959): 409–428, 414; Manuppella, *Leone Ebreo*, 342–427.

¹⁷ As I see it, it is obvious that Leone's Italian has a clear Hispanic bent but obviously Italian was a language that a Jew with his cultural background could easily master. Furthermore, there is no good reason why Leone should have been as hopeless with foreign languages as some Italian scholars seem to be even today. For a summary of these discussions, see Kodera, *Filone und Sofia*, 8–11, with references.

¹⁸ For example, *Dialoghi* 279 mentions amongst the few human beings who were immortal in body and soul not only Enoch and Elijah, but also "San Giovanni Evangelista."

of love” is announced in the text. It thus remains uncertain if that concluding dialogue has been lost or if Leone was unable to finish his work. The *Dialoghi* were probably written before 1510; as Leone’s literary and conceptual development is remarkable, it seems that he had worked on the text over a longer period of time. The first dialogue is rigidly Aristotelian in content and form; for this reason, it appears likely that Leone had been working on it whilst he was still in Spain. The second part is an (unprecedented) comment on pagan mythology and astrology in a Jewish context; it thus perhaps evidences Leone’s early encounter with Italian Renaissance culture (even if only in the garb of Boccaccio’s *Genealogia*). The third dialogue displays considerable (and critical) awareness of Plato’s *Symposium* and generally of some texts written by Renaissance Neo-Platonists such as Marsilio Ficino or Pico della Mirandola.

Leone explicitly saw himself at odds with and superior to the culture of these “savants of Edom.”¹⁹ In particular the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* had provided them and other Christian Platonists with novel ideas on the topic of love;²⁰ yet, both for Jew and Gentile, the assimilation of ancient Greek concepts to their respective cultural contexts proved to be an arduous task.²¹ Another hotly debated issue was the intellectual and cultural position of sages who had lived before Christ. Whereas his Gentile counterparts wanted to put Plato, Zoroaster, Hermes, and other so-called *prisci theologi* (ancient theologians) on par with Mosaic and pre-Christian revelation, Leone was eager to make Plato a (somewhat confused) disciple of Moses. He thus saw the Platonic tradition as derivative of, and thus secondary to, Judaism. In such ways, the *Dialoghi* can be read as a highly unusual vindication of the superiority of Jewish culture amidst a Gentile debate on *prisca theologia*.²²

¹⁹ *Elegy against Time*, vs. 109–112 in Gebhardt, *Dialoghi d’amore*.

²⁰ Leone in all probability knew Ficino’s influential translations of and commentaries on both texts. On Leone’s criticism of some of Ficino’s readings of Plato, see Kodera, *Filone und Sofia*, 49–51.

²¹ Cf. Kodera, *Filone und Sofia*, 21–26.

²² A debate that was led with distinct Anti-Semitic undercurrents, *Dialoghi* 251; James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 464; Lesley, “The place of the *Dialoghi*,” 81. On the concept of Ancient Theology in general, see Daniel P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century* (London: Duckworth, 1972), 1–21 and passim. On Leone Ebreo’s position in that debate, see Moshe Idel, “Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. Lenn E. Goodman (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 324; Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 88–91.

Sex

We have already mentioned that Leone's philosophy of love is characteristically this-worldly and sensual. Indeed, heterosexual intercourse and childbirth are the models that structure his speculations about the cosmological and theological functions of love and beauty. Leone describes these cosmological founding acts in the following words:

The divine intellect with all ideas was produced from the reverberations of the beloved divine beauty; it is the father and the form of the universe, and the husband and beloved of the chaos. The chaos was produced by its lover, the shining and wise divine mind; it is the mother of the world and the lover and wife of the first intellect; the amorous universe was the product of their illustrious love, and mutual love that was born into this world from the intellect as father and the chaos as mother.²³

Here the pivotal role of beauty in the process of Creation becomes obvious: it is beauty which engenders universal and productive affections, which thereby ensures the unity of the universe.

Therefore Leone says that love for the beautiful causes the urge to reproduce that beauty; in order to become meaningful, love has to result in sexual intercourse and in the begetting of a child. Leone's focus on heterosexual acts as universal, creative forces entails that love occurs exclusively between partners who are different; by feeling mutually attracted to each other through dint of that difference, these sex partners produce a third entity, a child. This perspective is fundamentally different from the mainstream Gentile Renaissance Neo-Platonists. Their formative discursive model had been intellectual friendship between men, a construction which entailed the love of the like for the like, with distinct homoerotic undercurrents.²⁴ (Thus, in

²³ "Del risplendere de l'amata bellezza divina l'intelletto primo universale con tutte le idee fu prodotto, il quale è de l'universo il padre e la forma, e il marito e amato dal caos; e de la chiara e sapiente mente divina amante fu prodotto il caos, madre del mondo, amatrice e moglie del primo intelletto; e de l'illustre amore divino, che nacque d'ambidue, fu prodotto l'amoroso universo, il quale a questo modo nacque del padre intelletto e de la madre caos" (*Dialoghi* 256–257).

²⁴ On this kind of friendship which became famous as "Platonic Love," see Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon Marsile Ficin*, ed. Raymond Marcel (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1956), book 2, chapters 8–9; book 7, chapter 9; Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love*, 75; Arthur Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 195–196; Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 1: 355; in general, Sabrina Ebbersmeyer, *Sinnlichkeit und Vernunft*; Kodera, "Masculine/Feminine." On Plato's homosexual ethics, see David M. Halperin, "Why is Diotima a Woman? Platonic Eros and the Figuration of Gender," in *Before Sexuality: The*

Platonic metaphysics, pregnancy and childbirth were discursive models that generally remained on a metaphorical basis.) In accordance with such implicit misogyny and the concomitant distrust towards the material world, Renaissance Neo-Platonists like Marsilio Ficino²⁵ or Giovanni Pico della Mirandola²⁶ had seen the ultimate human goal as a liberation of the soul from the prison of the body.²⁷

Leone partly eclipses such ideas about an ascent of the human soul; he emphasizes instead the reciprocal nature of emotional relationships between the physical and the intellectual realms of creation. Ontologically superior and inferior entities, men and women fall for each other not because they are similar, but because they are different. Their attraction results sometimes in childbirth and sometimes in spiritual elevation. Even though intellectual contemplation was an important topic for Leone too, it nevertheless seems that he sought to avoid forms of spirituality that entailed a characteristic hostility towards the physical world, the body, and by extension towards women.²⁸ It was probably the characteristic this-worldliness of being a doctor which led Leone to acknowledge that beauty is not only an intellectual, but also a sensual phenomenon—that body and mind are complementary and not antagonistic forms of being.²⁹ In fact, the lover's mental abstraction (which brings him into trouble with his beloved Sophia) is a frequently

Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World, ed. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 257–308. I am conscious that the terms *homoerotic* and *heterosexual* are perhaps anachronistic; in the present context, they are only meant to denote sexual relationships between males or between men and women and not the constitution of subjective identities.

²⁵ On Ficino's Christianized Plato, see Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*; on his philosophy of love, see Michael J.B. Allen, "Cosmogony and love: The role of *Phaedrus* in Ficino's *Symposium* Commentary," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 10 (1980): 131–153 and Michael J.B. Allen, "Ficino's Theory of the five substances and the Neoplatonists' *Parmenides*," *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 12 (1982): 19–44. On Ficino's doctrine of Platonic love, see Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love*, 71–74; Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. Virginia Conant (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 47.

²⁶ On possible connexions between Pico and Leone Ebreo, see Veltri, "Philo and Sophia."

²⁷ On that concept, see Ficino, *Commentaire*, book 5, chapter 4. This figure originally derives from Plato's *Phaedo*, 81–83.

²⁸ In the dramatic setting of the *Dialoghi*, this balanced view is at odds with the ideal of spiritual ecstasy propagated by Philone (see, for instance, *Dialoghi* 223).

²⁹ On this topic in general and on materialistic models of explanation for mental processes in Renaissance medicine, see Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Renaissance Medicine* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 106.

discussed medical textbook case: The beautiful image in the lover's mind causes a state of ecstasy that may overcome vital somatic functions (such as sleep). Philone's lovesickness may consequently turn out to be lethal.³⁰ Renaissance doctors called this kind of hopeless infatuation with an image *heroic frenzies*; Giordano Bruno would later in the sixteenth century write an important text on that topic.³¹ Accordingly, contemporary medical handbooks would recommend rather drastic cures to eradicate the erotic image from the lover's mind: contrary to Ficino, Leone does not mention such remedies. It is nevertheless quite clear that Philone's mental abstraction is a medical case.

Leone's identity as a doctor who had no inhibitions to speak about the physical details of human sexuality also becomes visible in other instances. For example, in the second dialogue, the mythological accounts of the birth of Venus serve Leone as a pretext to describe in great detail different forms of sperm and other bodily functions pertaining to sex; his rendering of the scandalous relationship between Venus and Mars is no less than a direct reference to the effects of excessive intercourse (*Dialoghi* 133–135). Leone's focus on spiritual and physical aspects of creation is also reflected in his understanding of the complementary function of the thought of Plato and of Aristotle. According to the *Dialoghi*, both philosophers were doctors who sought cures for the respective spiritual and physical ailments of the human race. Whereas Plato's philosophy was aimed against the materialism of his predecessors, Aristotle had to mitigate the highly successful doctrines of his teacher, in order to ensure the continuation of care

³⁰ “Non è dunque giusta la tua querela contra di me, ché quando tu, o Sofia, m'hai veduto rapito dal pensiero senza sentimenti, era allor mia mente con tutta l'anima si ritirata a contemplare l'immagine di tua bellezza, che, abbandonati il vedere e l'udire insieme col movimento, solamente quello che hanno ancor gli animali bruti mi portava per quella via, la quale prima da me fu desiderata; sì che se lamentar ti vuoi, lamentati pur di te, che a te stessa hai serrate le porte” (*Dialoghi* 197). “Così pungitivo potrebbe essere il desiderio e tanto intima la contemplazione, che del tutto discarasse e ritirasse l'anima dal corpo, resolvendosi i spiriti per la forte e ristretta loro unione in modo che, afferrandosi l'anima affettuosamente col desiderato e contemplato oggetto, potria prestamente lassare il corpo esanimato del tutto” (*Dialoghi* 177–178).

³¹ On Bruno's *De gl'heroici furori*, a text published in London in 1584, see Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love*, and Ferdinand Fellmann, introduction to *Giordano Bruno. Von den heroischen Leidenschaften* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1989), passim. As Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, “Jewish Philosophy on the Eve of Modernity,” in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (London–New York: Routledge, 1997), 525, reports, Harari has argued that this text “encompasses selections from the no longer extant fourth dialogue of [Leone Ebreo's] *Dialoghi*.”

for physical beings. Thus, while Plato's idealism had centered on the intellect, the contemplation of eternal and beautiful entities, and the spiritual qualities of the soul, Aristotle's hylemorphic doctrine encompassed both the formal and the material aspects of individual bodies. Leone makes it quite clear that he is more inclined to follow Aristotle, simply because his language is more appropriate to the true nature of things.³²

³² “Sappi che Platone misse ne le idee tutte l'essenzie e sustanzie de le cose, di modo che tutto il procreato di quelle nel mondo corporeo si stima che sia più presto ombra di sustanzia ed essenzia, che si possi dire essenzia né sustanzia: e così sprezzò le bellezze corporee in loro stesse, però che dice che, non essendo loro altro che ombre de le bellezze ideali non vagliano per altro che per mostrarnele e indurne in la cognizione di quelle, ché per sé la loro bellezza è poco più che niente. Aristotile vuole in questo essere più temperato, però che gli pare che la somma perfezione de l'artefice debba produrre perfetti artificizati in loro stessi: onde tiene che nel mondo corporeo e ne le parti sue sia l'essenzia e la sustanzia propria d'ognuno di loro, e che le notizie ideali non sieno l'essenzie e sustanzie de le cose, ma cause produttive e ordinative di quelle: onde egli tiene che le prime sustanzie sieno l'individui, e che in ognuno di loro si salvi l'essenzia de le spezie. ... però che egli tiene che la materia e il corpo entri ne l'essenzia e sustanzia de le cose corporee, e che ne la diffinizione d'ogni essenzia, qual si facci per genero e differenza, entri prima la materia o corporenzia, o ver forma materiale comune, per genero e la forma speziale per differenza, però che l'essenzia e sustanzia sua è costituita d'ambidue, materia e forma; e come ne le idee non sia materia e corpo, in loro non cade secondo lui essenzia né sustanzia, ma sono il divino principio di che tutte l'essenzie e sustanzie dependono, cioè li primi come primi effetti corporali e li secondi come loro immagini spirituali ... ne l'uso de' vocabuli forse è da seguire Aristotile, perché il moderno lima più la lingua e più divisamente e più sottilmente suole appropriare i vocabuli a le cose. Ti dirò ben questo che, Platone trovando li primi filosofi di Grecia che non stimavano altre essenzie né sustanzie né bellezze che le corporee, e fuora de li corpi pensavano essere nulla, fu bisogno come verace medico curarli col contrario, mostrandoli che li corpi da se stessi nissuna essenzia nissuna sustanzia nissuna bellezza posseggono, come è veramente, né han altro che l'ombra de l'essenzia e bellezza incorporea ideale de la mente del sommo opifice del mondo. Aristotile, che trovò già li filosofi per la dottrina di Platone remoti del tutto da li corpi, stimando che ogni bellezza essenzia e sustanzia fusse ne le idee e niente nel mondo corporeo; vedendoli che perciò si facevano negligenti ne la cognizione de le cose corporee, e in li suoi atti moti e alterazioni naturali, ne le cause de la sua generazione e corruzione (de la qual negligenzia verria a risultare difetto e mancamento ne la cognizione astratta de li suoi spirituali principi, però che la gran cognizione degli effetti al fine induce perfetta cognizione de le lor cause),— però gli parve tempo di temperare l'estremo in questo, qual forse in processo verria a escedere la mèta platonica: e dimostrò (come t'ho detto) essere propriamente nel mondo corporeo essenzie e sustanzie prodotte e causate da le idee, ed essere in quello ancora vere bellezze, ben che dependenti da le purissime e perfettissime ideali. Sì che Platone fu medico curatore di malattia con eccesso, e Aristotile medico conservatore di sanità, già indotta da l'opera di Platone, con l'uso del temperamento” (*Dialoghi* 337–339).

Beauty

Thus Leone's theory on love obviously encompasses body and mind, and love is reciprocal: it becomes manifest between superior and inferior beings, between men and women. In that process, the ontologically higher being loves its beauty in order for the lower things to partake of that beauty; the ensuing mutual (and anthropomorphic) relationship between superior and inferior realms of creation embellishes the universe; in both cases, love for the higher and lower being is structured by unification and by copulation. Leone materializes that concept in the image of a cosmic circle of being that begins and terminates in the Creator (*Dialoghi* 378–380).³³ Beauty becomes vital in the process of creation because it engenders the creative love between intellect and primordial chaos. The birth of love happens in the highest divinity, the beautiful (*bello*) is the father of love, and the cognition of that beauty (*bellezza*) is its mother. In this account, even beauty becomes sexed, as any other entity. This account of the interconnections between desire, beauty, and creation structures the entire cosmology of the *Dialoghi*: the first beauty is the highest achievement in the universe, because it is the image of the perfection of its Creator (*Dialoghi* 315).

In the creation of the world, God's first two creatures were the first intellect; in him all the ideas of the highest artificer reverberate: he is the forming father and Creator of the world. And [secondly] the shadowy chaos of the shadows of all ideas, which contains all their essences, and which is the mother of the world. By means of these two, as the first generative instruments God formed, created, and painted the entire world in resemblance to the divine beauty or wisdom or essence, as desiring love. Apart from this creative act produced by extrinsic divine love another, second, love was introduced to this Creation: the [love] of the chaos for the intellect (as the [love] of the wife for her husband). And a reciprocal [love] of the intellect towards [the chaos] as the [love] of the husband for the wife. By means of [this second love] the world was created. And another and third love was necessary in the creation and the being of the world, that is, the love that all of its parts feel for each other and for the whole, ... All these three kinds of love were born when the world was born or when the two first parents were born.³⁴

³³ Divine beauty is represented in a shadowy manner even by the circular movement of prime matter (*Dialoghi* 285). Yet, forms are not always capable to domesticate matter which is always ugly; for this reason, some things are more beautiful than others (*Dialoghi* 321). On the kabbalistic context of these circle images, see Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 88–91.

³⁴ “Li due primi generati da Dio ne la creazione del mondo, cioè l'intelletto primo,

This account of divine creation through sexual intercourse (and the satisfaction concomitant to it) is (again) the model that structures all creative acts and ensures the coherence and the mutual love of the entire creation (*Dialoghi* 364–365). Perhaps most remarkable in this cosmology is the fact that Leone calls the first intellect and the chaos the “li primi istrumenti genitori” which means in a literal translation “the first sexual organs.” What for today’s reader might sound vaguely reminiscent of Tantric concepts refers to a literal reading of the famous passage in Genesis (1:26).³⁵ Here the Bible says that God created (*bara*) man “in his image.” The same word is used again when Adam “creates” Seth (Genesis 5:3). The Hebrew original puts both actions on a par, and hence facilitates the assumption that the creation of the world functions in analogy to human sexuality. According to Leone, both sexes mirror the sense of perfection that God loves in his creatures; his love is the first for a beautiful creation (*Dialoghi* 235). The *Vulgata* translates *bara* in the former passage as *creavit* and the latter as *genuit*, thus marking a difference between God’s creative act and human sexuality.³⁶ Of course, Leone often emphasizes that the realm of divine Creation is not directly comparable with the human experience of sexuality. Even so, it is the single metaphoric structure which may bridge the gap between infinite Creator and finite creature (*Dialoghi* 382–383). This perspective entails a distinctly positive assessment of human sexuality, which is good insofar as it is necessary for the conservation of life (*Dialoghi* 362 and 366). It is an image of God’s infinite and divine love for his creation in its entirety

nel qual tutte le idee del sommo artifice risplendano, il quale è padre formatore e generatore del mondo; e il caos ombroso de l’ombra di tutte le idee, che contiene tutte l’essenzie di quelle, il quale è madre del mondo: mediante li quali due, come primi istrumenti genitori, tutto il mondo a similitudine de la bellezza o sapienzia ovvero essenzia divina Dio, come amor desiderativo, creò formò e dipinse. Fu ancora messo in quella creazione uno altro secondo amore, oltre il divino estrinseco, cioè del caos a l’intelletto come da la moglie al suo marito, e reciproco da l’intelletto a lei come del marito a la moglie, mediante il quale il mondo fu generato. Fu ancor uno altro terzo amore necessario ne la creazione ed essere del mondo, cioè l’amore il quale hanno tutte le sue parti l’una con l’altra e con il tutto, Tutti questi tre amori nacquero quando il mondo nacque, ovvero quando nacquero li due primi parenti” (*Dialoghi* 258). For an account of the predecessors of that doctrine, see Pines, “Mediaeval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb?,” 372–373 and 377.

³⁵ On copulation as a mystical experience in the kabbalistic tradition, see the fascinating work by Charles Mopsik, *Sex of the Soul: The Vicissitudes of Sexual Difference in Kabbalah* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2005), 82–86, 140–145; and 146–148 for a discussion of the differences between Indian and Jewish traditions of mystical eroticism.

³⁶ Hans Belting, *Das echte Bild. Bildfragen als Glaubensfragen* (Munich: Beck, 2005), 71, with reference to Mopsik, 49ff.

(*Dialoghi* 371).³⁷ Therefore, the perfection and the happiness of all things is the ultimate and most perfect goal of love (*Dialoghi* 374–375). Interestingly, Philone also explicitly says that intellectual satisfaction is derivative of a passionate relationship. This is even true of God’s relationship to his creation, as one can learn from the many biblical accounts of divine wrath (*Dialoghi* 364). A reading of the *Song of Songs* thus allows Leone to go one step further: by maintaining that the universe is a portrait of its creator, he postulates that God too is in love with the world; this assumption has an unexpected and extensive set of consequences, as we shall presently see (*Dialoghi* 355–356).³⁸

For Leone, love for the physical world is a duty because this emotional attraction secures the coherence of the divine creation.

Philone: The reason for all these changes in the soul is the twofold love which is found in it.

Sophia: What kind of love is in the soul and why is it twofold?

Philone: Just as there is the highest and perfect beauty in the divine intellect, from which the splendor of the human soul proceeds, and hence falls in love with this highest intellectual beauty—its highest origin—so the imperfect female (*femina*) falls in love with the male who perfects her, and desires to become happy in their perpetual union. Linked to this there is another twofold love of soul for the physical world, which is inferior to it, like the [love] of the male for the female in order to make it perfect by imprinting into it the beauty taken from the intellect by way of this first love. Just as the soul (made pregnant by the beauty of the intellect) desires to give birth to it in the physical world; or it takes the seeds (*semenza*) of this beauty in order to allow it to sprout (*germinare*) in the body; or, like an artificer, it takes the exemplary forms of intellectual beauty in order to imprint them into the bodies according to their ratio.

³⁷ “È adunque l’amoroso matrimonio de l’uomo e de la donna simulacro del sacro e divino matrimonio del sommo bello e [de] la somma bellezza, di che tutto l’universo proviene” (*Dialoghi* 356).

³⁸ The *Song of Songs* also emphasizes the hierarchical relationship between *bello* and *bellezza* (*Dialoghi* 356). It has often been said that Johanan Alemanno (1433/4–ca. 1504), who wrote between 1488 and 1492 a text entitled *Salomon’s Ascents*, which was formative for the *Dialoghi d’amore* (see Arthur M. Lesley, “The place of the *Dialoghi* in contemporaneous Jewish thought,” in *Ficino and Renaissance-Neoplatonism*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler and Olga Zorzi Pugliese (Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 1986), 69–86.). On Alemanno in general, Tirosh-Rothschild, “Jewish Philosophy on the Eve of Modernity,” 526–527; Moshe Idel, “The Anthropology of Yochanan Alemanno: Sources and Influences,” *Annali di storia dell’esegesi* 7 (1990): 93–11; Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 186–188; On Alemanno’s influence among Italian Kabbalists, see Moshe Idel, “Major Currents in Italian Kabbalah between 1560 and 1660,” in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 345–367, here 347.

And this does not only happen in the world soul, but the same thing occurs to the human soul (or the microcosm) with its intellect.³⁹

The matching approaches thus delineate two different aspects of creative potential: it comes about either through intrinsic seeds or by means of ideas that are imprinted from outside—positions that can be identified with Leone's understanding of Aristotelian or Platonic philosophy respectively. For Leone, the mutual attraction between a higher and a lower being culminates in a sexual union and the birth of a third being, a "child." It is a new, different being; it thus cannot resolve the primordial longing for unity with the beloved. Even so, the "child" causes the universe to expand, thus fulfilling the divine plan for the creation (*Dialoghi* 314).

In the preceding paragraphs we have seen that this idea has some distinct and explicit relationship to the Jewish conceptions of the relationship between body and mind. But Leone's idea of mutual sexual attraction between the male and female pole in Creation can also be seen as a conscious subversion of a distinctly Aristotelian metaphor. The irrationality of material bodies had led Aristotle to introduce a potent and hotly debated metaphor to explain the nature of the body as a composite being made out of a male (and immutable) form and female (and changeable) matter. Aristotle had compared matter to a sexually aroused woman, longing for a man, or a male form (*Physics* 192a, 20–24):

In fact, however, form cannot desire itself, because it is not in need of anything ... It is matter which does the desiring. You might liken it to a woman longing for a man, or what is ugly longing for what is beautiful, if it were not for the fact that matter is not in its own right something that is either ugly or female, except coincidentally.⁴⁰

³⁹ "Filone: La cagione di tante mutazioni ne l'anima è il gemino amore che in lei si truova. Sofia: Che amore è quel che ha l'anima, e come è gemino? Filone: Essendo ne l'intelletto divino la somma e perfetta bellezza, l'anima, che è un splendore procedente da quello, s'innamora di quella somma bellezza intellettuale sua superiore origine, come s'innamora la femmina imperfetta del maschio suo perficiente, e desidera farsi felice ne la sua perpetua unione. Con questo si giunta un altro amore gemino de l'anima al mondo corporeo a lei inferiore, come del maschio a la femmina, per farlo perfetto imprimendo in lui la bellezza che piglia da l'intelletto mediante il primo amore: come che l'anima, ingravidata de la bellezza de l'intelletto, la desidera parturire nel mondo corporeo, o veramente piglia la semenza di essa bellezza per farla germinare nel corpo, ovvero come artifice piglia l'esempli de la bellezza intellettuale per sculpirli al proprio ne' corpi; che non solamente accade ne l'anima del mondo, ma quel medesimo interviene a l'anima de l'uomo col suo intelletto nel picciol mondo" (*Dialoghi* 195–196).

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996),

Note that Aristotle is very careful to emphasize the metaphorical character of his comparison between matter and a sexually aroused woman. Even so, he introduces the idea that there is a certain desire inherent in matter to imitate the beautiful forms. According to Aristotle, this desire for the beautiful is merely one-sided, and thus restricted to the love for the ontologically higher entity.⁴¹ According to Leone, the attraction is reciprocal, yet the mating between male and female principles is not conducive to the desired union; it rather produces a new entity that contributes to the unfolding of a beautiful divine creation. This positive redefinition also has distinct echoes in Plotinus' criticism of the Aristotelian metaphorical description of the relationship between matter and form.

According to Plotinus, when the female desires the male, or when she is inseminated by the male, she does not therefore somehow cease to be female. On the contrary, she becomes more female. ... the advent of form confirms, paradoxically, the absence of form, far from ousting the privation, form "preserves" the privation "in its existence." Aristotle would reply, that change thus becomes impossible. And Plotinus would say: exactly so: the beauty of the world is a mere charade, matter in the sensible world remains forever deprived of form, precisely because matter and privation are the same thing, with the result that the participation of matter in form fails to produce any real transformation of matter. The ugly remains ugly. In the eyes of the philosopher, the sensible world remains forever a mere "corpse animated."⁴²

Leone is thus in agreement with Plotinus when he emphasizes the creation of a third entity that is the inexorable consequence of love

31; Aristotle, *Aristotelis opera cum Averrois commentaries* (Venice: Junctas, 1562–1574; facsimile edition: Frankfurt/Main: Minerva, 1962), vol. 4, fol. 45^v–46^r M-F: "attamen neque ipsum suam ipsius possibile est appetere formam, propterea quod non est indigens, ... sed hoc est materia, sicut si foemina masculum, & turpe pulchrum: verum non per se turpe, sed secundum accidens: neque foemina, sed secundum accidens." (Moerbeke interp.); fol. 46 r B: "impossibile est ut ut forma appetat se, quoniam non est diminuta, neque appetit suum contrarium, ... sed materia appetit formam, sicut foemina mare, & turpe pulchrum: non quia in se est turpis, sed per accidens; neque quia est foemina, sed per accidens" (Mantino interp.).

⁴¹ For Maimonides' reading of that passage (*Guide* III, 8) in relationship to the *Dialoghi*, see Kodera, "Masculine/Feminine," 500–503, and my forthcoming "Nymphomaniac Matter: The Prostitute as Metaphor for the Body in Italian Renaissance Philosophy," in *The Body in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Julia Hairston and Walter Stephens (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).

⁴² Denis O'Brien, "Plotinus on matter and evil," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 180, with reference to Plotinus, *Enneads* III, 4, 5.

and the ensuing physical union of the male and female aspects in creation. This positive assessment of this activity, which is vital for the entire dynamical development of divine creation, is in sharp contrast to Plotinian metaphysics that accentuates the negative aspects of matter.

Beauty as Universal Link

From the perspective of the infinite divinity, God's love for His creation is an intrinsic affair: in Him lover, beloved, and love coincide in a "most simple unity."⁴³ God is the first lover who recognizes his own beauty; in this fundamentally and singularly narcissistic act lover and beloved are indistinguishable (*Dialoghi* 253). God's love for his own beauty engenders in the creator the wish to produce a child, his likeness. The narcissistic account of creation consequently entails a circular relationship between God and His creatures: Leone describes it as a gigantic circle with the creator at its apex, and prime matter on the opposite side; their dynamic relationship brings forth the material cosmos (*Dialoghi* 376–379).⁴⁴

The last perfection of the universe consists of its return into the Godhead, which is a process that Philone calls *redizione*: it is brought about by means of the intellect, as the highest possible experience of beauty and thus of love (*Dialoghi* 373). This ultimate reunion in the totality of the infinite Godhead remains inexplicable in finite terms. It

⁴³ "Non è lecito, o Sofia, parlare de l'amore intrinseco di Dio, amante e amato, con quella lingua e quelli labbri con li quali soliamo parlare degli amori mondani. Non fa diversità alcuna in lui l'essere amato e amante; ma più presto fa questa intrinseca relazione la sua unità più perfetta e semplice, perché la sua divina essenza non sarebbe di somma vita, se non reverberasse in se stessa de la bellezza o sapienza amata il sapiente amante, e d'ambidue l'ottimo amore. E così come in lui il conoscente e la cosa conosciuta e la medesima cognizione sono tutti una medesima cosa (ben che diciamo che 'l conoscente si fa più perfetto con la cosa cognita, e che la cognizione derivi da tutti due), così in lui l'amante e l'amato e il medesimo amore è tutto una cosa; e benché li numeriamo tre e diciamo che de l'amato s'informa l'amante e d'ambidue (come di padre e madre) deriva l'amore, tutto è una semplicissima unità ed essenza, ovvero natura, per nissun modo divisibile né moltiplicabile" (*Dialoghi* 253–254).

⁴⁴ On the topic of the circle, see Beatrice Heiber, "Die Idee der Liebe in den 'Dialoghi d'amore' des Leone Ebreo" (Ph.D. diss., University of Munich, 1986), 45; Soria Olmedo, *Los Dialoghi d'amore de Leon Hebreo*, 179; Fontanesi, "Il problema filosofico," 54; Gebhardt, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 76; Pines, "Mediaeval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb?," 370; Moshe Idel, "The Sources of the Circle Images in *Dialoghi d'amore*," *Iyyun* 28 (1987): 155–166.

is perhaps best explained in terms of a return into the primordial and divine origin, a wholeness that entails the annihilation of the individual. In this case, according to Leone, union is not productive but reductive.⁴⁵ In such ways, the universe unfolds from and recedes into its creator in cyclical periods of time. This dynamic relationship between expansion and subsequent reintegration into the creator is caused by love. Hence, the longing for ultimate perfection never leads to stasis, but rather to a permanent and cyclical movement.

Now, probably the most significant aspect of a beautiful entity is the lover who wants to imitate that beauty; that is, he or she has to become similar to the beloved object. The universe in general wants to imitate its creator and produce another loveable and beautiful image—a process which is achieved through the intervention of the intellect, and during which love and the pleasure of being becomes unified with the object of one's love (*Dialoghi* 371).

With this theological perspective in mind, we are once more able to look at the central aspect of love: the reproduction of a beautiful image. No matter whether directed towards the intellectual realm or towards the sphere of physical bodies, beauty becomes the pivotal moving agent for human beings in the *Dialoghi* (this is also true for all higher beings on the ontological scale, such as angels).⁴⁶

And as the love of the human soul is thus twofold, it is not only inclined towards the beauty that is portrayed in the body, it also happens from time to time that as [soul] is greatly attracted by the beauty of the intellect, that it entirely abandons the erotic inclination towards the body; [and] to such an extent that [soul] completely severs all ties with it; this results in a joyful copulative death (as I told you with the eclipse of the sun). And sometimes the opposite happens to [soul]: because if it is more drawn by the duty to love the physical beauty, it completely abandons the inclination and the love for intellectual beauty of the

⁴⁵ This is a structure which is characteristic of Neoplatonic metaphysics; the process of remaining, procession and return (*monē-proodos-epistrophē*) describes the unfolding of the hypostases from the ineffable One and the return into that transcendent origin. See Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 186–188, on the history of the reception of this idea in the Jewish tradition.

⁴⁶ Obviously Leone is insinuating that the Golden Mean between the two extremes is the solution appropriate for human beings. Many people, though, use only one side of their potential to recognize conceptual or material beauty, the former are quiet, the later become animals (*Dialoghi* 331–332). In that context, Philone presents a particular version of the love of statues as a deterring example (*Dialoghi* 334).

superior intellect. [Soul] thus makes itself physical in all respects opaque to the light and to intellectual beauty (as I told you about the lunar eclipse).⁴⁷

Of course, the Platonists had used such language too, but they usually were quick to emphasize that there was just one movement—upward and not towards the body, which was an alluring and dangerous trap for the soul, impeding its return to the divine origin. For Leone in the *Dialoghi* it is in the interest of the ontologically higher to bow down and embellish the lower world as a beautiful creation adds to the beauty and to the dignity of its creator. The hierarchical structure of the universe thus becomes mobile; just as love is perceived by different minds in different ways, so superiority and inferiority become relative to time and position of the individual.

Just as Philone is a reluctant teacher who is paralyzed by a beautiful mental image, so a lover is generally enslaved by the beloved and (as mother) gives birth to a love that is similar to its beautiful father.⁴⁸

... the beloved is the active cause that generates the love in the lover's soul, and the lover is the receiver of the beloved's love; thus the beloved is the true father of love who generates in the lover; he is the mother who gives birth to the love of which she was made pregnant by the beloved and [the lover] gives birth [to a child that] resembles its father. And therefore the love terminates in the beloved, who had been its generative principle. Thus the beloved is the first active, formal and final cause of love, as its perfect father whereas the lover is merely the material cause, as the pregnant mother in the act of giving birth. And this is meant by Plato, when he says that to love means *to give birth in beauty*; and you know that the beautiful is the beloved, by

⁴⁷ “Essendo adunque l'amor de l'anima umana gemino, non solamente inclinato a la bellezza de l'intelletto ma ancora a la bellezza ritratta nel corpo, succede qualche volta che, essendo grandemente tirata da l'amore de la bellezza de l'intelletto, lassa del tutto l'amorosa inclinazione del corpo, tanto che si dissolve totalmente da quello e ne segue a l'uomo la morte felice coppulativa (come t'ho detto ne l'eclissi del sole); e qualche volta gl'interviene il contrario, ché, tirata più del dovere da l'amor de la bellezza corporea, lassa del tutto l'inclinazione e amore de la bellezza intellettuale, e in tal modo s'asconde da l'intelletto suo superiore, che si fa in tutto corporea e oscura di luce e bellezza intellettiva (come t'ho detto ne l'eclissi lunare)” (*Dialoghi* 195–196).

⁴⁸ Plato's *Theaetetus* readily comes to mind: in a famous passage (149A–150E) Socrates claims here to be the son of a midwife and to practice that art himself, albeit in intellectual, and not in physical matters. On the passage in general, see for instance, W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962–1981), 3:444–445.

which the person in love is first made pregnant and [then] gives birth to a love that resembles the beautiful and beloved father and (who) sustains (that love) in him as its ultimate goal.⁴⁹

Leone here reads Plato's famous doctrine of begetting the beautiful as a metaphor for heterosexual reproduction and not in homoerotic terms.⁵⁰ The idea that love is not centered on the lover as the active part in a relationship is uncommon by Classical and Renaissance standards; I believe it is (again) a conscious subversion of venerable Platonic paradigms. Furthermore, the erotic relationship results in pregnancy, not in ritual homosexuality as it would have in ancient Greek discourses, again subverting the established paradigm. The idea that the lover is passive in an erotic relationship has important consequences for the hierarchy of being because it actually works as a mobilizing agent in otherwise static relationships between above and below. Love (or the urge to resemble a beautiful thing) thus causes a dynamic exchange between the different realms of the universe; it temporarily erodes the hierarchy of being.⁵¹ Moreover, the urge within higher beings to

⁴⁹ "... l'amato è causa agente, generante l'amore ne l'animo de l'amante, e l'amante è recipiente de l'amore de l'amato; di modo che l'amato è il vero padre d'amore, che genera ne l'amante, che è la madre che parturisce l'amore, del qual fu ingravidata da l'amato, e il partorisce a simiglianza del padre; però che l'amore si termina ne l'amato, qual fu suo principio generativo. Sì che l'amato è prima causa agente formale e finale de l'amore, come intero padre, e l'amante è solamente causa materiale, come grvida e parturiente madre; e questo intende Platone, quando dice che l'amore è parto in bello: tu sai che 'l bello è l'amato, del qual la persona amante prima ingravidata, parturisce l'amore a similitudine del padre bello e amato, e in quello come in ultimo fine il dirizza" (*Dialoghi* 229).

⁵⁰ On that topic, see Halperin, "Why is Diotima a Woman?," 291; Naomi Yavneh, "The spiritual eroticism of Leone's hermaphrodite," in *Playing with Gender: A Renaissance Pursuit*, ed. Jean Brink et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 87 and 94–95.

⁵¹ Pflaum, *Die Idee der Liebe*, 52, says "Leone Ebreo übernimmt das physikalische Weltbild des Mittelalters ..., die Vorstellung von einer strengen Hierarchie des Seins. Aber seine Liebesidee gibt diesem Weltbild einen neuen Sinn. An die Stelle eines starren Gebäudes tritt ein durch die Liebe bewegtes, also lebendiges Gebilde; die mittelalterliche Substantialität setzt sich in Funktionalität um." Cf. also William Melczer, "Platonisme et Aristotelianisme dans la pensée de Leon l'Hebreu," *De Pétrarque à Descartes* 32 (1976): 299–300. Eva Kushner, "Ponthus de Thyard entre Ficin et Léon l'Hebreu," in *Ficino and Renaissance Neoplatonism*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1986), 49–68, here 66, gives a good summary of the situation: "Ainsi, forme première et matière première, intellect et chaos, apparaissent alternativement comme principe mâle et principe femelle, parents premiers de la création dont l'amour donne lieu, dorénavant, à tout autre génération. L'originalité de cette conception consiste en ce que principe masculin et féminin, inférieur et supérieur perdent leurs connotations hiérarchisées; il ne reste qu'un passage graduel de l'intelligible au sensible; il y a séquence plutôt que chute."

embellish the lower world serves their intrinsic needs, and thus the consequent and temporal inferiority of the lower beings adds a perfection that the higher beings lack too.

This reciprocal relationship mirrors the love of the ineffable Godhead for his Creation. Leone even maintains that God's love for his creatures entails a lack in the Creator's perfection that is relative to his creatures, just as a perfectly beautiful work of art enhances the artist's relative (though not his absolute) beauty.⁵² Even so, and on all levels of being, a defect in his creatures also casts a shadow of imperfection on its creator.⁵³

From this theological perspective, we are now in a position to understand Philone's difficulties better: he is yearning for the reproduction of his image; childbirth is a cosmological necessity that is imparted by the divinity, an urge that makes human beings images of the Godhead that mirror God's urge to embellish his creation. The dynamic relationships which are imparted by beauty have thus communicated to all levels of Creation in order to allow the universe to grow (*Dialoghi* 384).

Leone says that there is no such thing as a perfect creature: rather, by falling in love with the ontologically lower, a certain being increases its own perfection and embellishes the creation. Thus every created being

⁵² "Sofia: Che dice adunque in Dio questo vocabulo, amore? Filone: Dice volontà di bonificar le sue creature e tutto l'universo, e di crescere la lor perfezione quanto la lor natura sarà capace; e come già t'ho detto, l'amore che è in Dio presuppone mancamento negli amati, ma non ne l'amante, e l'amor de le creature al contrario: ben che de la tal perfezione, de la qual crescono le creature per l'amor di Dio a loro, ne gode e se n'allegra (se allegrar si può dire) la divinità, e in questo la somma sua perfezione più riluce (come già t'ho detto); e però dice il psalmo: "Iddio s'allegra con le cose che fece". E questo augumento di perfezione e gaudio ne la divinità non è in esso Dio assolutamente, ma solamente per relazione a sue creature: onde (come t'ho dichiarato) non mostra in lui assolutamente alcuna natura di mancamento, ma solamente il mostra nel suo essere relativo, rispetto di sue creature. Questa perfezione relativa in Dio è il fine del suo amore ne l'universo e in ciascuna de le sue parti, ed è quella con la quale la somma perfezione d'Iddio è sommamente piena: e questo è il fine de l'amor divino e l'amato da Dio, per il quale ogni cosa produce, ogni cosa sostiene, ogni cosa governa e ogni cosa muove; ed essendo in essa semplicissima divinità necessariamente principio e fine, amante e amato, questo è più divino de la divinità, come ogni amato del suo amante esser suole" (*Dialoghi* 234-235).

⁵³ "Già per il passato t'ho significato che il difetto de la cosa operata induce ombra di difetto ne l'artifice, ma solo ne la relazione operativa che ha con la cosa operata: in questo modo si può dire che Iddio, amando la perfezione di sue creature, ama la perfezione relativa di sua operazione, ne la quale il difetto de la cosa operata indurria ombra di difetto, e la perfezione di quella ratificaria la perfezione relativa di sua divina operazione" (*Dialoghi* 223).

lacks ultimate perfection; everything merely participates in the ineffable divine beauty, and this lack of ultimate perfection causes the love which permeates the entire universe.⁵⁴

Thus, Leone is in (partial) agreement with Socrates in the Platonic *Symposium*: love is not identical with the beautiful but rather an expression of the lack of beauty.⁵⁵ In that context, the *Dialoghi* also recount the Platonic myth that love is born by a couple of lower gods, Poros (affluence) and Penia (lack), and the concomitant assumption that love is midway between beauty and ugliness. Significantly, Leone also criticizes Plato for saying that love is the product of some lower gods, whereas in truth love refers to a primordial manifestation of the highest divinity.⁵⁶ Leone thus displays detailed knowledge of some of the crucial passages of the *Symposium*, a text that had been available in print in Ficino's translation and with his commentary since 1484.

⁵⁴ "L'amore, quale è fra le creature de l'una a l'altra, presuppone mancamento, e non solamente l'amor degli inferiori a'superiori, ma ancor quello de' superiori agl'inferiori dice mancamento, però che nessuna creatura è sommamente perfetta, anzi, amando non solamente i superiori loro ma ancora gl'inferiori, crescono di perfezione e s'approssimano alla somma perfezione di Iddio: perché il superiore non solamente in sé cresce di perfezione in bonificar l'inferiore, ma ancor cresce ne la perfezione de l'universo, che è il maggior fine (secondo t'ho detto). Per questo crescimento di perfezione in lui e ne l'universo, l'amato inferiore ancor si fa divino ne l'amante superiore, però che in essere amato partecipa la divinità del sommo creatore, quale è primo e sommamente amato e per sua partecipazione ogni amato è divino, perché, essendo lui sommo bello, d'ogni bello è partecipato e ogni amante s'approssima a lui amando qualsivoglia bello, se bene è inferiore di lui amante: e con questo esso amante cresce di bellezza e divinità, e così fa crescere l'universo, e però si fa più vero amante e più prossimo al sommo bello" (*Dialoghi* 233–234).

⁵⁵ "Socrate, disputante contra Agatone oratore (il quale ancora teneva amore essere un gran dio e bellissimo), dimostra che amore non è dio, però che non è bello, conciosiaché tutti gli dèi sian belli; e dimostra che lui non è bello, però che amore è desiderio di bello, e quel che si desidera al desiderante sempre manca, ché quel che si possiede non si desidera. Onde Socrate dice che l'amor non è dio, ma è un gran demone, mezzo fra gli dèi superiori e gli umani inferiori, e se ben non è bello come Iddio, non è ancora brutto come gl'inferiori, ma mezzo fra la bellezza e la bruttezza: però che 'l desiderante, se bene in atto non è quel che desidera, è pur quello in potenza, e così se l'amore è desiderio di bello, è bello in potenza e non in atto, come son gli dèi" (*Dialoghi* 232).

⁵⁶ Leone also mentions the Platonic myth from the *Symposium* that love is born together with the higher Venus, a figure he identifies with the beauty of the intellectual world (*Dialoghi* 309–311).

Beauty as Grace

Obviously, the beautiful is the moving agent in all of these transactions between above and below, between intellect and body. The infinite beauty of the Creator is incommensurable to any finite creature. In God, beauty, wisdom, and intellect are identical; thus he beautifies all things to various degrees (*Dialoghi* 347). Divine beauty is eternal and separate from matter and the physical world (*Dialoghi* 312); this beauty therefore cannot be expressed in the measurable proportions of material and mutable bodies and their parts (*Dialoghi* 266–267). This highest form of beauty is hidden from the created beings, because otherwise no limited mind would be in a position to contemplate the order of the universe (*Dialoghi* 350 and 354). Accordingly, Leone defines beauty as the “splendor of the ideas,” which are themselves called *notizie*, or images of the created universe.⁵⁷ The lack of infinite divine beauty is the same everywhere in the world because the latter is incommensurable with the divinity (*Dialoghi* 268): hence we may only have indirect cognition of God’s beauty by means of images produced by our minds.⁵⁸ Leone says, “the human intellect which perceives the divine beauty in the mysteries of the physical universe, which is an image [of divine beauty].”⁵⁹ In the physical world, the divine forms thus become represented as shadows of the higher beauty in which limited bodies and minds may participate in varying degrees. These beautiful images of the higher forms induce love in those individuals who are capable of comprehending that beauty (*Dialoghi* 324). Beauty is thus relative to the mental capacities of the person who experiences something as beautiful (*Dialoghi* 263). A certain amount of intellectual capacity is necessary to perceive this beauty, which is a latent figuration of the spiritual forms in the higher world.⁶⁰ The more intellectual a certain being is, the more it is in a position to experience passionate love; conversely, what is

⁵⁷ Aristotle called them the *nomos*, the order of the physical world, because he holds that a perfect God also produces a faultless universe (*Dialoghi* 337). Preceding the creation of the material world, these primordial and beautiful ideas are in the mind of the godhead, and are hence called *prenotizie* (*Dialoghi* 336).

⁵⁸ These ideas are identical with the intellect, but this does not mean that God is merely an instrument in order to create things, his relationship to the world is analogous to the superiority of a person when compared to its portrait (*Dialoghi* 345).

⁵⁹ “... l’intelletto umano che vede la bellezza divina in enigmata de l’universo corporeo, che è simulacro di quella” (*Dialoghi* 277).

⁶⁰ This mental faculty is called possible intellect in Aristotle and it is identical with the Platonic doctrine of recollection of the forms (*Dialoghi* 328).

beautiful will remain unnoticed when intellectual capacities are lacking. The lack of beauty is felt more acutely by ontologically higher beings, such as angels; their perfection makes them capable of greater suffering and love for the incommensurable than the lower beings who lack such elaborate intellectual capacities and hence the ability to perceive that beauty (*Dialoghi* 261–265).

On earth, the perception of spiritual beauty as reflected in images becomes a distinctive human capacity (*Dialoghi* 333). These representations of the original divine splendor may exert considerable power over the individual.⁶¹ I take this to mean that, even if enigmatic, the world is a portrait of its Creator and hence it is perfectly legitimate to contemplate earthly beauty. This would then mean that rather than following intellectual speculations, human beings are required to contemplate the universe as images of its Creator, even if these images are always defective and indicative of the universal lack of ultimate, total beauty.⁶² Even though some images may be beautiful to one individual, they may nevertheless turn out to be highly dangerous for another human being, simply because their beauty is disproportionate to a given and finite mind. Philone is suffering from the effects of such a phantasma which is too big for his mind.⁶³ He says that Sophia is irresistible because she always flees through another street:⁶⁴ a paradox figure of speech that emphasizes our limited capacity to comprehend absolute beauty and hence absolute wisdom. At least for human beings, such wisdom seems to become manifest in the material aspects of the beautiful creation.

In such ways, Leone introduces a set of negative definitions of beauty: for all limited minds, beauty is available only in images. Their perception is relative to individual intellectual capacities; beauty is thus

⁶¹ In such ways, our imaginative faculty may become a vehicle for divine messages (again, a traditional assumption) but Leone seems to indicate that such messages were received exclusively by a few biblical saints. Moses spoke to God face to face, whereas the others had to communicate by their *fantasia sonnifera* in dreams and in visions (*Dialoghi* 275–276).

⁶² See also *Dialoghi* 269–270; Hughes, “Transforming the Maimonidean Imagination,” 476.

⁶³ Hughes, “Transforming the Maimonidean Imagination,” 483, emphasizes that Leone’s notion of the imagination as the medium between somatic and noetic aspects of creation differs from Maimonides; for the latter, the imaginative faculty is connected to divination.

⁶⁴ “Non ti si può resistere, o Sofia: quando penso averti levato tutte le vie del fuggire, tu ne fuggi per nuova strada; sì che bisogna far quel che ti piace, e la principal ragione è ch’io so’ amante e tu sei l’amata, e a te tocca darmi la legge e a me con esecuzione osservarla” (*Dialoghi* 201).

different from the good, which is not relative but absolute. This means that even bad things may be beautiful because they have some attractive proportion or grace (*Dialoghi* 320). Leone thus gives a positive description of the concept by identifying beauty with grace (*grazia*). Owing to its formal beauty (*spiritualità graziosa*), an object has the character of an image that may even paralyze a perceptive mind. Yet, beauty is not exclusively communicated by means of the intellect: importantly, it is perceived through sight and hearing, traditionally the noblest senses. Combined with the distinctive human intellectual capacity of abstraction and memory, our eyes and ears produce beautiful erotic images. The human imagination functions as the central medium to convey these pictures to the soul: a traditional assumption which is characteristic for medieval and Renaissance facultative psychology, which had developed out of close readings of Aristotle's *De anima* and medical texts.⁶⁵

The imagination and fantasy, which assembles, perceives and thinks the sensory images (*le cose de'sensi*) is also aware of many other functions and particularly gracious and beautiful instances that are moving the soul to the enjoyments of love: and we have already mentioned [the examples] of a beautiful fantasy and of a beautiful thought, a beautiful invention (*invenzione*). Intellectual reason knows much more about the beautiful, since the former understands universal graces and beauties, incorporeal and incorruptible, [as they appear] in individual and corruptible bodies which even more are motivating the soul to enjoyment and love. For instance, learning, law, the human virtues and sciences, are

⁶⁵ For a general introduction to the topic, see *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 464–448, here 471: “Imagination stored these data before passing them on to fantasy, which acted to combine and divide them, yielding new images, called phantasmata, with no counterparts in external reality.” Hughes, “Transforming the Maimonidean Imagination,” 479–483, discusses the concept in the *Dialoghi*, with reference to Perry, *Erotic Spirituality*, 22; see also Marco Ariani, *Imago fabulosa. Mito e allegoria nei Dialoghi d'amore di Leone Ebreo* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1984), 97–99. In the medieval chivalric tradition, this mental image also brings about the fulfilment of desire, because it acts as bridge between the lover's desire and the constantly receding object of that desire. Erotic desire thus generates a phantasmatic imagery which may be satisfied by those very images, see Giorgio Agamben, *Stanze. La parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 73–75, 78 note 3, 153. According to Leone, the power of the *phantasmata* is obviously much more limited. He is thus much closer to the traditional rabbinic assessment of phantasy according to which that faculty is a natural (and therefore not utterly negative) impulse which has to be held in check by divine law, see Emero Stiegman, “Rabbinic Anthropology,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, ed. Wolfgang Haase (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), Vol. II 19, 2: 487–579, here 525–526.

all called beautiful: beautiful study, beautiful law, beautiful science. But man's supreme cognition consists in the abstract mind, which, by contemplating the science of God, and those things that are removed from matter, enjoys and becomes enamored with the highest grace and beauty of all things, which is in the Creator and Producer of all things and by which [the human soul] arrives at its ultimate happiness. In such ways, our soul sets itself into motion through the grace and beauty that enters spiritually through [the senses of] sight, and of hearing, through thinking, reason, and the mind. This is the case because the objects [that pertain to these cognitive and perceptive faculties], due to their spirituality contain grace which causes enjoyment and moves soul to love; [but this is not true] of the objects in the remaining virtues of soul, because they are material. In such ways, the good, in order to be beautiful (and even if it is corporeal) has to have some kind of graceful spirituality that goes together with its goodness, in order to allow it to move to this beautiful thing, as it passes through the spiritual ways [*vie spirituali*] of our soul. In such ways human love (about which we are here speaking firstly and foremost) by itself is desire for the beautiful thing (as Plato says) and generally is desire for the good thing, as Aristotle says.⁶⁶

Here, Leone gives a positive definition of beauty; it is an aspect of creation that is reserved for beings who have some of the intellectual capacity to perceive such grace which is inherent in all things. Only when equipped with this mental background, may sight and vision, as the highest senses, convey images to the mind which the latter recognizes as beautiful due to their formal qualities. What seems to

⁶⁶ "L'immaginazione e fantasia, che compone discerne e pensa le cose de' sensi, conosce molti altri offizii e casi particolari graziosi e belli, che muovono l'anima a diletta- zione amorosa; e già si dice una bella fantasia e un bel pensiero, una bella invenzione. Molto più conosce del bello la ragione intelletiva, la qual comprende grazie e bellezze universali, incorporee e incorruttibili, ne' corpi particolari e corruttibili, le quali molto più muovono l'anima alla diletta- zione e amore: come son gli studi, le leggi, virtù e scienze umane, quali tutte si chiamano belle; bel studio, bella legge, bella scienza. Ma la suprema cognizione de l'uomo consiste ne la mente astratta, qual, contemplando ne la scienza di Dio e de le cose astratte da materia, si diletta e innamora de la somma grazia e bellezza che è nel creatore e fattore di tutte le cose, per la quale arriva a sua ultima felicità. Sì che l'anima nostra si muove de la grazia e bellezza, che entra spiri- tualmente per il viso, per l'audito, per la cogitazione, per la ragione e per la mente; però che negli oggetti di questi, per la lor spiritualità, si truova grazia che diletta e muove l'anima ad amare, e non negli oggetti de l'altre virtù de l'anima, per la loro materialità. Sì che il buono per essere bello (se bene è corporeo) bisogna che abbi con bontà qualche maniera di spiritualità graziosa, tal che, passando per le vie spirituali ne l'anima nostra, la possi diletta- re e muovere a quella cosa bella: sì che l'amor umano (del quale principalmente parliamo) propriamente è desiderio di cosa bella, come dice Platone, e comunemente è desiderio di cosa buona, come dice Aristotile" (*Dialoghi* 227–228).

be another commonplace in Renaissance Neo-Platonists reference to pure intellectual love at the expense of the physical needs of the body, constitutes in Leone a more sophisticated argument. Central to the argument is the distinction between things that are beautiful and which may be perceived as individually different and these things that are universally good. Leone accordingly emphasizes that certain things may be neither beautiful nor ugly and yet, they may be good.⁶⁷ Other than the beautiful, the good is universal because it is not necessarily tied to higher perceptive qualities.⁶⁸ Hence, all created beings may have their share in the universal good. This is a strategically important choice for Leone's rehabilitation of the more physical levels of human experience, such as taste, smell, and touch. The perception of things which are good is therefore not restricted to entities with intellectual capacities. Consequently, good things are perceived by the lower senses too, such as food or sexual satisfaction. Leone thus maintains that these lower senses do not perceive negative impulses. This is an interesting subversion of the traditional hierarchy of the senses in which smell, taste, and touch were unequivocally associated with bad things, as they seduce the mind to descend to the level of the body.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ "Filone: ma non è vero che ogni cosa che non è bella sia brutta. Sofia: Che è adunque? Filone: È né bella né brutta, come son molte cose del numero de le buone, che ben vedi che nelle persone umane, ne le quali cade bello e brutto, si trovano alcune che non sono belle né brutte: tanto più in molte spezie di cose buone, ne le quali non cade né bellezza né bruttezza, come quelle che ho detto, che veramente non sono belle né brutte; pure è questa differenza fra le persone e le cose, che ne le persone diciamo che non son belle né brutte, quando son belle in una parte e brutta in un'altra; onde non sono interamente belle né brutte. Ma le cose buone che t'ho nominato non sono belle né brutte in tutto né in parte" (*Dialoghi* 224–225).

⁶⁸ "La ragione è che il bello è appropriato a chi l'ama, ché quel che a un par bello non pare a un altro. Onde il bello, che è bello appresso uno, non è bello appresso di un altro: ma il buono è comune in se stesso, onde il più delle volte quel che è buono è [buono] appresso di molti. Si che chi desidera bello, sempre il desidera per sé, che gli manca: ma chi desidera buono, il può desiderare per se medesimo o per altro suo amico, a chi manchi" (*Dialoghi* 219).

⁶⁹ For a characteristic Christian Neoplatonic position on the hierarchy of the senses, see Ficino, *Commentaire*, book 5, chapter 2. Leone says: "Negli oggetti di tutti i sensi esteriori si trovano cose buone, utili, temperate e delectabili; ma grazia che diletta e muova l'anima a proprio amore (qual si chiama bellezza), non si truova negli oggetti de' li tre sensi materiali, che sono il gusto l'odore e il tatto, ma solamente negli oggetti de' due sensi spirituali, viso e auditio. Onde il dolce e sano cibo e potto e il soave odore e salutare aere e il temperato e dolcissimo atto venereo, con tutta la loro bontà, dolcezza, suavità e utilità necessaria a la vita de l'uomo e de l'animale, non son però belli: però che in quelli materiali oggetti non si truova grazia o bellezza, né per questi tre sensi grossi e materiali può passar la grazia e bellezza a l'anima nostra per

Philo-Sophia

It is now high time to acknowledge the fact that in the *Dialoghi* “Sophia” is portrayed not only as a charming and very real woman, she is also most probably an allegory of divine and ineffable wisdom. Accordingly, Philone addresses Sophia as “the daughter of truth” (and therefore similar to her) and the “niece of love,” and, significantly, Sophia does not contradict her lover.⁷⁰ Sophia, then, could be an embodiment of the wisdom Philone should seek: for the goal of human beings is not merely an ascent to the transcendent beauty of the Platonic forms. As body and soul are moving in opposite directions in the hierarchy of being, another important task of the soul is the materialization of these beautiful forms in physical bodies, here and now, and down to earth.⁷¹ The dynamic relationship between above and below postulated in the *Dialoghi* is also reflected in the conflictual relationship between Philone and Sophia (in which the woman wants education and the man needs sex) where both emotional inclinations are related to the beautiful. Sophia is a very real woman; she is neither frigid nor ignorant of physical love. She is probably only looking for the right kind of man, for someone who is capable of arousing her physical passions, a man who acknowledges her as a woman in flesh and blood and not as a phantasma, a man who recognizes her when she passes by on the street.⁷² This means for her that she wants to be educated

delezzarla o muoverla ad amare [il] bello” (*Dialoghi* 226–227). “Ma solamente si truova negli oggetti del viso, come son belle forme e figure e belle pitture, e bell’ordine delle parti fra se stesse al tutto, e belli e proporzionati stamenti e belli colori e bella e chiara luce e bel sole e bella luna, belle stelle e bel cielo: però che ne l’oggetto del viso per sua spiritualità si trova grazia, quale per li chiari e spirituali occhi suole entrare a delezzare e muovere nostra anima ad amare quello oggetto, qual chiamano bellezza. E si truova negli oggetti de l’audito, come bella orazione, bella voce, bel parlare, bel canto, bella musica, bella consonanzia, bella proporzione e armonia; ne la spiritualità de’ quali si truova grazia, qual muove l’anima a delezzazione e amore mediante il spiritual senso de l’audito. Si che ne le cose belle c’hanno del spirituale, e sono oggetti de’ sensi spirituali, e negli oggetti de’ sensi materiali non si truova grazia di bellezza: e però, se ben son buone, non son belle” (*Dialoghi* 227).

⁷⁰ “Filone: e se l’amore contro di me s’infuriarà, gl’interponerò la verità per placarlo, che gli è sorella, e tu che gli sei figlia e somigli a sua madre. Sofia: Ti ringrazio dell’offerta, l’intercessione t’offerò ...” (*Dialoghi* 204).

⁷¹ On this, see also Kodera, “Masculine/Feminine.”

⁷² “Sofia: Che l’amor sia è manifesto, e ciascuno di noi può far testimonio del suo essere, e non è alcuno che in se stesso nol senta e nol veda; e qual sia l’essenzia sua mi pare che assai m’abbi detto quel giorno quando parlammo d’amore e desiderio. Filone: Non mi par già poco che tu confessi sentire in te stessa che amor sia: ch’io

and that she wants to hear about love in theory and not in practice. Exasperatedly, Philone retorts that the small comfort offered by these intellectual delights are vain when compared to the physical pain of his physical desire to be united with Sophia.⁷³ She retorts by urging the man to respect her rights to have her soul perfected which has to be loved more than her body (a chiasmic formulation).

During the dynamic controversy between the two speakers at the end of the third dialogue, echoing the dynamics of his theory of love, Philone accordingly reproaches Sophia for being sterile and for not agreeing to sleep with her lover. Sophia flippantly and accurately retorts that his seeds perhaps have not been seeded well enough and that therefore she might be unwilling to consent.⁷⁴ In such ways, the woman tells the man to obey the divine command to embellish the lower parts of the universe, instead of devoting his energies to bottomless passion. It is characteristic of the *Dialoghi* that the woman wants to be recognized as human, as a thinking and a real being. She is neither to be reduced to one of Philone's obsessive mental constructions nor is her body a mere container for male semen. Hence, facing his love for the woman, for the lower being, the man will have to acknowledge his duty: to beautify Sophia, and thus to allow a dynamic exchange between above and below.

Sophia, then, perceives herself to be in need of education and therefore as neither wise nor beautiful, at least not in the way Philone imagines her. The woman wants to be taught (and thereby receive intellectual beauty) as much as the man seeks relief of his carnal desire. They are both in need of each other, and Philone is to be faulted for not acknowledging his duty to educate Sophia: to teach her that divine wisdom and God's beauty are present in his creation as well as in his transcendental ineffability. Neglecting the need of affection in the

timido stava che tu (per mancamento d'esperienza) non mi domandasse del suo essere dimostrazione, la quale a persona che noi sente (come di te presumessi) non sarebbe facile di fare. Sofia: Già in questa parte t'ho levato l'affanno" (*Dialoghi* 205).

⁷³ "Mira che dar tu remedio a la terribil pena mia è vero debito (poi che noi siamo veri amici), ben che non l'abbi promesso; ma la promission mia non fu per debito, anzi di grazia, nè a te è molto necessaria, ché già non è per remediarti di pericolo o danno, ma solamente per darti qualche diletto e soddisfazione di mente: debbe dunque precedere il tuo debito non promesso quel di mia libera promissione" (*Dialoghi* 200).

⁷⁴ "Filone: ... quello che fa mancare del fine a l'amore mio in te, è quello che 'l reciproco amore tuo manca del debito suo: però che, se in tutto l'universo e ognuna de le sue parti l'amore nacque, in te sola mi pare che non nacque mai. Sofia: Forse non nacque perché non fu ben seminato" (*Dialoghi* 387).

physical world enhances the cosmic imbalance instead of remedying it by embellishing the material world with intellect.

Sophia's refusal to become a mere mental image of divine beauty is one significant aspect of the *Dialoghi*; her denial qualifies Philone's speculations about the value of intellectual love, which is unfit for limited human beings (with the exception of a few chosen ones). Philone's love-sickness would then appear as a dangerous disease of the imaginative faculty. It severs the individual from the rest of the Creation, isolates the man from the universal and divine order of mutual give and take that structures the entire cosmos. In such ways, the body becomes the arbiter between the opposing aspects of the universe. Instead of being condemned or marginalized as in Neo-Platonic discourses, Leone's philosophy acknowledges the crucial role of our sexualized physical constitution.

The universe is structured along one idea: the desire for the beautiful and/or the good, the urge to reproduce that beauty and to make the universe a perfectly beautiful representation of its Creator. This longing implies that, to varying degrees, all beings have to be aware of their incompleteness and lack of ultimate beauty. The human soul is the paradigmatic example of this state of unfulfilled desire. This applies to our spiritual as well as to our physical desires. Human beings are complete only as men and women; only as spiritual and physical beings are they capable of encompassing the manifestations of divine creation. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the *Dialoghi* is the consistency with which Leone enacts the idea that beauty, and the ravishment concomitant with it, is the necessary product of all human mental activities. As God created man in his image, the perception of beauty is a crucial issue, for the love generated by these mental images is modeled on the affection of the Godhead for His Creation.

BODY OF CONVERSION AND THE
IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL:
THE “BEAUTIFUL JEWESS” SARA COPIO SULLAM*

GIUSEPPE VELTRI

In 1856, *Les quatre martyrs* was published in Paris. In this book, the art historian Alexis François Rio wished to provide an evaluation of the biographies of four Roman Catholics as paradigmatic examples of a life of sacrifice. It is the fourth biography that is of special interest to us here,¹ that of the Genoese scholar Ansaldo Cebà, called by Rio *le martyr de la charité* (“the martyr of charity”).² Ansaldo had had a spirited correspondence with Sara Copio Sullam³ from Venice, the poet from

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¹ The first person was 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 vérité*” (“the martyr of truth”). The second was a woman, the first to receive a doctorate at a European university, the polymath scholar Elena Lucrezia Piscopia Cornaro (1646–1684), born in Venice and called by Rio “*la martyre de l’humilité*” (“the martyr of humility”). The third also stemmed from Venice, the commander of Famagusta in Cyprus, Marc-Anton Bragadin, whom the Turks skinned alive, “*le martyr soldat*” (“the soldier martyr”).

² Alexis François Rio, *Les quatre martyrs (Philippe Howard, Ansaldo Ceba, Hélène Cornaro, Marc-Antoine Bragadino)* (Paris: Bray, 1856).

³ For literature about Sara Copio Sullam from the nineteenth century, see: Moses Soave, “Sara Copio Sullam,” *Corriere Israelitico* 3 (1864): 157–160; 188–196; Emanuele Antonio Cicogna, “Notizie intorno a Sara Copia Sulam: Coltissima Ebreja Veneziana del Secolo XVII,” *Memorie dell’Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 13 (1864): 227–246; Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart*, vol. 10, 3th edition. (Leipzig: Leiner, 1897), 134–136; Abraham Geiger, “Sara Copio Sullam,” *Jüdische Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und Leben* 7 (1869): 178–183; Ernest David, *Sara Copia Sullam, une héroïne juive au XVIIe siècle. Étude historique et biographique* (Paris: Wittersheim, 1877); Abraham Berliner, *Luhot 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, reprint Hildesheim: Olms, 1991), 159–170; Nahida Remy, *Das jüdische Weib* (Leipzig: Laudien, 1892), 170–184, reprint ed. Esther Sharell (Frankfurt: Cultura Judaica, 1999); Gustav Karpeles, *Jewish Literature and Other*

the ghetto of Venice, trying to convince her to convert to Christianity. Cebà's biography was not the first time the name of this highly gifted Jewish poet and intellectual was mentioned in the context of the *res publica literaria*.⁴ But Rio's book was probably the prime stimulus for scholars associated with the German "Science of Judaism" (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*) to deal with her life and work.⁵ For example, the book proved very useful for the Breslau-based Orientalist Moritz Abraham Levy in preparing a lecture in 1862. He recommended emulating Sara Copio Sullam as a paragon for extraordinary erudition, general education and religious zeal.⁶ For the exponents of the Science of Judaism, the Italian Renaissance was in any case a singularly privileged era of the first Enlightenment and of Jewish scientific tradition, standing in marked contrast with the "darker centuries" of the medieval world. Fascination with that humanistic era then flowed into the Berlin of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Fritz (Yizhak) Baer has shown in his *Galut*.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, displayed musical talents, remarkable social graces, and a gift for improvising poetry.⁸ In addition, she organized an academy in her father's house, frequented

Essays (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1895), 124–128; Moritz Steinschneider, "Die italienische Litteratur der Juden," *Monatschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 43 (1899): 318; Eden Sarot, "Ansaldo Ceba and Sara Copia Sullam," *Italica* 31 (1954): 138–150. A complete biography is provided by Carla Boccato, "Sara Copio Sullam, la poetessa del Ghetto di Venezia: Episodi della sua vita in un manoscritto del secolo XVII," *Italia* 6 (1987): 117–121. For further bibliographical references on Sara, see also the following footnotes.

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 That is very evident from Heinrich Graetz and Moritz Levy (see above, note 3), who were doubtless dependent on Rio.

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.

not only by Jews (among them Leone Modena), but also by nobility from Treviso, Padova, and Vicenza.⁹ Her teacher was the poet and man of letters Numidio Paluzzi, with whom she later had a falling out due to his lack of faithfulness.¹⁰ All sources agree that she had strong literary and philosophical abilities and was also an exceptional beauty, gifted 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), and Leone Modena wrote her epitaph, published by Abraham Berliner for the first time in the nineteenth century.¹¹

The Italian woman poet from the Venice ghetto acquired a certain fame, probably because her desire for cultural recognition, while at the same time preserving her religious identity, anticipated what would become the most important topic in modern Judaism. Her “salon” in the Venice ghetto was the precursor of the cultural and intellectual activity of the Jewish elite which reached its zenith in Berlin in the nineteenth century. Even Heinrich Graetz, who was usually rather taciturn when it came to praise, was enthusiastic about her: “Young, charming, with a noble heart and keen intellect, striving for great things and a lover of the Muses, Sara Sullam enchanted both old men and young boys. ... She reveled in the realm of beauty, exuding her enthusiasm in a moderated, soft and delicate work.”¹²

The exceptional aspect of this personality, a figure who in recent years has occupied the interest of Italian specialists and others, lies less, in my view, in her great literary talents. Much more fascinating and intriguing is her ability to bring into focus in and through her life one of the main Christian and Jewish topics of the seventeenth century in an exemplary fashion: namely conversion and identity. In this, her exceptional physical beauty and artistic gifts played a great role, as a paradigm of philosophical discussion about the immortality of the soul. That was a question much discussed at the time, and also, probably not

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.

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, online: <http://www.questia.com>.

¹¹ Berliner, *Luhot avanim*, 80, note 159.

¹² Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 10: 135.

incidentally so, influenced by contemporary debate on conversion. It was a contemporary accepted tenet that aesthetics is but the expression of the divine world (*imago divina*).¹³ That this understanding of aesthetics was moored on the pillars of Christian religious philosophy is not really touched on until the discussion on the immortality of the soul and the eternity of matter, as I try to show in the following pages.

Two elements in the sadly short life of Sara are of importance for this question: her correspondence with the Genoese priest Ansaldo Cebà, from which a platonic love relationship blossomed, and her contest with the archdeacon of Treviso and later bishop of Capodistria, Baldassarre Bonifaccio. In both cases, the encounter involved conversion, repeatedly attempted but abortive in its results, honest dialogue, the beauty of the physical body and the immortality of the soul, intercultural philosophical debate and contest, and engaged apologetic discussion.

On Love, Cultural Recognition and unio fidei

In 1615, Ansaldo Cebà published the heroic poem *La reina Esther* (Queen Esther).¹⁴ For Sara Sullam, this literary event was the occasion for an initially anonymous contact and then very active correspondence in a vibrant cultural and personal exchange with the author,¹⁵ who

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> (June 2005).

¹⁴ *La reina Esther. Poema heroico di Ansaldo Cebà* (Milano: Gio. Battista Bidelli, 1616).

¹⁵ On the edition of writings by Sara Copio Sullam, see Leoncello Modena, *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 ebraea”. 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 A. D’Accone*, ed. Irene Alm (Stuyvesant, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 1996), 367–422; Marina Arbib, “The Queen Esther Triangle: Leone Modena, Ansaldo Cebà, and Sara Copio Sullam,” in

later commented: “My poem moved a noble Jewish woman to seek my friendship, on the basis of these letters, and I did not refuse to fall in love with her soul.”¹⁶ She reacted to the poem in May 1618 by composing a sonnet, which began with the famous lines:

The beautiful Jewess, who with faithful songs
Beseeched the heavenly choirs for mercy
So that in sacred love among the stars in heaven
She happily relishes the most exalted spirit ...¹⁷

We are well informed about Ansaldo’s relation with Sara, because his letters to her were published in 1623.¹⁸ She was not happy about the publication, as she wrote in at least one letter.¹⁹ Sara’s letters to Ansaldo have unfortunately been lost.²⁰ At the time the correspondence began, Sara was probably no more than 20 years old, while Ansaldo, aged 53, referred to himself as a piece of “old wood” that “can catch fire and burn easier than young wood.”²¹ Sara’s great beauty, which Ansaldo learned about from a report of his servant, ignited in him a great love, not only platonic, “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 and even sarcastic undertone. The occasion for this friendship was probably the fact that Ansaldo in his poem *Queen Esther* spoke of a heroine in the times of the knights, and the Jewish people, in Sara’s eyes, rose up in those days from the status of a servant

The Lion Shall Roar: Leon Modena and His World, ed. David Malkiel (Jerusalem: 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, note 10) claims.

²¹ For the reference of this quote, see the following note.

²² Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 10: 135.

to the exalted heights of heroic fame. Ansaldo's work was interpreted by Sara as the literary rising of the Jewish woman to become the heroine of that nation which, according to Rabbi Simone Luzzatto, a contemporary of Sara and likewise a citizen of the ghetto of Venice, now lives only tending the flame of the memory of its past fame.²³ In her eyes, Ansaldo had returned to a shattered "nation" a modicum of its former greatness. In typical ornate Baroque style, Sara thus told him that his work was always with her, and under her bedside chair at night.

Ansaldo answered Sara's letter on May 19, 1618. From the start, it was the aim of the priest to influence Sara to convert to Christianity, even if—and perhaps precisely because—the tone of the letters alternated between love and criticism, literary recognition and theological apologia, like the variations in a typical courtly conversation between lovers.²⁴ They exchanged pictures, a very common way at the time for visual friendship with a stranger, which did not try to conceal a certain kind of veneration for images, as reflected in a sonnet by Sara that begins:

The portrait is of the one,
Who carries your image, chiseled in her heart,
Which shows, hand on heart, to all the world,
That in my heart I carry my idol,
And I wish for all to worship him.²⁵

To influence her to convert, Ansaldo recommended she read the Gospels and the works of the Dominican Luiz de Granada.²⁶ Graetz comments: "Cebà tried in vain to undermine her conviction, by a show of tenderness, by critique, and sentimental yearning, with reference to

²³ Simone Luzzatto, *Discorso circa il stato de gl'Hebrei et in particular dimoranti nell'inclita città di Venetia* (Venice: Gioanne Calleoni, 1638).

²⁴ As Ultsch (ibid. online) 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'imgo è questa di colei ch'al core
Porta l'imgo tua sola scolpita,
Che con la mano al seno al mondo addita:
Qui porto l'Idol mio, ciascun l'adore, ...

²⁶ 1504–1588; Spanish mystic from the Dominican order.

a possible dissolution of the relation in the offing, and his longing to be united with her in a heaven of bliss.” Graetz mentions an episode that has a certain humorous element, and is summarized by him with a literary turn of phrase: “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 here to discuss all the various elements in this very interesting correspondence between an older priest and a young Jewish woman, which might provide the tale for a historical novel. I already mentioned earlier that this element is not, in my view, something that stirs central interest in Jewish studies and research on the history of philosophy. But more important and seldom discussed²⁸ is his artful attempt to convert her, and Sara’s unyielding reply, determined to stick resolutely to her Jewish faith. The anthropological image that clearly emerges from the correspondence is shaped by Ansaldo’s unconditional ardor in his efforts to bring her to conversion. Physical beauty and intelligence are an integral part of the picture, along with art and talent, which since antiquity has molded European anthropological understanding. But since Augustine they have not been regarded as a primary characteristic of the human being, corrupt in the wake of Adam’s Fall. According to general philosophical and thus Thomist dictate, 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. And he writes even more 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 formulated that even more clearly: “Not my friendship ... [but only] faith can make you immortal, not any faith, but the Christian faith.”³⁰

It is obvious that in order to illuminate such statements we have to refer to anthropological views of the time. The contemporary debate on religion was decisively influenced by the Christian notion that only

²⁷ Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 10:135.

²⁸ Ultsch (ibid. online) does discuss his proselytizing, noting that “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 portion of the soul is immortal, the intellect purified by baptismal water, while matter is subject to decay. As a non-Christian, a Jew can only be part of matter, and thus of the world of corruption. That is at the core of the debate which Sara later had with another cleric.

On 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 praised 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 intending to pillory the heretical views of this Jewess. Sara answered this attack on her with a "Manifesto" in which she sought to remove any doubts about her "orthodoxy." In it she openly presented her views, against the brashness of this cleric, who 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 panicky reaction on the basis of a fear that the Inquisition would accuse her of heresy and burn her at the stake. That could, in the worst-case scenario, lead to expulsion of the Jews from Venice. That was a scenario of horror initially sketched by Heinrich Graetz³³ and then supported in the literature by Moritz Levy, Leonello Modona, Carla Boccato, and Umberto Fortis.

Initially it should be noted that aside from a few brief notes, to date few researchers have analyzed the corresponding philosophical texts, and the dispute between Sullam and Bonifaccio has been interpreted solely on the basis of general knowledge. This philosophical-theological dispute is no coincidence, it is not a literary "exercise" or a panicky

³¹ Baldassarre Bonifaccio, *Amata, tragedia di Baldassare Bonifaccio* (Venice: Pinelli, 1622); *Lettere poetiche di Baldassare Bonifaccio, per difesa, e dichiarazione 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 counter-example of Uriel da Costa "in libertarian Protestant Amsterdam."

reaction. Rather, it reflects the sphere of literary culture in that space and century, which was open for public discussion, and where the Church still wished to play a didactic role. The Inquisition was still very interested in *Christian* heretical views, but not those enunciated by *Jews* deviating from general *Jewish* opinion, and there was never a tribunal for that.³⁴

However, what reason Bonifaccio may have had to challenge Sara to an initially peaceful contest remains something of a riddle. It is known that Bonifaccio initiated the dispute and wrote a letter to Sullam in early January 1619. This letter remained in manuscript form until 1988, when it was located by Carla Boccato and published.³⁵ The letter, contained in Bonifaccio's papers, is addressed to Sabba Giudea, who has been identified as Sara.³⁶ The occasion appears to be his desire to wish her a Happy New Year. At first glance, the letter seems like a harmless talk about the immortality of the intellect, that part of the soul which avoids human decay and corruption. But under more careful scrutiny this New Year's greeting can be shown to be an astute Christian provocation on an eternal theme, conversion to Christianity, with the evident aim of persuading Sara to convert by means of philosophical and theological arguments. I will describe the main points of the argumentation.

Baldassare Bonifaccio begins with noting that the year becomes younger while man grows older, because the first gets a new form

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 questioned period there is no trace of trials on Jewish heretic ideas.

³⁵ Boccato, “Una disputa,” 593–606, text 603–604.

³⁶ Boccato attributes this evident 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. According to Christian literature, a topic of the conversation between Salomon 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* (published 1497). His book was re-published 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.” The text is also available online: <http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/camenaref/muliers.html> (last accessed 30 June 2007).

(being a celestial body) while our life is enumerated by the time, “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, due to the Original Sin of Adam, the human being has forfeited its original immortality. Only the part of the soul that is Reason, which was obedient to God, had the supernatural power to prevent the decay and corruption of matter, an ability that was lost through Original Sin. Repentance made it possible to absolve the sin, but the capacity of immortality was not restored. Since that juncture, matter cannot hope for immortality, as the woman of Tekoa says in 2 Sam. 14:14: “For we must die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which can’t be gathered up again.”³⁹ Like water, the human being 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 interesting that the quote of the woman of Tekoa, thought as a reference to the Old Testament, is clarified by an indirect allusion to Christ on the cross. Jesus describes his condition with the words from the Psalm 21:15: “I am poured out like water” (*sicut aqua effusus sum*). Probably following an ancient Christian tradition in a philosophical garment, Thomas Aquinas, indirectly cited by Baldassarre, connects

³⁷ Boccato, “Una disputa,” 603: “che standosi nell’interminabile dell’eternità in guisa ch’egli da lei non è circoscritto, cava il tempo dall’evò.”

³⁸ There is something twisted 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 disposizione che ad una forma, sarebbe stato bisogno che i primi propagatori dell’humana generatione si fossero conservati nell’originale giustizia, 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 following note.

³⁹ *Omnes morimur et quasi aquae dilabimur*. Boccato, “Una disputa,” 603, read *acquae*, probably a scribal error. This verse is a topos of Christian homiletics and the sermons on the occasion of death (*Tractatus de Morte non Timenda*, etc.). Baldassarre quotes only the first part of II Sam 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 proicitur: sic ergo effusus sum.”

the two verses: the woman of Tekoa points to the mortality of man in the image of water spilt upon the ground, while Jesus symbolizes the merging of the spirit with the air. The indirect reference to the cross is consciously included, as the archdeacon later discloses in the letter with his intentions to convert Sara. 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 stated 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 on 10 January in a letter,⁴² where in keeping with the patterns and usages of her time, she continued the philosophical discussion about immortality of the soul, expressing her “doubts” about 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, i.e., the cyclic seasons, becoming younger, and man getting ever older.

The fact that one year is followed by another, that the year is renewed (Baldassarre: “the year becomes younger”), also pertains to the human being, although his life is longer than one revolution around the sun. Through the duration of human life we see his identity as an individual. The biographical dates of a human life mark its

⁴¹ Italian text from Boccato, “Una disputa,” 604: “Solo il mio Christo, architetto divino ch’edificò 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 Vulgata reads “templum Dei,” which certainly does not fit in with Baldassarre’s intentions. The King James version in English 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 Baldassarre Bonifaccio* (Venice: Pinelli, 1621), fols. 5^r–6^v, and re-published by Fortis, *La “bella ebrea,”* 145–147. The transcriptions of Baldassarre (and therefore of Fortis) are not free of mistakes: for example “effects” instead of “affects” (5^r); “language” (6^r) instead of “lineage” and other spelling mistakes.

individuality as a fragment in time. Just as the year loses its essence to number, man 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 based on the fact that he is part of the species of “man.” Because “if the essence of a human being would not be distinguished from the others by dint of its essence, we would have to conclude that if the essence of Socrates were missing, that of Plato would be too, i.e. of the other individuals, so that the death of an individual would mean the death of a species.”⁴³

That matter is corruptible, a truth of the peripatetic school, is, in Sara’s view, easier to assert than to prove. As a matter of fact, if substance is an internal and external part of the composite and is eternal, how can one assert that a thing can take over 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, 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 the heaven, because it has only one form and one substance which fully fills the effective power of the matter.⁴⁴ So for Aristotelian philosophy, there is not an infinite number of heavens.

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 così de gl’altri, in modo che nella morte di un individuo morirebbono tutti.”

⁴⁴ Aristoteles, *Metaphysics*, Book XII, Part 8, trans. W.D. Ross: “Evidently there is but one heaven. For if there are many heavens as there are many men, the moving

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. Because when a mason rebuilds a destroyed house, it will not be the same, even if made from the same bricks.

Sara speaks in this text about the eternity of matter, *materia*, and not about the mortality or immortality of the soul, and about the transitoriness of the human creature, which is dependent on number, and thus on 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 be inconsequential in respect to an original plan of God, and would, in Baldassarre’s logic, become an *ad hoc* planning (God is only waiting until man sins). In particular, she rejects the notion of Christianity as some kind of a *reconstruction* of Judaism. If we suppose that Jewish religion or Jewish man since Adam is a destroyed house, Christ erects a new building, i.e., he cannot rebuild the old. *Ergo*, we would argue, Christianity cannot simply build upon Judaism, a topic richly reminiscent of philosophical discussions at the time of Mendelssohn, in which Judaism was defined as a sub-structure of Christianity.

Baldassarre goes beyond Sara’s courtly and discursive tone, and two years later, in 1621, he published a small volume of 61 pages entitled *Dell’immortalità dell’anima; Discorso di Baldassare Bonifaccio* 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 in order to reduce the influence of Sara’s “academy,” endeavoring to disqualify her by dint

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>.

⁴⁵ Venice: Pinelli, 1621. The text I used is available online in the Herzog-August-Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, <http://diglib.hab.de/drucke/83-12-quod-3/start.htm> (last accessed May 2005).

of her being an “Aristotelian.” It thus becomes clear that the first letter was conceived as a conscious provocation designed to challenge Sara to respond.

Baldassarre makes no secret of the fact that he views the dispute as a contest, and he embarks without hesitation and armed with a “golden sword”⁴⁶ into the battle against the “moon of the lady philosophers.”⁴⁷ His bill of indictment is clearly a renewed provocation, since he accuses Sara of irreverence for 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 *neshama* (“spiracolo di vita, animo ragionevole”), *nefesh* (“anima sensitiva dei bruti”) and *ruah* (“spirito, sostanza incorporea”).⁴⁹ Baldassarre sums up Sara’s critique: immortality cannot be predicated of 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 the theory of Aristotle about the eternity of the world is true (which he, Baldassarre, fervently rejects) 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 conceivable individually. Baldassarre replies: Since the soul is separate from matter, and number is valid only for substance that can be divided, 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.

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 Bonifaccio, *Discorso*, 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.

Baldassarre suppresses the argument here 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 a participation in the divine spirit, and not as an identification with divine substance (which would be tantamount to Spinoza).

Sara’s second main argument runs: no agent can exist without action. Here Baldassarre does not appear to deal directly with Sara’s argument. She asserted 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. Because no matter can exist without actual concrete form, the perception of the soul with and without a body differs. One occurs through thought, the other through the species which it participates in 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 the first comes about through active intellect, the second through passive intellect. The question would be proper here as to 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, that cannot refer to matter, but only to form, because matter dissolves into its elements, and these evidently are not destroyed. In order to circumvent this problem, Baldassarre talks about separation, not corruption. He states that in the separation of soul and body, the body (matter) remains only a potency 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 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

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 11: “E che occorre altra proua, se prouiamo col senso che la materia di

Baldassarre does not respond directly to Sara's philosophical question, but rather brings in typical Baroque discourse 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 far more a thing transitory than a blossom,
 Is far more a wisp of wind, hastily fleeting,
 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 the immortal form of life pilfers and robs
 And the image of Gods corrupts.
 Run, run to the purifying fountain
 Where life now springs forth: Christ is the pious bird
 who through his blood animates the dead children.⁵²

The aesthetic theory reflected here is linked to religion. Baldassarre speaks of “feminine beauty,” but without referring to the corresponding

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; vizzate 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 sdegnà 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 uscìo
 Che la forma immortal di vita priua
 E corrompe l'immagine di Dio
 Corri, corri al lauacro, ond'hor deriua
 La vita: Christo è quel augel sì pio
 Che col suo sangue morti figli auuiua.

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.

Barely recuperated from an illness and surprised by the publication of the tractate, Sara answered with a publication that remained the only one in her life,⁵⁴ in which she attacked her opponent with vehemence, sarcasm and girded with all the rules of rhetoric, or as Graetz put it: “with mature dialectics, masculine courage and crushing power applied against her slanderous accuser.”⁵⁵ That is perhaps the impression the reader initially gets. Yet if one looks more carefully, one may note that Sara does not really provide any additional serious point of argumentation here, aside from two notes *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 suitable for the Baroque period, but it is hardly comparable to the logical deductive speculations of her previous letter. Just consider her tone here: acrimonious, sarcastic, insulting, offensive, invidious. Nothing but that. With an avowal of faith at the beginning that sounds like a statement of credo: “The human soul, Mr. Baldassare, 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, and 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, but rather only as curiosity to hear together with you about the

⁵³ See for example Agnolo Firenzuola, *Delle bellezze delle donne* (see above, note 13).

⁵⁴ *Manifesto Di Sarra Copia Solam Hebraea: Nel quale è da lei riprouata, e detestata l’opinione negante l’immortalità deli’ Anima falsamente attribuitale dal Sig. Baldassare Bonifaccio* (Venice: Pinelli, 1621), online at: <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.

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, thus also to a woman, a Jewish woman, who is constantly confronted with these topics by those who attempt, as you well know, to force 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, Baldassare.
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.

Because 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

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, stíma in me l'alma non face

Per piú nobil desio mio cor si sface,
Baldassar, ond' arditá e situbonda
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 one’s 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 she had grown up in, it was customary to raise *dubitationes* and ask *quaestiones*, in order to spark a discourse in its requisite acuteness. Sara did this and now was like a burnt child who dreads the fire, because the archdeacon wanted to use the opportunity to force her again and again 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 tone of this *Manifesto* is so biting that she could have been accused of heresy just on the basis of her statements here alone. Baldassarre was after all an archdeacon, accused by a Jewess of vanity, false zeal and ambition, ignorance in various fields of philosophy, theology, the Italian and Hebrew languages. And accused most pointedly of the cowardice of a knight who suffices to be measured in 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 within Judaism in particular. *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 aspects of the era, was for example treated with the proper focus and attention by various Venetian Jews, such as Leone Modena in his unpublished work of apologia *Magen va-Herev* or David del Bene’s *Kīss’ot le-vet David*.

After Sara’s debate with the priests, the topic of the immortality of the soul and eternal damnation is 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 Menasse ben Israel (*Nishmat Hayyim*), Saul Levi Morteira, Isaac Aboab de Fonseca and Moses Raphael d’Aguilar. It was not just a theological-philosophical discussion but also involved the rehabilitation of the crypto-Jews, those who had been converted by force to Christianity, a debate 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 aspect was honor and fame for a Jewish woman, who had talent, beauty and good manners, but who did not follow the “true religion.” So she 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. Because had I believed, and as you say, were not afraid of the loss of the happiness of the other life, there were indeed ample opportunities to improve my situation by changing the law [the religion]. That is a fact known to many in authority, since they incessantly tried to achieve that.”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 attempts in vain 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 Altman, “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, 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 Ebra, 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 in a total Counter-Reformation).⁶¹

In Conclusion: Souls and Bodies

If we exclude the biographical elements emerging from the correspondence between Cebà and Sara and the contest with Bonifaccio, one may wonder whether any light is cast here on the topic 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. Her Jewish beauty is thus only a deceptive physical feature which conceals the imminent physical corruption as long as Sara does not become a Christian. Beauty of the body is nugatory if not bound up with morality of the soul, which for Christians is only possible through the sacrament of baptism. This becomes the main reiterated point in Baldassarre's repeated attempts to convert Sara. He views Jewish religion as a product of the “incurable” Adamic Original Sin. So the Jewish body is a dilapidated and collapsing old house that can only be rebuilt through Christ—as any other person not appertaining to Catholicism. Christian aesthetics and anthropological attitude are clearly dependent on the conversion of the soul, which then retroacts to heal 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 of 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, continuation, and conserver of his name (“conservazione del tuo nome”).⁶² Her father's soul, she continues, gave her the essence

⁶¹ Giorgio Bassani, *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini* (Turin: Einaudi, 1962), 182, quoted in Fortis, *La “bella ebrea,”* 17.

⁶² Fortis, *“La bella ebrea,”* 149.

of composition 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 diletissima, che desti l’essere a quel caro composto da cui fui generata in questo mondo.”

PART IV

THE BODY IN JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DISCOURSE

SHAPING THE BODY OF THE GODHEAD:
THE ADAPTATION OF THE ANDROGYNOUS
MOTIF IN EARLY CHRISTIAN KABBALAH

SAVERIO CAMPANINI

Eloquar an sileam?

Vergil

In this article I would like to draw the reader's attention to an interesting feature concerning the not wholly predictable transmission of esoteric lore such as Kabbalah in a Christian environment at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Of the entire phenomenon of Christianizing a specific Jewish doctrine, which lasted several centuries and was fiercely opposed as theologically dangerous, I will concentrate on one issue, trying to show the main turning points of the evolution of this trans-cultural and inter-religious adaptation process. It is my intention to analyze a particular image connected to the fundamental kabbalistical doctrine of the mystical shape of the Godhead in the works of two Christian Kabbalists of the Renaissance, in order to underline the peculiar shift it underwent.

Even before the crystallization of a systematic description of the world of the *sefirot*, there existed a literary genre called *Shi'ur Koma*, text fragments that deal with the corporeal shape of the Godhead.¹ These writings were heavily criticized by Maimonides because of their open recourse to anthropomorphism, their concordance with the biblical usage notwithstanding, and because they appeared to be diametrically opposed to the philosophical attempt at allegorizing any biblical reference to the corporeality of God. These ancient, or late-ancient, doctrines were successfully integrated in the emerging doctrine of Kabbalah in the course of the thirteenth century and reached their peak in the sections of the *Zohar* known as the *Idrot* (Assemblies).

¹ See Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York: Schocken, 1991), 15–55. On androgyny in Kabbalah and some feminist considerations, see Moshe Idel, "Androgyny and Equality in the Thesophico-Theurgical Kabbalah," *Diogenes* 208 (2005): 27–38.

From the entire movement of the Christian Kabbalah I have singled out two authors who were among the most explicit in dealing with these difficult concepts. Other Christian Kabbalists preferred to avoid the topic, perhaps because they regarded it as too slippery. Nevertheless, Paulus Ricius and Francesco Giorgio, very well informed and quite successful in determining the development of Christian Kabbalah, did expand on the topic and, moreover, made it the center of their speculations, trying to show in a series of symbolic images how Kabbalah works even for a public completely unaware of its intricacies. Johannes Reuchlin's position, on the other hand, while showing remarkable affinities to Ricius' model,² carefully avoids expanding³ on the correspondence between the limbs of the human body, the body of the *Adam coelestis* (interpreted christologically as a mediator between the human soul and the divine, but located rather in *Tiferet*, the sixth *sefirah*, and therefore not identified with the Son, who was for Reuchlin clearly identified with *Hokmah*, the second *sefirah* or the first emanation) and the *sefirot*.⁴

For Paulus Ricius,⁵ a physician with a peculiar philosophical upbringing (he had been a pupil of Pietro Pomponazzi), the correspondence between the human body and the structure of the divine world is

² Moreover, rather oddly, Reuchlin puts in the mouth of the Jew Simon the reference, in laudatory terms (*vir egregie doctus*), to Ricius's epitome of Gikatilla's book and to his *Isagoge*, in spite of his conversion to Christianity (*quondam ex nostris unus et nunc Christianus*), advising the other participants to the dialogue (Philolaus and Marranus) to refer to its accessible presentation of Kabbalah.

³ Some human limbs or corporeal features are simply listed in a collection of attributes of the ten *sefirot*, avoiding carefully to name any physical attributes for the first three and associating with *Hesed* the right arm but also the "first foot," with *Gevurah* the left arm but also "the second foot"; among the attributes of *Nezah* are listed the thigh and the right foot, among the ones of *Hod* one finds the left foot. A very pale allusion is found among the attributes of *Yesod* where, among others, also the attribute "covenant of the Lord" is recorded, but no precise corporeal attribute is found with reference to *Malkhut* (see Johannes Reuchlin, *De arte cabalistica* (Hagenau, 1517), LXIIb–LXIIIa).

⁴ On this peculiar point, see Johannes Reuchlin, *L'arte cabalistica* (*De arte cabalistica*), ed. Giulio Busi and Saverio Campanini (Florence: Opus libri, 21996), 29–30, 63–64, 160, 174–175, 197–201 and Bernd Roling, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin," in *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan N. Bremer, Jan R. Veenstra and Brannon Wheeler (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 232–266.

⁵ On Paulus Ricius, see G. Eis, "Lost Publications by Paulus Ricius," *Medizinische Monatsschrift* 9 (1955): 180–181; François Secret, "Notes sur Paolo Ricci et la Kabbale chrétienne en Italie," *Rinascimento* 11 (1960): 169–192; idem, "Notes sur quelques kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 36 (1974): 67–82; idem, "Aristote et les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance," in *Platon et Aristote à la*

central to any attempt to reduce the complex teachings of Kabbalah to an understandable, purportedly rational pattern. One finds this in particular in Ricius' *Isagoge*,⁶ written at the very beginning of his remarkable career as a "popularizer" of Kabbalah in Renaissance philosophy and first thought of as an introduction to his Latin abridged translation of the work *Sha'are Orah (Portae lucis)* by Joseph Gikatilla.⁷ In this work, Ricius tries to summarize the chief points of the doctrine, concerning the relationship between the structure of the human body and that of

Renaissance, XVI^e Colloque de Tours (Paris, 1976), 277–291; idem, "Une traduction latine d'œuvres d'Averroès par Paulus Ricius en 1511," in *Postel revisité. Nouvelles Recherches sur Guillaume Postel et son milieu*, ed. François Secret (Paris–Milan: Chrysopoëia, 1998), 13–15; Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, "Christian Kabbala: Joseph Gikatilla (1247–1305), Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522), Paulus Ricius (d. 1541), and Jacob Böhme (1575–1624)," in *The Language of Adam: Die Sprache Adams*, ed. Allison P. Coudert (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), 81–121, esp. 88–94; Bernd Roling, "Prinzip, Intellekt und Allegorese im Werk des christlichen Kabbalisten Paolo Ricci (gest. 1541)," in *An der Schwelle zur Moderne. Juden in der Renaissance*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri and Annette Winkelmann (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 155–187; idem, "Mediatoris fungi munere: Synkretismus im Werk des Paolo Ricci," in *Christliche Kabbala*, ed. Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann (Ostfildern: Thorbecke Verlag, 2003), 77–100; idem, "Maimonides im Streit der Konfessionen: Die "Statera Prudentum" des Paulus Ricius und die christliche Neulektüre des Maimonides im 16. Jahrhundert," in *Gottes Sprache in der philologischen Werkstatt. Hebraistik vom 15. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri and Gerold Necker (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 149–168; idem, "Maimonides und Wissenschaftskritik: Christliche Kabbala und Sündenfall bei Agrippa von Nettesheim," in *Moses Maimonides (1138–1204): His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical Wirkungsgeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts*, ed. Gorge K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse (Würzburg: Ergon, 2004), 239–269, esp. 251–255; idem, "Erlösung im angelischen Makrokosmos. Emanuel Swedenborg, die Kabbala Denudata und die schwedische Orientalistik," *Morgen-Glantz* 16 (2006): 385–457, esp. 391–394; see now idem, *Aristotelische Naturphilosophie und christliche Kabbalah im Werk des Paulus Ricius* (Tübingen: Niemeyer 2007). I was unable to take advantage of the following article, which was published during the proofreading of this volume: Crofton Black, "From Kabbalah to Psychology: The Allegorizing Isagoge of Paulus Ricius. 1509–1541," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 2, 2 (2007): 136–173

⁶ The *In cabalistarum seu allegorizantium eruditionem Isagoge* was published for the first time in Pavia in 1509 and re-issued in the same town in 1510.

⁷ At the end of the first (and second) impression of the *Isagoge* one reads: "Ipsius vero porte lucis (quod de hebraico excerpti idiomate) compendium (ne eius esculentia pusillorum dentes obstupescant) impressure nunc committendum non censui. Si quis tamen superne veritatis fulmine tactus huius oracula adire efflagitaverit illi pro arbitrio ex eo quod nobiscum est exemplari exemplum tradere permittitur." It emerges quite clearly that Ricius was aware of the scandalous potential of his work, especially in the light of the condemnation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and of the generally hostile climate against Christian Kabbalah, which was dominant among the Dominicans.

the divine world, presenting it as a system. No less arbitrary than the forcible Christianizing of Kabbalah, this operation elicits a heavy price: as a matter of fact, to make a system out of the Kabbalah or to make it fit one historical scheme is a continuing temptation even for modern scholarship. Actually his literary models, especially Joseph Gikatilla's *Sha'are Orah*, but also the *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, follow a similar organizing principle, structured as they are as commentaries on the ten *sefirot*, attempting a systematization of the numberless symbolic connections of Kabbalah into one great pattern.

Ricius (who died in 1541) re-worked his *Isagoge* repeatedly until the last edition of 1539 and this revised edition was to be printed as (the fourth) part of the *De caelesti agricultura* in the 1587 collection *Artis cabalisticæ scriptores* by Johannes Pistorius, a influential and reprinted⁸ anthology of some of the most important Christian kabbalistic works, including prominent authors such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Johannes Reuchlin, Leone Ebreo (the latter, one must add, rather oddly), and Arcangelo of Borgonovo.⁹ The *Isagoge*, recalling Porphyry's manual introducing the chief tenets of Aristotelian logic, presents its materials in the form of numbered aphorisms, tightly linked from a formal standpoint. The number and content of the aphorisms and the attached commentaries vary from the first edition, through the second, already revised, publication,¹⁰ until the last edition of 1539. The various sets of aphorisms are similar, although they differ not only in number, but also in substance. The last edition has only 50 aphorisms, as opposed to the original 66.¹¹ To the aphorisms, Ricius appended various commentaries (called *enodationes*),¹² which were also

⁸ In the last forty years it was reprinted twice: 1967 (Frankfurt am Main: Minerva Verlag) and 2005 (Lavis: La Finestra Editrice).

⁹ On the dependency of the latter on his teacher Francesco Giorgio, see Chaim Wirszubski, "Francesco Giorgio's Commentary on Giovanni Pico's Kabbalistic Theses," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 37 (1974): 145–156 and now Saverio Campanini, "Ein unbekannter Kommentar zum Hohelied aus der kabbalistischen Schule des Francesco Zorzi," in *Erzählende Vernunft*, ed. Günter Frank, Anja Hallacker and Sebastian Lalla (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2006), 265–281.

¹⁰ It was published in Augsburg in 1515.

¹¹ An English translation, not always reliable, of the 66 theses (based on the second edition, Augsburg, 1515) is offered by Joseph Leon Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), 67–74.

¹² In the first redaction the *conclusiones* which are commented upon are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 37, 49, 57, 59 and 64.

revised and re-written by 1515¹³ and even more so on the occasion of the last edition (where the aphorisms are called *theoremata* and the commentaries *appendices*).¹⁴

One of the most interesting features of Paulus Ricius's presentation of the Kabbalah, based as it was on authentic kabbalistic materials often quoted with diligence, is the insistence on generation and the bisexual nature of this process, not only as far as humans are concerned, but also on a cosmological plan and even in God himself.

Already in the introduction (suppressed in the *De coelesti agricultura*) Ricius, with his typical blend of Aristotelian wisdom in a humanistic garb, combines kabbalistic allusions with Christian motives and praises his own attempt as a "most divine work" by referring to the image of giving birth:

Prorsus tamen conticescere non libuit si quidem et sanguineam, nedum in spiritu sobolem propagare divinissimum opus statuitur. Si enim castam et impollutam que tecum est puellam, ad tantum conceptum exornas, habebis quidem in utero, pariesque filium emmanuel.¹⁵

Nevertheless I did not want to keep utterly silent, for it has been established that procreation in flesh and blood is a most divine work, and much more so procreation in spirit. If, then, you prepare the young woman, chaste and unpolluted, which is by you, to such a conception, you shall nurture in the womb and shall give birth to a son Emmanuel.

According to an annotation written in the margin of the text, the reference to corporeal procreation as a divine activity is an allusion to the authority of Aristotle,¹⁶ who in his treatise *On the Soul* attributed the reproductive function to the soul as the only way that beings subjected to the limitations of matter could attain eternity and the divine. Arguing *a fortiori*, Ricius states, not surprisingly, that a spiritual conception, made possible through adequate preparation of the soul, allows humans to attain eternity. The special turn of phrase he

¹³ The number of the aphorisms is left unchanged, but the ones that are commented upon are (I have put in italics the new ones): 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 49, 57, 59 and 64. Moreover, some of the old *enodationes* have been expanded.

¹⁴ One finds commentaries to the *theoremata* 1, 2, 3, 4-5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17-18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 46 and 50.

¹⁵ *Isagoge* (Pavia, 1510), 3^v.

¹⁶ Cf. Aristoteles, *De anima* 2,4,415a-b.

chooses appears quite remarkable: he promises the reader that the soul, prepared and adorned with the kabbalistic doctrine that he is about to present didactically, will be able to nurture within itself and give birth to the Messiah, according to the Christian interpretation of Isaiah 7:14,¹⁷ as quoted in the Gospel of Matthew.¹⁸ Anticipating the biblical allusion, the soul is clearly meant in the reference to a “young woman” (*puella*), translating precisely the Hebrew *almah*. However, in a hermeneutical shift of momentous importance, Ricius moves closer to the translation as “virgin” (*parthenos*), found in the Septuagint, in his use of the adjectives chaste and unpolluted (*casta et impolluta*), thus pointing to the Christian identification of the young woman mentioned by Isaiah with the Virgin Mary. The name Emmanuel (God with us) had already been translated in the Septuagint and was familiar to any Christian reader as a messianic allusion to Christ.

Now, what did Ricius mean with this construct exactly? To conceive and give birth to the Messiah, in a corporeal sense, was surely a matter of honor and a possible, albeit quite lofty, ambition for a Jewish couple. The kabbalistic literature even records a manual, sometimes attributed to Joseph Gikatilla, with detailed instructions on how to prepare the best conditions in order to give birth to the Messiah.¹⁹ However, for a Christian, who believes that the Messiah has already come, the only way to understand Ricius’ image seems to be a re-etymologization of the name “Emmanuel”, meaning, albeit obscurely, that an appropriate preparation (or adorning)²⁰ will make possible a spiritual re-birth, or birth from above, according to the Gospel of John.²¹ In this way, God will dwell, so to speak, within the reader. To nurture the Emmanuel in the womb of the soul seems to allude to the personal path of the author, who converted to Christianity by “conceiving” the truth of Christ’s essence in his soul. Nevertheless, the readers of Ricius’ *Isagoge* are already baptized and are not supposed to need this “conception.” Such

¹⁷ See also Is. 8:8–10.

¹⁸ Mat. 1:23.

¹⁹ I am alluding to the kabbalistic work bearing the title *Iggeret ha-kodesh* (The Holy Letter), see S.J. Cohen, *The Holy Letter. A Critical Edition with Translation and Introduction* (New York: Ktav, 1976) and Charles Mopsik, *Lettre sur la sainteté. La relation de l’homme avec sa femme. Igueret ha-qodech* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1993).

²⁰ It appears that one should read the Hebrew *le-takken*, the origin of the kabbalistic term *tikkun*, behind the verb *exornare*.

²¹ John 3:3 and *passim*.

mixture of Jewish and Christian motifs, probably not inappropriate for a “cabalistic apostate,” as Joseph Blau called him,²² was aimed at merging incompatible hermeneutic systems but, in all likelihood, runs the risk of displeasing both the intended readership and his former co-religionists.

The imagery of the body, this time associated with the mind, occurs again in the commentary on the first *conclusio*, explaining why the secrets of the Kabbalah, transmitted since Moses as an oral tradition, have been put into writing. Ricius writes that the wise men [i.e., among the Jews], seeing that the Israelites were diminished intellectually and physically (*mente simul et corpore*) and scattered all over the world, dared to write down and leave for posterity some elements of that doctrine so that the secrets of such profound wisdom would not be obscured by oblivion.²³

To a greater degree, the body occupies the center of Ricius' speculation and organizes, as it were, the entire presentation of his *summa* of the kabbalistic doctrine. After an introduction intended to make the kabbalistical interpretation of Scripture not only acceptable, but also necessary as the *via regia* towards adhesion to the divine, Ricius introduces the concept of the correspondence between *macrocosmos* and *microcosmos*, thus anticipating the idea that every level of existence, the universe and the angelic choirs correspond to the structure of the human body. A very well known distinction between theoretical and practical Kabbalah is used, quite unexpectedly,²⁴ to describe, on the one hand, the path offering the mind the objects of contemplation and, on the other

²² This is the title of the chapter dealing mainly with Ricius in Blau, *The Christian Interpretation*, 65–77.

²³ *Isagoge* (Pavia, 1510), 7^v: “At recentiores sapientum quum israelitarum prosapia in dies mente, simul et corpore exterminari, passimque per orbem disseminari perpendenter; ne tanta sapientiae adita funditus denigraret oblivio, ausi sunt aliquid huius dogmatis calamo posteris linquere, ea tamen serie, ut nisi singulis doctrinarum generibus sollers quis fuerit, audituve horum eloquia acceperit, nequaquam illorum sensus limitem applicare dinoscet.” The 1541 Augsburg edition expresses the same idea but with different words: “Hac igitur de causa antiquorum Synteresis, primum nullis literis complex est cabalam, sed tandem cum videret Iudaeos passim dispergi, pauca de cabala ne plane interiret, eo modo tradidit et docuit, quo a perspicacibus sapientia et probitate viris, iisque praesertim, qui antea auditione partem huius doctrinae accepissent, percipi et diiudicare possint, atque simul cum hoc velata et incognita reliquantur prophanis.”

²⁴ Gershom Scholem, in the margin of his copy of the book by Blau, preserved at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, writes !שדך, innovation!

hand, the activity of adapting the forces of the mind and the body to make contemplation easier and to satisfy human needs.²⁵

The path of knowledge designed by the theoretical part of Kabbalah allows one, according to a quite Aristotelian way of thinking, to glean the highest realities through the lowest, and the hidden things through the ones that are better known to us.²⁶ What is better known to us is, in turn, what we experience in ourselves (that is to say the structure of the human body), in Ricius' words: *Notiora sunt ea, que in nobis (structura inquam humana) experimur.*²⁷ The Kabbalists teach that even the Law, which is the blueprint of creation, is constructed according to the shape of the human body. Therefore, there is a correspondence between the Law and the human body in its three articulations: the sublime and archetypical angelic choir, the universe (*macrocosmos*), and the body made of flesh and bones.²⁸ All of these bodies are masculine and feminine:²⁹ as far as the Law is concerned, it is also divided into masculine and feminine; its masculine part is comprised of the first four books of the Pentateuch while Deuteronomy is feminine in nature.³⁰ The only distinction between male and female that is obvious to the senses is the one pertaining to the human body: from this we can infer that the same distinction is present in the other two articulations (angels

²⁵ *Isagoge* (Pavia, 1510), 5^r (*Conclusio* no. 23): "Huius dogmatis pars quedam theorica dicitur, que menti intuenda cognoscibilia porrigit, alia practica, que ad facilem horum intuitu, et ad humanorum facientia usum assequenda mentis et corporis vires adaptat." Once again, the revised version (1541) differs significantly in the terminology, but not in content (*Theorema* no. 13): "Huius dogmatis pars una theoretica, quae speculabilium rerum penetralia considerat; pars altera actuosa, quae animum et corporis vires pro spiritalibus donis, et huius vitae commodis impetrandis adaptat."

²⁶ *Isagoge* (Pavia, 1510), 5^r (*Conclusio* no. 24): "Theorica altiora per ima, et horum latentia magis per nobis notiora denunciat." Ricius seems to be aware of the pattern he is following in the revised version (*Theorema* no. 14): "Theoretica (quemadmodum et reliqua doctrinarum genera) altiora per ima, et latentia per notiora nobis denunciat."

²⁷ *Isagoge*, 5^r (*Conclusio* 25).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, *Conclusio* no. 26: "Homo quem fabricatum in lege dicimus trifarii hominis deique imaginem refert. Trifarii dico hominis, unum quem sublimem et archetipum chorum nuncupamus, alium quem celestem, una cum elementari machina prospicimus, tertium quem sanguine, et ossibus contextum cernimus."

²⁹ *Ibid.*, *Conclusio* no. 27: "Horum quivis hominum (quemadmodum et lex) in masculum et feminam proscinditur."

³⁰ *Ibid.*, *Conclusio* no. 28: "In lege masculi vicem gerit lex prima, quattuor prima pentateuchi volumina complectens, femine vero quintum volumen, quod deuteronomium, idest secunda lex inscribitur."

and universe) and this brings us to the knowledge of the most High.³¹ As far as the universe is concerned, the masculine is represented by the transparent celestial spheres, except the lunar one and its contents, namely the world of the elements, which are darker.³² The purely intellectual world of the angels is masculine as far as the higher nine hierarchies are concerned, whereas the tenth, the “animastic” (*cetus animasticus*) is feminine.³³ The limbs of each body are nine if we consider the masculine or the feminine form, but if we take the hermaphroditic form (that is to say the combination of both genders in one body, as Ricius states that they actually are) their limbs are in each case ten.³⁴

It is easy to see that this idea allowed Ricius to suggest a solution for the very difficult problem of reconciling the number nine, especially prominent in the Dionysian tradition of the angelic hierarchies but also not absent from cosmologic speculations about the spheres, with the number ten, which dominates theosophical Kabbalah, as well as the Pythagorean tradition (the *tetraktys*) and even the Aristotelian canon of the ten categories. The main limbs of the body of the Law are the commandments of the Decalogue.³⁵ The principal limbs of the carnal body are also ten: the breath (*spiritus*), the brain, the lungs, the heart, the liver, the gall, the spleen, the kidneys, the genitals, and the womb with all its attachments.³⁶ The following table is aimed at showing the principal series listed by Paulus Ricius in the aphorisms and in their commentaries:

³¹ Ibid., *Conclusio* no. 29: “Carnalis vero hominis marem et feminam sensus per effigiem operationumque discrimina noscit, unde per similem actuum habitudinem, ad aliorum duorum partium appellationem cognitionemque altissimi conscendamus.”

³² Ibid., *Conclusio* no. 30: “Magni corporei hominis mas est nitida machina celi, femina vero ea quae obscurior lunaris elementarisque cernitur.”

³³ Ibid., *Conclusio* no. 31: “Archetipi hominis mentalem angelorum cetum marem dicimus, feminam eum quem animasticum asserimus.”

³⁴ Ibid., *Conclusio* no. 32: “Si istorum cuiusvis hominum marem feminamque per se aspexeris tam marem, quam feminam in novem primaria completaque membra absolve: si vero marem cum femina et hac cum mare ut unum (sicuti et re vera sunt) iudicaveris, in decem primaria completaque membra, quemadmodum et legem sacraeque dei nomina partiri dinosces.”

³⁵ Ibid., *Conclusio* no. 33: “Legis que perpetuo manent membra sunt indispensabilia decem precepta decalogi.”

³⁶ Ibid., *Conclusio* no. 34: “Sic et carnalis hominis artus, et ipsum in perpetuo peculiarique sibi esse constituentes decem enumerantur: utpote spiritus, cerebrum, pulmo, cor, epar, fel, splen, renes, genitalia, matrix cum ceteris illi annexis.”

<i>Macrocosm</i>	<i>Homo archetypus</i> (according to the theologians)		<i>Divine Names</i>		<i>Sefirot</i>		<i>Quidditates of the Macrocosm</i>		<i>Categories</i>		<i>Body</i>		<i>Simplices</i>		<i>Quidditates of the body</i>	
	<i>Homo archetypus</i> (according to the Jews)	<i>Homo archetypus</i> (according to the theologians)	<i>Eheie</i>	<i>Eheie</i>	<i>Diadema supremum</i>	<i>Privatio</i>	<i>Substantia</i>	<i>Spiritus</i>	<i>Os</i>	<i>Menstrua</i>						
Celum intellectuale	Haios hacodes	Seraphim	Eheie	Eheie	Diadema supremum	Privatio	Substantia	Spiritus	Os	Menstrua						
Primum mobile	Ofanin	Cherubim	Ioh	Ioh	Sapientia	Materia	Quanto	Cerebrum	Cartilago	Sperma						
Orbis stellarum	Erelim	Throni	Tetragrammaton prolatum Elohim	Tetragrammaton prolatum Elohim	Prudentia	Forma	Quali	Pulmo	Nervus	Plasmativus spiritus						
Saturnus	Hasmalim	Dominationes	El	El	Gratia	Corpus	Relatio	Cor	Corda	Massa seu embrio						
Jupiter	Seraphim	Virtutes	Eloha	Eloha	Fortitudo	Elementum	Ubi	Epar	Ligamentum	Humores						
Mars	Malachim	Potestates	Elohim	Elohim	Gloria	Minerale	Quando	Fel	Fortalicium (Hebrew hisuk)	Organicum corpus						
Sol	Elohim	Principatus	Tetragrammaton zevaos	Tetragrammaton zevaos	Eternum	Vegetale	Positio	Splen	Arteria	Vegetativum						
Venus	Bene Elohim	Archangeli	Elohim zevaos	Elohim zevaos	Confessio	Animale	Habitus	Renes	Vena	Sensitivum						
Mercurius	Cherubim	Angeli	Sadajj	Sadajj	Fundamentum	Rationale	Agere	Genitale	Paniculum	Ratio						
Luna	Iscim	Animasticum	Edonay	Edonay	Regnum	Intellectuale	Pati	Matrix	Caro	Mens						

It would be possible to add additional groups of ten elements and refer them to the *sefirot*, *in quas omnia vergunt*, as Ricius writes, quoting the *Commentary of Pseudo-Rabad*, which was actually a work of Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi,³⁷ where the author tries to connect the first three *sefirot* with different chambers of the human brain and the remaining inferior seven, to the seven orifices of the head. It is interesting to note that Ricius attributes this commentary to a “Rabi Isac Magnus,” identified by Joseph Blau, without any basis, as Isaac the Blind.³⁸

I would like to stress that Ricius does not try to establish a precise correspondence among the individual elements of the series he proposes, which is quite understandable considering that he would have had difficulties trying to connect the seven planets of Ptolemaic astronomy and astrology with the symbolic meaning of each *sefirah*. This problem had already been known to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who proposed a necessary shift in the traditional disposition of the planets, moving Saturn from above Jupiter to a place under the sun and immediately before Venus, because the connection between the sun and the sixth *sefirah*, *Tiferet*, had to be kept.³⁹ Pico further added his cautionary formula: “Whatever other Cabalists say” (*quicquid dicant caeteri cabalistsae*), knowing that his opinion was isolated and not sustained by a general consensus. The correspondence Pico proposes between the Ten Commandments and the *sefirot*, required mere juggling and brought other examples of where the canonical order could not be kept,⁴⁰ again for symbolical reasons. For instance, in order to make the seventh commandment (“thou shalt not steal”) correspond to Mercury, who was, as a divinity of the Pagans’ Olympus, connected with theft, Pico had to move the commandment down the list to match the ninth *sefirah* (*Yesod*). Similar problems, for those without a kabbalistical background, were the object of the speculative writings of Abraham ibn Ezra who, in his commentary on the Pentateuch, tried to reconcile the Decalogue and

³⁷ Cf. Gershom Scholem, “The Author of the Commentary on the Sefer Yetzirah attributed to Rabad and His Works,” *Kiryat Sefer* 4 (1928): 286–302 (Hebrew).

³⁸ Scholem writes in his copy of Blau’s book on the margin of the footnote where Blau proposes this identification: לא ולא!, no and no! The statement of the correct identification is found on the same page on the margin above.

³⁹ See the *Conclusiones* in S.A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico’s 900 Theses (1486): The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems* (Temple, Ar.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998), 540 (*Conclusio* 48 *secundum opinionem propriam*).

⁴⁰ Farmer, *Syncretism in the West* (*Conclusio* no. 49 *secundum opinionem propriam*).

the ten spheres of the medieval cosmos. These writings interested a Christian readership to such a degree that during the sixteenth century this peculiar commentary on the Decalogue was translated twice.⁴¹

The concurrent cosmologic-kabbalistic models by Pico and Ricius influenced the entire development of Christian Kabbalah for decades to come, but a real consensus on this difficult matter was never reached. As far as Ricius' lists are concerned, one can see from the table that there exists a certain correspondence between the human body and the *sefirot* in only one location. This is proven conversely by the inverted list, that is, the one numbering the *quidditates* of the body, where the menstrual blood and the semen are registered. It is obvious that these two particular items should be in the last and the penultimate place. This is, in fact, the only constant feature in all the lists: the prominent identification of the *sefirah Yesod* (Fundament) with the male and of the *sefirah Malkhut* (Kingdom) with the feminine. This corresponds very well to the last two Aristotelian categories, active and passive, giving the picture, at least superficially, a credible philosophical garb.

I do not wish to go into details here, however, as Ricius' lists demonstrate, it is easier to obtain a significant group of ten objects than to show their relationship, if we want to keep a given order. If I am not mistaken, it has not yet been noted that a curious shift took place between the first⁴² and the last versions of this "dogmatic" approach to Kabbalah. In his final version, Ricius modified only the list of the main limbs of the body. In the 1541 edition, the breath (*spiritus*) is not listed at all, and the brain has taken the first place. As a replacement, since the total must remain at ten, the stomach enters the sequence immediately after the heart.⁴³ Even so emended, the list does not automatically correspond to the traditional association of limbs to the *sefirot*, as one can deduce, for instance, from the position of the heart, traditionally connected with the sixth *sefirah*, as we will see later on. What does not change along various re-writings is, as I already pointed out, the central issue of the bi-sexual character of this ideal *and* concrete body and the precise correspondence, also from a positional point of view, of the last two limbs, planets, *sefirot*, *quidditates*,⁴⁴ categories and so forth.

⁴¹ First by Sebastian Münster and again by Jean Mercier.

⁴² The second version is unchanged in this respect in comparison to the first.

⁴³ Pistorius 1587, 121 (*Theorema* no. 24): "Terreni hominis membra, quae et speciem perpetuant, et individuum conservant, quoque decem enumerant, videlicet cerebrum, pulmo, cor, stomachus, epar, fel, splen, ren, genitale, matrix cum annexis."

⁴⁴ Inverting, as I suggested, the order of the entire list.

I wish to put forward the claim that this body is still a Jewish body, meaning that the *membrum virile* is circumcised. In his list of attributes and symbolic designations for the *sefirot*, Ricius adds *foedus circumcisionis*, the covenant⁴⁵ of circumcision as a symbolic equivalent for the ninth *sefirah*, usually connected with the phallus. He bases this equivalence on the observations made in Gikatilla's *Sha'are Orah*,⁴⁶ and on the *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut (Liber divinae ordinationis)*.⁴⁷ This corresponds very well to a wide-spread kabbalistic doctrine which sees in every precept of the Torah a mysterious connection with the supreme reality. It is true that Ricius, perhaps in order to avoid a blatant claim which would have offended his Christian readers, refrained from translating

⁴⁵ Blau, *The Christian Interpretation*, 71, translates, quite oddly, with "the rite of circumcision."

⁴⁶ It is perhaps useful to quote here Ricius' translation of Gikatilla's passage, concerning the ninth *sefirah*, *Yesod*, speaking of its connection with circumcision. It is remarkable, *ex silentio*, that Ricius, who comments upon many topics of his source, does not add any remarks on this specific theme: "Idem etiam oraculum, El hai, בריית, BERIS, idest foedus in lege scribitur: omnis enim legis dictio quae foedus sonat, unum de tribus sphericis luminibus insinuat, scilicet El hai, Edonai, bina, idest prudentiam. At foedus prudentiae foedus est oris, foedus linguae, foedus labiorum. Scribitur enim quia per hos horum eloquiorum tecum excidi foedus [Ex. 34:27]. Foedus vero El hai, foedus dicitur pacis, foedus sabati, foedus arcus. Instituit et nobis mundi conditor circumcisionis foedus ut per ipsum El hai consortes efficiamur. Foedus autem Edonai foedus concernit legis, quae inter El hai prudentiaeque foedus iuncta consistit; et quum El hai atque prudentiae metris templum haereat Edonai, id ipsum sibi foederis cognomen adaptat, iuxta aenigma foedus linguae foedusque effusorii. Idem circumcisionis ostensio aperit, ut illud sapientum prodit: Si circumciderit et circumcisi membri praepitium membri coronam non patefecerit pro nihilo circumcisio ipsa reputabitur [cf. bShabbat 137b]; membri enim circumcisio ostensio coronae, abditum repraesentat Edonai; quumque defuerit ostensio, primum utique sphericum oraculum per quod in Tetragrammaton edem ingredimur deesse iudicabitur. Enunciatur etiam dimensio ista ארת Oss, idest signum eo quod inde ostenta et signa in seculo innoventur, quare nimirum si in aegypti exitu, quum orationi annexa fuisset redemptio quam plura effulserint portenta atque prodigia, cui concordat illud: et vidit (vel respexit) deus Elohim filios israhel et cognovit Elohim [Ex. 2:25], nec non illud: Et recordatus sum foederis mei [Ex. 9:15]. Dicitur etiam sabatum (quod et El hai metrum refert) signum, ut scribitur: Inter me et filios israel ipsa est in perpetuum [Ex. 31:17]. Similiter et circumcisio, quae hanc ipsam spheram El hai ostendit, signum nuncupari didicimus, ut illud: circumcidite carnis praepitium vestrum et cetera [Gen. 17:11]. Sic pariter et arcus signum nominatur, quemadmodum scribitur: Arcum meum dedi in nube erique in signum foederis et cetera [Gen. 9:13]. Foederis autem arcus, ut antea expressimus, foedus denunciat El hai, quotiens ergo signi prolationem audies El hai dimensionem intellige, quod recordationis mysterium exponit, siquidem omnes saeculi filios idem in memoriam revocat El hai. At foederis sabati et circumcisionis signum, huic tantum filios conciliat Israel: signum vero foederis arcus in omnia quae terrarum complectitur orbis applicatur."

⁴⁷ See, especially, chapter 10 (*Sha'ar ha-adam*, that is *The gate of man*).

the most open statements where Gikatilla repeatedly underlines that there is no revelation of the Torah and no access to the contemplation of the mysteries of the divine figure without circumcision of the flesh,⁴⁸ but he did not delete the passage altogether. From the portion he did translate, it is quite clear that the circumcision of the flesh plays a central role in easing the way from one sexual dimension to the other, putting sexuality, but also the mystical journey, under the sign of the covenant: the expression “uncovering the corona,” an act that has to be performed ritually by the *mohel*, is consequently interpreted as opening the way to contemplation of the tenth *sefirah*, the female, called not only Malkhut, but also *Atarah* (Corona = crown).

It would appear that this neutral or even positive view of circumcision, coming from a converted Jew, was a remnant of his cultural and religious background, and could not but disturb a smooth reception of his ideas among Christians.⁴⁹ The entire conception of an anthropomorphic correspondence between the limbs of the human body and the mystical shape of the Godhead is scandalous enough, not to speak of the hermaphroditic representation of God himself, but even the few who dared to present such a system in Latin for a Christian readership could not leave this very idea uncensored. As the first result of an ongoing research project, I intend to present here the parallel representation of the “Archetype”⁵⁰ as described by the Franciscan of Venice

⁴⁸ See, for example, J. Gikatilla, *Sha'are orah*, chapter 2: ואלמלא ברית מילה שהיא ברית: והכל תלוי בברית מילה שהוא השרש התחתון של אות ו' וה' היא סוד התורה שבעל פה שהיא וכותי שהוא [Everything depends upon the covenant of circumcision, which is the lower root of the letter *waw*, whereas the letter *he* is the secret of oral Torah, which is the secret of the uncovering of the corona; therefore the Torah could not be given to a Gentile because he is uncircumcised]; וכותי שהוא [And the Gentile, that is an uncircumcised, who studies the Torah is subject to the death penalty]. See Joseph Gikatilla, *Gates of Light*, trans. A. Weinstein (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 77–83, especially 80–81.

⁴⁹ Ricius presents in other works of his as a matter of fact a Christian orthodox view of circumcision as being superseded by baptism and, not being part of the Decalogue, as a not unchangeable tenet of the divine law, see *De coelesti agricultura*, in Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticæ scriptores*, 92–94.

⁵⁰ A revealing terminological shift has also taken place here: archetypus for Ricius means the world of angels, but Giorgio uses it as a clear designation of the mystical shape of the Godhead.

Francesco Giorgio⁵¹ (also Zorzi or Franciscus Georgius Venetus; 1466–1540), a contemporary of Paulus Ricius and one of the most prominent Christian Kabbalists of the Renaissance.

In his *De harmonia mundi totius*, published in Venice in 1525, the project of showing the harmony of all dimensions of the world, already central for Ricius, is put forward with a very ambitious program, marching, if a corporeal metaphor in this context may be allowed, on two legs. The project merges a kabbalistic inspiration, based on a large library of kabbalistic texts,⁵² very well digested rather than explicitly quoted,⁵³ as it was the case for Reuchlin, with an unflinching adhesion to a blend of Platonism and Hermetism of the sort Marsilio Ficino popularized in the second half of the fifteenth century. Even if Ricius and Giorgio agreed on the kabbalistic inspiration, they could not be further removed from one another regarding to their philosophical heritage: the Aristotelian converted Jew, with an open sympathy for Averroes, stands on one side of the philosophical spectrum while Giorgio's Hermetic Platonism is located exactly on the opposite. Giorgio was especially committed to attacking, with extremely intense polemical sharpness, the kind of philosophy that was taught in the universities, and particularly in the Averroistic bulwark of Padua. Nevertheless the two Christian Kabbalists agree on many points, especially on the idea of a possible concordance of all things. Giorgio, following the path paved by Pico della Mirandola's understanding of the Kabbalah and Marsilio Ficino's Platonism, represents such concordance, as a grand synthesis of all things based on mathematic, that is to say, musical proportions. It would seem that they also agree on the fundamental hermaphroditic conception of the divinity, also based in Giorgio on the biblical verse Gen 1:27: *ad imaginem Dei creavit illum, masculum et feminam creavit eos*, whose interpretation is so prominent in Ricius' exegesis. Nevertheless, a more careful analysis of Giorgio's exposition reveals that he was committed to the myth of the androgynous origin of human body told by Aristo-

⁵¹ I have listed the most useful bibliography on Francesco Giorgio in Saverio Campanini, "Francesco Giorgio's Criticism of the Vulgata: Hebraica Veritas or Mendosa Traductio?," in *Hebrew to Latin—Latin to Hebrew*, ed. Giulio Busi (Berlin–Turin: Nino Aragno Editore, 2006), 206–231.

⁵² See Saverio Campanini, "Le fonti ebraiche del *De harmonia mundi* di Francesco Zorzi," *Annali di Ca' Foscari* 38, 3 (1999): 29–74.

⁵³ Explicit quotations of Kabbalistic materials are rather the exception in Giorgio's *De harmonia mundi*, whereas they occur systematically in his later work, *In Scripturam sacram problemata* (Venice, 1536); see François Secret, *Le Zôhar chez les Kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Paris: Mouton, 1962).

phanes in Plato's *Symposium*,⁵⁴ as interpreted by Marsilio Ficino in his *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis*,⁵⁵ and on the famous dictum, found in the first tractate (*Poimandres*) of the *Corpus Hermeticum*,⁵⁶ on the fecundity of both genders filling God's creative power. Whereas Ricius brings male and female organs near to one another in his figure, while keeping them rigorously separated, Giorgio seems to think rather of one sexual function merging both sexes into one. The divergence is even more remarkable when one focuses on the details of the series which, and this is again a common feature in both Ricius' and Giorgio's lists, are meant to express proportions rather than exact correspondence. If one looks at the cosmological plan, for instance, it is easy to see that, while Ricius skipped the details in cosmology in order to avoid the difficult problem of linking the symbolic meaning of the planets with the corresponding *sefirot*, Giorgio attempts to show this correspondence in the details. However, he presupposes a different cosmology to Ricius, with nine spheres or, which has the same consequence, he does not count the *empyreum* among the other spheres. He adopts this strategy whenever he wishes to reconcile enneads with decades (for example the hierarchies of the angels). Therefore, he has to adjust his pattern and to accept a peculiar asymmetry: the undisputable advantage, in symbolic terms, to have Saturn above Jupiter and connected to *Binah*, leaving Mars to correspond with *Gevurah*, has to be paid with the necessity to connect the Moon with two *sefirot*, *Yesod* and *Malkhut*. One can also think, however, that the androgynous character of the Moon, as

⁵⁴ Cf. Plato, *Symposium* 189a–193d. It is particularly interesting to note that Aristophanes associated the three original genders, male, female and androgynous with two planets and an element: the sun presiding over the male, the earth over the female and the moon, because of its mixed nature, over the androgynous. On the dual nature of the moon in Giorgio's thought, see the discussion below.

⁵⁵ Written in 1469. See Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, ed. Raymond Marcel (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1956). See also Ficino, *Commentaires sur le Traité de l'Amour ou le Festin de Platon (Commentarium in Convivium Platonis)*. Traduction anonyme du XVIIIe siècle éditée et présentée par S. Matton avec une étude de P. Hadot (Paris–Milan: Arché, 2001).

⁵⁶ *Corpus Hermeticum* 1,9. The passage, quoted in Ficino's translation appears many times in Zorzi's *magnum opus*: see *De harmonia mundi*, 1,1,5; 1,1,13; 2,1,7; 2,4,2; 2,5,13; 3,8,2. For another occurrence of the same passage in a mystical commentary on the Song of Songs, where Giorgio, or a pupil of his, states clearly that the feminine is also present in God, but the theologians did not dare to attribute a feminine dimension to the divinity, see Campanini, "Ein unbekannter Kommentar," 279–280.

found in Plato's *Symposium*, was precisely the starting point of Giorgio, creating, as a collateral effect, a more plausible association between *sefirot* and planets, as it emerges in the following table of correspondences:

<i>Sefirot</i>	<i>Spheres</i>	<i>Divine Names</i>
Keter	Primum mobile	אהיה אשר אהיה
Ḥokhmah	Fixed stars	י יהוה
Binah	Saturn	ה יהוה
Gedullah	Jupiter	אל
Gevurah	Mars	אלהים
Tiferet	Sun	יהוה
Nezah	Venus	אלהים צבאות
Hod	Mercury	יהוה צבאות
Yesod	Moon	שדי
Malkhut	Moon	אדני

The justification adduced by Giorgio reminds us of Ricius' mode of thought, although the consequence of the disposition of the series are diverging: the Moon corresponds to *Malkhut* as receptacle of the influx of all spheres but, also as an individual planet, that is to say, with an autonomous identity and with the capacity of influencing the sublunar world, it corresponds to *Yesod*. In kabbalistic terms, this means that Giorgio attributes an androgynous character to the Moon, which is both active and passive at once. These active and passive principles were carefully divided by Ricius, between the Moon (obvious symbol of the passive and traditionally identified with *Malkhut*) and an unspecified planet (from a merely positional point of view it should be Mercury, but one cannot exclude also Mars or any other masculine planet).

Let us now examine how the limbs of the human body, according to Giorgio, fit this pattern. First of all, one should stress that the list of the ten limbs is quite different from Ricius', and is not completely free from ambiguities. In the sixth section (*tonus*) of the first canticle, Giorgio describes the shape of the Archetypus as a tree, according to the classic kabbalistic imagery, and states that this image allows him to show, albeit only allusively (Giorgio refers to a metaphor taken from painting: *adumbrando potius quam pingendo*), the mysterious analogy existing between the human body, the Christ (identified by Giorgio with the biblical Tree of Life), and God himself. In his words:

Arbor itaque homo est, arbor Christus, arbor et ipse Deus, qui in arboris typo, eo sacramento describitur, ut membra hominis omnia ipsi convenient.⁵⁷

Man is therefore a tree, Christ is also a tree and even God Himself, who is described according to the figure of a tree in such mysterious way, that all limbs of the human body correspond to Him.

Giorgio establishes a correspondence between the limbs and the *sefirot*, but sometimes he keeps his language in the allusive mode, so that even in this case we cannot trace a precise relationship. The head corresponds, obviously, to *Keter*: “Eius cacumen (quod coronam vocant) caput est, cui ipsa corona imponitur.” The head is followed by the two eyes which, together with the ears, explicitly mentioned, seem to correspond to the second and third *sefirah*.⁵⁸ The right and the left arm are characterized in such a way that no doubt remains that they represent *Gedullah* and *Gevurah*.⁵⁹ That the ears do not correspond to a specific *sefirah* is also confirmed indirectly by the fact that *Tiferet* (the Sun on the cosmological plan) is explicitly assigned to the heart (the most beautiful limb).⁶⁰ *Nezah* and *Hod*, the seventh and the eighth *sefirah* are attributed, albeit only by way of allusion, to the two breasts, once again underlining the hermaphroditic character of the figure, because it is explicitly stated that these breasts poured out milk and honey and, symbolically, that the prophets suckled them.⁶¹ Now, to come to the point which interests us most: *Yesod* is said to correspond, in a

⁵⁷ *De harmonia mundi* 1,6,34.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: “Capiti autem utrinque est oculus: dextro quidem remunerandos benignissime intuetur, et sinistro puniendos acrius respicit; de quibus oculis dicit scriptura: oculi domini contemplantur bonos et malos. ... Sunt ibidem et aures, de quibus quoque canitur in psalmis: et aures eius in preces eorum” [Ps. 33:16].

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: “Sub oculis et capite sunt utraque brachia et manus dextra et sinistra: illa quippe misericordiam impartitur, et omnia bona: hac autem punit malemerentes lege severissima, quae ab ipsa provenit.”

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: “In meditullio autem tanquam cor, et totus venter est verum pulchrum socraticum, immo divinum, a quo omnia pulchra, de quo psalmographus ait: Virtus et pulchritudo in sanctuario eius [Ps. 95,6]. Illud enim תִּפְרֵת *tipheret*, quod interpretatum est magnificentia, potius illud verum pulchrum significat, quo omnia pulchrescunt vita et pulchritudine divina. Huic respondet pulcherrimum, et excellentius omnium membrorum cor summopere a Deo ipso concupitum, quo moto in Dei amorem, movetur et cor divinum in amorem diligentis.”

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: “... ut in Canticis dicitur: Dilectus meus mihi, et ego illi, inter ubera mea commorabitur [Song 1:12]. Ubera enim haec sub brachiis collocata sunt, quae lactare desiderabat Salomon dicens: Osculetur me osculo oris sui, quia meliora sunt ubera tua vino [Song 1:1], quia suavissimum lac propinant, quod prophetas et amicos Dei constituit, et sapientes rerum divinarum.”

rather discreet way, to all the internal organs and to some instruments, which are the fundamentals of the whole life and generation, located under the heart (*sub corde autem sunt intestina omnia, et instrumenta quaedam, tamquam fundamenta totius vitae, et generationis*).⁶² It would appear, all the obscurities of language notwithstanding, that Giorgio is thinking of both masculine and feminine organs, attributing life (that is Eve) to the matrix, and generation (in an active sense) to the male (Adam). An indirect confirmation is provided by the very fact that the tenth *sefirah*, *Malkhut*, is said to correspond to the feet.⁶³

It is quite clear that, whereas Ricius intended the organs of the body in an essentialist sense, looking for the ones that were indispensable for the definition of “body” (the ones that could not be dispensed with), and therefore lists mostly internal organs, Giorgio has in mind the external form of the body and lists many limbs which, as the feet, are not essential for the body: in plain terms, we can imagine a body surviving and being perceived as such even without ears or eyes or feet, but not without lungs or kidneys. Paradoxically the organs of generation, conflated by Giorgio into one, could be understood as an exception to this pattern, but they were essential to Ricius’ anthropomorphic model and they are listed as if they were internal and not dispensable, whereas Giorgio identifies them with the entire invisible part of the body, representing the center of the Vitruvian man, as he openly states,⁶⁴ against the explicit indication of Vitruvius,⁶⁵ not in the navel but in the genitals (see figure 1, p. 376).

What one would hopelessly search for is any reference to circumcision, which Giorgio mentions only very sparingly in his lengthy treatise, and always in classical Pauline dismissive terms.⁶⁶ We cannot

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid: “Ultimum autem in archetypo existens pedes representat, per quos terram inhabitat, quae dicitur scabellum pedum suorum: unde et illud Hebraice Sachina dicitur, id est habitatio in nobis.”

⁶⁴ *De harmonia mundi* 1,6,2: “A cuius umbilico secundum aliquos, sed a pectine (ut verius est) si circinus ducatur circulus ille perfecte conducitur.”

⁶⁵ Vitruvius, *De architectura* 3,1,3: “Item corporis centrum medium naturaliter est umbilicus.”

⁶⁶ *De harmonia mundi* 1,8,7: Angels do not intervene in human matters only in favor of the circumcised. In the same chapter the intervention of an angel is referred to, which took place in order for Peter to abandon his reservations against uncircumcised people. 1,8,10: (neutral) the circumcision, connected to the election of Abraham, is equated to the firmament, separating the elected people from the other human families, which were not worth of God’s predilection; 2,3,10: the new Law of Christ, abolishing circumcision, is opposed to the old Law of bloody sacrifices; 1,4,14: commenting

suppose that this omission was involuntary because we know that Giorgio, commenting upon Pico della Mirandola's *Conclusiones* in 1539, although many years after the publication of the *De harmonia mundi*, was perfectly aware of the role circumcision played in opening the way to the unification of *Yesod* and *Malkhut*. Pico dedicated three of his *Conclusiones* (1486) to circumcision, two of them *secundum opinionem sapientum cabalistarum* and one *secundum opinionem propriam*. The first two⁶⁷ alluded in a very enigmatic way to the mystery of circumcision and located its archetype in the world of *sefirot*, thus anticipating the development we have traced here, but in the third⁶⁸ Pico underlined the point that the necessity of circumcision was removed after the coming of the Messiah. Giorgio commented on the two series of the kabbalistic *Conclusiones* shortly before his death, for an audience of fellow Franciscans. In his commentary he shows that he was very well aware of the mystical meaning of circumcision,⁶⁹ but this *privatissimum* was not meant for pub-

upon Paul to the Romans, Giorgio underlines that salvation does not depend upon circumcision, although, polemically against Lutheran theology, he also defends the importance of the works, which obviously, do not include circumcision any more; 3,2,5 as Gregorius the Great stated, the effect of circumcision is obtained, in the new covenant, through baptism.

⁶⁷ They are the *conclusiones* numbers 31 and 32; see Farmer, *Syncretism*, 358 (no. 31): "Data est circumcisio ad liberationem a virtutibus immundis quae in circuitu ambulat"; and (no. 32): "Ideo circumcisio fit octava die, quia est superior quam sponsa universalizata." See also Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem: The Israeli Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1989), 44–45.

⁶⁸ It is the *conclusio* no. 27: "Ex principiis cabalistarum evidenter elicatur quod per adventum messiae tolletur circumcisionis necessitas"; see Farmer, *Syncretism*, 530.

⁶⁹ I quote here the commentary on the *conclusio* no. 32, from the manuscript Yahuda Var. 24 preserved at the Jewish National and University Library of Jerusalem, fols. 35^v–36^r: "Nota quod circumcisio poterat institui et ordinari facienda decima, vel quarta seu quinta vel qualibet altera die; tamen ordinata fuit facienda octava die, quia octava dies est Iesod. / Nam Iesod est octava Sefirah computando Nizah et Hod pro una tantum numeratione. A qua quidem Sefirah Iesod venit pactum et venit ipsa vita aeterna. Unde sicut ab ipsa numeratione venit ipsa vita aeterna ita circumcisio ipsa erat pignus et arrha vitae ipsius aeternae, et qui non circumcidebatur habebat pignus et arrha inferni. Sicut scriptum est Masculus cuius praeputii caro circumcisa non fuerit delebitur anima illa de populo suo [Gen. 17:14]. Dicitur ergo conclusio Ideo circumcisio fit octava die, quae scilicet est supposita ipsi Iesod, quia est superior scilicet Iesod quam sponsa universalizata idest quam Malcut, quae est matrix et uxor omnium planetarum et fontium superiorum." Giorgio, as one can see, could not reconstruct the passage from Recanati's commentary on the Pentateuch where Pico found his wisdom and postulated that in order to connect *Yesod* with the eighth day one was forced to count *Nezah* and *Hod* as one *sefirah*. This again demonstrates how easily Giorgio rearranged the *sefirot* to make them fit a given exegetical need.

lication and, in fact, it was issued only posthumously under the name of his pupil Arcangelo da Borgonovo.⁷⁰

To sum up, the process of adaptation of one and the same Jewish doctrine arrived at quite different conclusions, not only as far as the theosophical implications of this esoteric lore are concerned, but also, as a direct outcome of the main tenets of this teaching centered on the correspondence between the image of man and the Godhead, the result of two peculiar anthropologies. Aristotle or Plato, as concurrent alternative options, seem to represent the necessary mediators that bias and, at the same time make possible, the comprehension and assimilation of Kabbalah even before the theological difficulties brought about by this operation could come to the fore.

The reception of Kabbalah into the Christian world, attempted by several intellectuals at the dawn of the Renaissance, was very far from representing a homogeneous view. However, the shift we have traced, from a representation of the divinity where both gender traits are present but not mixed, to a decidedly androgynous model will prove to be deeply influential in western esotericism, in particular in alchemical literature. Nevertheless, the only very remarkable act of censorship appears to have taken place at the most specifically Jewish element of culturalization of the body, the sign of the covenant.

⁷⁰ In his also posthumously published work *Cabalistarum selectiora obscuraque dogmata a I. Pico ex eorum commentationibus pridem excerpta et nunc primum luculentissimis interpretationibus illustrata* (Venice, 1569), reprinted in Pistorius, *Artis cabalisticae scriptores*, 731–868. On 821–824 Arcangelo sums up Giorgio's ideas and adds, according to his method, information he found in Ricius' works.

Liure sixieme.

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A comparaison est permise avec les infinis, Donc toutes les choses basses imitent les plus hautes, voire mesme le souuerain Ouurier, qui est à bon droit nommé l'Archetype, comme la premiere forme &, pour dire ainsi, l'estampe de toutes choses qui entre toutes tient le degré de principauté:ainçois qui est l'Idée de toutes les images qui se voyent aux choses basses,& lequel rend plus parfaitement à soy semblables celles qui luy approchent de plus pres. Attendu donc que Dieu est Sfere intelligible,& que tout ce monde se fait voir d'une figure ronde, il est necessaire que l'homme aussi, qui tient le milieu entre Dieu & le Monde soit comprins & borné de mesme forme,& qu'il imite en l'Amé la Sfere intellectuelle,& au corps la sensible, que peut demonstrier la peinture presente.

B Du nombril de laquelle (comme veulent aucuns) ou bien du membre viril (comme il est plus veritable) si vous contournez le compas vous tracerez vn cercle parfaitement rond. Dond on recognoist que toute la mesure du corps prouient de la rondeur,& tend à la rondeur mesme. Car le chef est rond, semblable à vn globe & boule ronde, dict Lactance. Et tout le corps aussi est fait au tour en mesure bien proportionnée. Car de l'extremité du mollet du bras deuers la main, à l'endroict où le pouls est agité, iusques au poulce en mesure circulaire se trouue vne proportion double & d'autant & demy. Et du coul iusques aux iambes la mesme proportion. Du poulce iusques au bras pres de l'espaule y a proportion triple. Pareillement du bras au mollet de la cuisse proportion triple. Nous pourrions discourir beaucoup d'autres pointds touchant les nombres & proportions du corps humain tant apparouissans que cachez:mais ie crains qu'en traictant des nombres, ie n'outrepasse le nombre & la mesure, & que nos forces debiles ne succombent sous vn si grand fardeau: attendu que telles choses sont cachées (conduictes toutesfois par Harmonie) aux veines, aux nerfs, & aux entrailles,



Lactance.

C que iamais personne ne les a peu trouuer, non pas mesmes (dict saint Augustin) la cruelle diligence des anatomiques, qui decouperent & dechirent les corps des morts, pour rechercher tout ce qui y est caché, & afin qu'ils apprennent d'où, & comment, & en quels lieux il faut apposer la medecine. Toutesfois nul n'a iamais sçeu trouuer les nombres accomplis, desquels consiste par dehors ceste disposition Harmonique de tout le corps, comme celle de quelque organe par dedans: pource parauenture que nul n'a osé la rechercher. Si est-ce toutesfois, (comme poursuyt saint Augustin, & comme Hippocrate, & les Pythagoriens l'enseignent,) qu'il y a assez de choses en cest œuure Harmonique pour en tracer pour le moins les ombres & premiers traicts d'aucunes, si nous ne pouuons les depeindre toutes.

Voyez Vitruue & Albert Durer.

S. Augustin.

Hippocrate. Pythagoriens.

De la proportion des mesures en l'homme.

C H A P . 3.



R A R ce que rien à la volée, ny rien de dissonant & desacordé n'a esté fait en l'homme, mais tout y a esté conduit & réglé par nombres, à celle fin (comme dict Damascene) que les membres d'iceluy gardent vne proportion par ensemble, & avec les parties du Monde, ainsi que cordes en vne Harpe: A ceste cause nous traicterons quelques pointds d'entre plusieurs, touchant le soing & diligence

Damascene.

q ij

THE HUMAN BODY AS A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT IN THE SERMONS OF JUDAH MOSCATO*

GIANFRANCO MILETTO

The interpretation of the Renaissance has been the object of many studies and has sparked many heated discussions about its relationship with the Middle Ages. All of this controversy has promoted a better understanding of both the Renaissance and the medieval era as historical moments closely connected and yet clearly different.¹ A typical feature of the Renaissance is harmony, which is expressed in art and also as a life-ideal whose patterns were sought after in classical culture. A considerable discrepancy existed between this ideal and reality, however. The desire for equilibrium and for artistic and intellectual serenity was jeopardized by the crisis of traditional values.

The Renaissance brought forth a new conception of the human being, a reevaluation of his activity in the world and, accordingly, a redefinition of his relationship to God. The ideal of an active and productive life and the admiration for the performance of human action according to the values of a merchant society was often felt to be in contradiction with traditional Christian ethics. A rift arose between the endeavor to reach worldly success and the anxiety for the salvation of the soul. The actions of man were no longer turned only toward God, approximated on the model of Franciscan asceticism that found its exemplary literary representation in the *Divina Commedia* by Dante, but toward searching for his goal in the world itself, which often forced him to refrain from the traditional moral values. Therefore, man had to be “half beast and half man,” as Machiavelli imagined the perfect prince to be.²

* This paper was previously published with some changes in Hebrew in *Pe'amim* 2005 (104): 65–78.

¹ For an overview on this question, see Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948); Eugenio Garin, *Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Bari: Gius. Laterza, 1954) [reprint Rome and Bari: 1990].

² See chapter 18 of *The Prince* by Machiavelli, trans. with an introduction by William K. Marriott (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1908).

Within a Christian (neo)platonistic philosophy, one tried to find a new synthesis that would offer a solution to the crisis of the traditional hierarchy of values. Particularly important in this context was the work of Francesco Giorgio (or Giorgi or Zorzi) Veneto.³

Francesco Giorgio Veneto (Venice 1466–Asolo 1540) was one of the outstanding personalities among the Italian kabbalistic scholars, whose influence extended far beyond the Italian borders. Descending from a Venetian patrician family, Giorgio Veneto entered the Franciscan Order in 1480. His philosophy combines the mystical tradition of the Franciscans with the Hermetic-kabbalistic thought of Pico della Mirandola and the magic-neoplatonic philosophy of Marsilio Ficino.⁴ After Ficino's Latin translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in the year 1463, Hermetic tradition was released from the ban, which the medieval Church had issued because of its magic subject matter, and became part of the Renaissance culture. On the authority of leading Fathers of the Church, particularly Lactantius and Augustine, the authorship of the Hermetic writings was ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus.⁵ He was considered to be a wise Egyptian priest who had lived in pre-biblical times, a law-giver and a teacher of old wisdom. This wisdom was passed down, in an unbroken chain, to Plato. From Hermes arose one ancient theology (*prisca theologia*), an extra-biblical wisdom that foresaw the coming of Christianity.⁶ In the Florentine "Accademia Platonica," Giovanni Pico della Mirandola connected Hermetism with Kabbalah, which was interpreted according to Christian theology, and Hermes was paralleled to Moses.⁷

Francesco Giorgio Veneto was deeply influenced by the thought of Ficino and Pico. But Francesco Giorgio Veneto, who possessed a

³ For a thorough presentation of Francesco Giorgio Veneto and his work in the cultural context of his time, see Cesare Vasoli, *Profezia e ragione. Studi sulla cultura del Cinquecento e del Seicento* (Naples: Morano, 1974), 129–403; idem, "Marsilio Ficino e Francesco Giorgio Veneto," in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, 2 vols., ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Florence: Olshki, 1986), 2:533–554; idem, "Dall' 'Apocalypsis Nova' al 'De Harmonia Mundi.' Linee per una ricerca," in *I Frati minori tra '400 e '500. Atti del XII convegno internazionale. Assisi 18–20 ottobre 1984* (Assisi, 1986), 261–291.

⁴ Regarding Francesco Giorgio Veneto's interest in Kabbalah in the cultural context of his time, see Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago–London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 151; François Secret, *Les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Milan: Archè, 1985), 126–140; idem, *Hermétisme et Kabbale* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1992)

⁵ Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 6–7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14–15.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 84–86; 108–112.

good knowledge of the Hebrew language, added to the Christian Kabbalah of the Florentine tradition other new kabbalistic works which the expelled Spanish Jews had brought with them to Venice.⁸ In the Kabbalah, Francesco Giorgio Veneto saw the confirmation of the Christian truth, and he considered it the only exegetical method that could reveal the true, hidden sense of the sacred writings. For Giorgio Veneto, each Hebrew letter of the sacred writings shows manifold meanings that become gradually clear during the course of generations and reminds one of God's unfathomable, eternal wisdom.⁹ This eternal wisdom moulds the whole history of mankind and forms an unbroken chain of tradition that overcomes all differences of beliefs and philosophical teachings.¹⁰ Within nature, God's wisdom appears in the harmonic order of the variety of the being, which is founded on the divine unit. Francesco Giorgio Veneto explains his vision of the world order in *De harmonia mundi totius Cantica tria* (Venice 1525).¹¹ The idea of a universal harmony is also displayed in the structure of the book, which is divided

⁸ Frances A. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London–New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 29. For the Jewish sources in Giorgio Veneto's work and his attitude towards the Jewish culture, see Saverio Campanini, "Haophan betoc haophan. La struttura simbolica del De harmonia mundi di Francesco Zorzi," *Materia Giudaica* 3 (1997): 13–17; idem, "Le fonti ebraiche del De Harmonia mundi di Francesco Zorzi," *Annali di Ca' Foscari* XXXVIII/3 (1999): 29–74 and idem, "Talmudisti e cabbalisti. Un'immagine dell'ebraismo alle origini della qabbalah cristiana," in *Civiltà e popoli del Mediterraneo: immagini e pregiudizi*, ed. Domenico Felice and Anselmo Cassani (Bologna: Cooperativa Libreria Universitaria Editrice, 1999), 119–135.

⁹ Yates, *The Occult Philosophy*, 29; Secret, *Les kabbalistes chrétiens*, 131–133; Vasoli, *Profezia e ragione*, 156.

¹⁰ Vasoli, *Profezia e ragione*, 237–238, 242–243, 402–403.

¹¹ I used the first edition *Francisci Georgii Veneti Minoritanae Familiae De harmonia mundi totius cantica tria* (Venice, 1525), uncensored copy of the University Library of Cologne (shelf mark GB VII. 215b). In the same library is also a copy of the second edition (Paris, 1545), which is unfortunately heavily censored. The extensive work of almost 600 pages in the folio was translated by Guy Le Fèvre de la Boderie (1550–1613) into French (Paris, 1579). The work of Francesco Giorgio Veneto almost represents the *summa* of the Hermetic, neoplatonic and kabbalistic tradition of the Italian Renaissance. It is therefore obvious that the critics of this tradition mostly directed their attacks against Francesco Giorgio Veneto. One of them was Marin Mersenne (1588–1648), friend of Descartes and opponent of a spiritualist conception of nature. The kabbalistically inspired biblical exegesis of Francesco Giorgio Veneto (*In Scripturam Sacra Problemata*, Venice, 1536) was refuted by Mersenne in his *Quaestiones celeberrimae in Genesim cum accurata textus explicatione in hoc volumine athei et deistae impugnantur, et expugnantur et Vulgata editio ad haereticorum calumnijs vindicatur. Graecorum, et Hebraeorum Musica instauratur. Francisci Georgii Veneti Cabalistica dogmata fuscè refelluntur, quae passim in illius problematibus habentur. opus Theologis, Philosophis, Medicis, Iuriconsultis, Mathematicis, Musicis vero, et Catoptricus praesertim utile* (Paris: Sebastian Cramoisy, 1623).

into three sections named “songs” and every “song” into eight “tones.” Every “song” is introduced by a preface and by an “Index tonorum” (i.e., “index of tones”), in which are represented the elements of the creation, their order, and correlation. Each “tone” has its own index once again.

The order of the creation is understood in (neo)Platonic-Pythagorean meaning as a series of numeral ratios, which yield a musical harmony. Only the wise man, divinely inspired, can recognize in the apparent difference and variety of the world forms their interplay that causes cosmic harmony. Such wise men were Adam, Abraham, Moses, Solomon, and the Prophets.¹²

The dimensions of the Ark of the Covenant that Moses had built, and the measurements of Solomon’s Temple are based on the decimal order, which is the quintessence of the harmony, like the teachings of Pythagorean and platonic philosophy.¹³ God himself gave Moses the building plan for the Ark of the Covenant and ordered him to prepare it on the model that Moses had looked at on the mountain.¹⁴ According to Francesco Giorgio Veneto, this model shows the same proportions that underlie the entire creation. Accordingly, Solomon built the temple, God’s earthly residence. However, God dwells not only in one material construction but also in the human being himself, as Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16).¹⁵ The temple, both as architectural building and its manifestation in the human body, is therefore an illustration of the heavenly, universal

¹² *De harmonia mundi*, I, tonus 1, 2^r–3^r: “Quod a sanctis viris divino lumine collustratis de Deo discere possumus, quae tractamus”; III, tonus secundus, chap. 7, 23^r: “Multa enim cognovit Adam, Abraham, Moses, Salomon, caeterique prophetae, quae vulgares, et etiam multi, qui doctoris, et sapientis sibi nomen vendicant, minime norunt.” Although an intense eschatological belief is present in the *De harmonia mundi*, Giorgio Veneto doesn’t mention any author of the Franciscan prophetic tradition such as Gioacchino da Fiore or the “Beatus Amadeus.” Giorgio Veneto bases his eschatological expectation on neoplatonic authors (Plotinus, Augustinus, Pseudo-Dionysius, Origenes) combined with kabbalistic-Jewish writings. See Vasoli, *Profezia*, 153, 233, 332–333.

¹³ *De harmonia mundi*, *Proemium primi cantici*, 1^r and I, tonus quartus, chap. 32, 83^r: “Quam belle omnia haec depicta sint in arca, quam coelesti oraculo fabricavit Moses”; I, tonus quartus, chap. 33, 84^v: “Quanto mysterio omnes enneades in suo decimo convenient.” See also Vasoli, *Profezia e ragione*, 242–243, 262 and Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia perennis. Historische Umrisse abendländischer Spiritualität in Antike, Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 492, 498.

¹⁴ *De harmonia mundi*, I, tonus quartus, chap. 32, 83^r–84^v. See Ex. 25:40.

¹⁵ All biblical quotes are cited according to the *King James Bible*.

order, the connection between heavens and earth in which the units of measurement of the macrocosm and the microcosm coincide.¹⁶

The Solomonic Temple is paralleled with man's body, structured according to the same numeral ratios, which underlie the *ordo mundi*: "Man, who is the perfect image of the world, contains within the same proportions of all what is merged in the great world," says Francesco Giorgio Veneto, following Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.¹⁷ Giorgio Veneto's idea of the central position of man in the world is clearly explained through the illustration of the man in the circle (*Homo ad circulum*).¹⁸ The proportions of the human body correspond with the perfect harmonic circle of the universe, and in his twofold composition of body and soul, the man is correlated both with the corporeal world and the supercelestial world, where his soul was originally.¹⁹ According to the Renaissance aesthetic principles, Giorgio Veneto takes the man's body as a model for showing the harmonic correspondence between the universe and the human being. The Renaissance ideal of human beauty, the ideal of the perfect human body that displays all harmonic proportions, was typified in the *homo vitruvianus*, in that "well-built man" ("*homo bene figuratus*"), as it is described by Vitruvius in his third book of *De architectura*. Its importance for Renaissance culture can hardly be overestimated. Vitruvius' explanation of the proportions of the human body—"homo" can mean in Latin both "man" and "human being"—was represented in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with a male figure and "homo" was clearly understood as

¹⁶ *De harmonia mundi*, I, tonus quartus, chap. 32, 84r: "Quod tamen unum est [i.e., Tabernaculum] omnia complectendo: Cuius subsellium, et scabellum est hoc, quod habitamus mundanum tabernaculum: Ad cuius utriusque effigiem maximis mysteriis et illud a Mose, et templum a Salomone fabricatum est: sed hoc a Davide dispositum, et ordinatum: Quorum quoque imaginem gerit hoc humanum tabernaculum, et templum: quod secundum Apostolum sumus nos." See also Vasoli, *Profezia e ragione*, 262–263, 268; Yates, *The Occult Philosophy*, 29–30.

¹⁷ *De harmonia mundi*, I, tonus quintus, chap. 10, 91r: "Homo perfectissimum simulacrum mundi existens illa omnia, quae in magno mundo glomerantur, eadem proportione continet." Cf. also Vasoli, *Profezia*, 263 note 74.

¹⁸ See figure 1, p. 376. About the influence of Neoplatonism, Hermeticism and Kabbalah on the anthropology of the Italian Renaissance and especially of Pico della Mirandola, see Moshe Idel, "Man as the 'Possible' Entity," in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 33–48.

¹⁹ See Vasoli, *Profezia e ragione*, 266–268; Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (Chichester: Academy Editions, 1988), 24–25 (first published in *Studies of the Warburg Institute* 19, London, 1949).

“vir.” The figure of the *Vitruvian Man* inscribed in a square and a circle was subject of many drawings of which the most known and celebrated is that of Leonardo da Vinci.²⁰ Giorgio Veneto’s drawing belongs to this tradition. He interprets the *Vitruvian Man* in the light of Christian theology and neoplatonic thought. The man’s body is regarded as a musical instrument, which “like the zither strings”²¹ can perceive and reproduce the cosmic consonance, based upon ternary numerical relationships and accomplished by the octave in the diatonic scale of the creation.²²

The whole cosmic structure is conceived by Giorgio Veneto neoplatonically as a process from the unity of God to the multiplicity of the creation through the mediation of the Word of God, namely Christ, who is “wisdom and word of God containing all things in an ideal manner (*ratione ideali*).”²³ Starting from the biblical statement of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, “but thou hast ordered all things in measure and number and weight,”²⁴ the divine creative process is explained through mathematical relationships based upon the perfect ternary number (symbol of the Trinity). For Giorgio Veneto all created things may be traced back to twenty-seven primary genera, distinct in three hierarchically linked series, each one of the nine genera producing a supercelestial, celestial, and elementary ennead.²⁵ Through them the divine unity extends gradually to the elementary world. The correlation of the three grades of the creative process also permits a return from the elementary world to the divine unity, which is the source of the universal harmony that

²⁰ For some drawings examples of the “Vitruvian Man,” see Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, 22–25. About the relation between architectural theories during the Renaissance and the idea of universal harmony, see also Paul von Naredi-Rainer, *Architektur und Harmonie. Zahl, Maß und Proportion in der abendländischen Baukunst* (Cologne: DuMont, 1999), 82–103.

²¹ *De harmonia mundi*, I, tonus sextus, chap. 3, 101^r: “sicut chordae in cithara.” Cf. Vasoli, *Profezia*, 266–267.

²² *De harmonia mundi*, I, tonus sextus, 98^v: “Qua concordia contineantur omnia in homine, tanquam in parvo in strumento.” See also *ibid.* 87^r–88^v and Vasoli, *Profezia*, 262.

²³ *De harmonia mundi*, II, tonus primus, 186^r: “Christus, & Messia est Dei sapientia, & verbum omnia ratione ideali continens, & homo existens omnia inferiora actu complectens.”

²⁴ *Sapientia Salomonis* 11,21 “sed omnia mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti.” *De harmonia mundi*, I, tonus quintus, chap. 16, 95^r: “Quomodo omnia suo numero, pondere et mensura constitua sint.” Giorgio Veneto refers often to this biblical verse. See Vasoli, *Profezia*, 265–266, note 77.

²⁵ *De harmonia mundi*, I, tonus tertius, 39^r and the following chapters of this “tone.” Cf. Vasoli, *Profezia*, 252–253.

reaches its perfection in the interval of the octave.²⁶ The octave interval is included in the numerical value of the divine Tetragrammaton and is symbolized by the sun, which occupies a central position in the order of the planets, midway between the outer (i.e., Mars, Jupiter, Saturn) and inner planets (the Moon, Mercury and Venus) according to the Ptolemaic system.²⁷ The cosmic consonance, in which all things are linked together and is reflected in the human body through a close network of relations and analogies, is, in the end, reassumed and coincides with the divine name.

The cosmic harmony is also the topic of the first of the fifty-two sermons, which represent a part of Judah ben Yosef Moscato's homiletical output, published in his collection *Sefer Nefuzot Yehudah* ("The Dispersions of Judah," Venice, Giovanni di Gara, 1589).²⁸ Born in

²⁶ *De harmonia mundi*, I, tonus octavus, chap. 14, 178^v: "Si ad octavum, et verum diapason pervenire cupimus, oportet quidem, ut ad intima penetralia ingrediamur: Tunc enim ad octavum pervenimus, quando ad ipsum Deum, a quo processimus, revertimur: ut dicere possimus cum Christo: Exivi a Patre, et veni in mundum, iterum relinquo mundum et vado ad Patrem."

²⁷ *De harmonia mundi*, I, tonus quartus, chap. 10, 66^v–68^r: "Magnam melodiam Sol in octo cum potestatibus conveniens quasi diapason reddit." About the divine name see *De harmonia mundi*, I, tonus quintus, chap. 18, 97^r: "Quomodo omnes isti tres novenarii adhuc contineantur in supremo nomine Dei, et ab ipso emanent." and 98^v: "Et ḥ, iod importans denarium numerum perfectum, divinitatem ipsam repraesentat, qua omnia replentur etc." The thesis, that the octave interval is included in the Tetragrammaton, was already put forward by Philo of Alexandria, see *De vita Mosis* II [III] 115.

²⁸ Judah Moscato is often quoted as example of a Jewish scholar affected by the Renaissance culture. I am not aware, however, of a specific monographic study about him. So far only partial aspects of his personality and of his works have been studied. On Moscato's preaching, see: Israel Bettan, *Studies in Jewish Preaching* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1939 [reprint Lanham and London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987]), 102–226; Joseph Dan, *Sifrut ha-musar ve-ha-derush* (Jerusalem, 1975), 190–197 (Hebrew); Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching 1200–1800: An Anthology* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 1989), 253–269; Moshe Idel, "Judah Moscato: a Late Renaissance Jewish Preacher," in *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto*, ed. David B. Ruderman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 41–66. On the importance of rhetoric in Moscato's works, see: Alexander Altmann, "Ars Rhetorica as Reflected in Some Jewish Figures of the Italian Renaissance," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard D. Cooperman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 1–22 (= *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman (New York and London: New York University Press, 1992), 63–84). For an analysis of Judah Moscato in the cultural context of the Italian Humanism, see Adam Shear, "Judah Moscato's Scholarly Self-Image and the Question of Jewish Humanism," in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 149–177. The first sermon of the *Sefer Nefuzot Yehudah* was the topic of the dissertation of Herzl Shmueli, "Higgajon bechinnor. Betrachtungen zum Leierspiel des Jehudah ben Joseph

Osimo (province of Ancona) in 1533, Moscato went to Mantua owing to the expulsion of all Jews from the Papal State (with the exception of the communities of Rome and Ancona), decreed by Pope Pius V (1566–1572) on February 26, 1569 with the Bull *Hebraeorum gens sola*. Around 1570 Moscato was already an outstanding personality in the Mantuan Jewish community. Between 1573 and 1574 he was deeply involved in the dispute about *Me'or Enayim* (“The Light of the Eyes”) and in 1577 he acted as an arbitrator together with R. Gershon Cohen (Katz)-Porto in the legal affair between the bankers Abraham Yagel ben Hananiah Gallico and Samuel Almagiati.²⁹ Moscato was appointed chief rabbi of Mantua only in 1587, three years before his death on September 20, 1590 at the age of 57.³⁰

Other than his sermon collection, Moscato’s other major published work was a commentary on Judah Halevi’s *Sefer haKuzari*, *Kol Yehudah* (“The voice of Judah,” Venice, Giovanni di Gara, 1594). Neither work has yet been adequately studied and this can explain the different opinions of the modern scholars on Moscato’s attitude toward Renaissance culture.

For Herbert Davidson, Moscato was not an original thinker. However, although his writings display traces of Renaissance influence, “Moscato’s picture of the universe would ... seem to consist of a loose harmonization of three cosmologies, with most, though not all, of the elements being available from medieval Jewish philosophy.”³¹ The Jewish background in Moscato’s thought is also stressed by Joseph Dan. For

Arieh Moscato Rabbi zu Mantua” (Ph.D. diss., University of Zurich, 1953). The text of the first sermon is also reproduced by Israel Adler, *Hebrew Writings Concerning Music: In Manuscripts and Printed Books from Geonic Times up to 1800* (Munich: G. Henle, 1975), 221–239. His commentary about the sources in Moscato’s sermon is based upon the dissertation of Shmueli.

²⁹ For the dispute about *Me'or Enayim*, cf. Abe Apfelbaum, *Toledot R. Yehudah Moscato Rav be-Mantova lifne 300 shanah* (Drohobycz: Zupnik, 1900), 10–11; Shlomo Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1972), 637; Joanna Weinberg, *Azariah de' Rossi, The Light of the Eyes* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2001), XLIV. For the bankers’ affair, cf. Simonsohn, *History*, 253; David B. Ruderman, *A Valley of Vision: The Heavenly Journey of Abraham ben Hananiah Yagel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 7, note 20, 13, note 53, 209.

³⁰ I found in the State Archives of Mantua (“Archivio Gonzaga, Registri Necrologici,” 18) the previously unknown death certificate, which proves also the birth date of Moscato. The certificate, along with some other documents about Moscato, are currently in press (*Revue des Études Juives*, forthcoming).

³¹ Herbert Davidson, “Medieval Jewish Philosophy in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, 106–145, here 132.

Dan, Moscato's quotations of non-Jewish authors are only an outward influence of Renaissance humanism and they are not to be overestimated: his sermons are deeply rooted in the medieval tradition of Jewish preaching.³² In contrast, Moshe Idel detects in Moscato's thought a "noticeable imprint" of Renaissance culture.³³ Adam Shear has, in my opinion, rightly pointed out the encyclopedic and syncretistic character of Moscato's writings. For Shear, Moscato aimed "to offer a synthesis between different cultural traditions necessary for forming a robust Jewish subculture in early modern Italy."³⁴ Indeed, the synthesis of Moscato's encyclopedic ideal is the vision of a divine order of the universe.

It is not by sheer chance that Moscato deals with this topic at the beginning of the book. Moscato's explanation of his idea of universal harmony can be considered almost a general introduction to the following sermons. The first sermon, entitled *Meditation on the Lyre* (Hebrew *higgayon ba-kinnor le-yom Simḥat Torah*) is dedicated to the holiday of *Simḥat Torah* (literally means "rejoicing in the Torah") and the Torah is, for Moscato, pure harmony.³⁵ In the short introduction (*klal ha-derush*) Moscato presents the topic of the sermon. God is perfect music and accordingly the whole of creation consists of musical proportions. Specially man, who was made in the image and likeness of God, is structured according to musical ratios and therefore has to praise God with music and musical instruments such as the lyre (*kinnor*), a frequently mentioned instrument in the Bible.

The sermon opens with the quotation of the rabbinical tale of David's lyre that, suspended above his bed, began to play by itself when the North wind was blowing on its strings.³⁶ The same harmonious

³² Dan, *Sifrut ha-musar*, 191–197. The same ideas are stressed again in his article, "An Inquiry into the Hebrew Homiletical Literature in Renaissance Italy," *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Jerusalem 1977, division 3, 105–110 (Hebrew).

³³ Idel, "Judah Moscato," 48.

³⁴ Shear, "Judah Moscato's Scholarly," 167.

³⁵ The holiday of *Simḥat Torah* falls outside of Israel on the 23rd and in Israel on the 22nd of Tishri, the first month of the Jewish calendar (= September–October). It is a joyous celebration which concludes the annual cycle of the reading of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, and represents the culmination of *Sukkot* (Feast of Booths or Feast of Tabernacles), which begins at sunset the day before the 15th day of Tishri and lasts for seven days.

³⁶ See *bBerakhot* 3b–4a; *Bemidbar Rabbah* 15,16 (= Num. 10:2); *Midrash Tanḥuma*, *be-ha'alotekha*, 10.

music of David's lyre is also present within the whole world. The Bible proves that the whole of creation is ruled by the same mathematical ratios, upon which music is based.³⁷ The mixture of the elements, the succession of the seasons, and the course of the planets are produced from mathematical ratios. Moscato deduces that the whole world is a harmonic structure in which all things are linked to each other and all is correlated. It follows a universal harmony increasing from the material world to empyrean, where the angels sing and praise God, the source of the harmony of his creation. Moscato adduces as proof of the presence of the most perfect harmony in God, the Tetragrammaton, whose consonants are explained in their mathematical and musical value.

Among all creatures man has a unique position. His soul comes from the heavens and was, by God himself, initially inspired into the material form of the first man. Therefore, more than all other creatures, it is man who is affected by music. The power of music relieves physical effort and eases mental pain. Through its effect, the soul is attracted to its original heavenly seat and stimulated to prophesy. Moscato regards the human body in its unity of material and soul as a musical instrument, an organ which can produce the best melody, if it is "tuned" to the higher spheres. So David's soul was as his lyre which began to play by itself when the North wind was blowing on its strings. When the "strings" of David's soul were in tune with God, the Holy Ghost rested upon him and David could lift up marvelous songs to God. Everyone can be like David through the belief in God's teaching and through the performance of his commandments. The Torah is the truly perfect harmonical music, which only man can play. In perfect consonance with God was Moses, whose body and soul were molded according to the best musical proportions as also his name proves.³⁸ Everyone has to take Moses as a model even if it is practically impossible to reach his degree of perfection. Nevertheless God doesn't judge the actions of everybody according to their perfection, but according to the zeal that one employs in observing his commandments. From this point of view everyone can be like Moses. The sermon ends with an affirmation of

³⁷ Moscato quotes Isaiah 40:12: "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?"

³⁸ Moscato derives music and Muse from Moses. Moscato, *Nefuzot Yehudah*, 5a.

faith in the coming of the Messiah that will restore the world to its original harmony as it was in the first days of the creation before the sin of man.

Among the non-Jewish authors, only classical, Arabic, and medieval authors are quoted (Plato, Aristotle, Galen, Al-Farabi, the *Margarita Philosophica* by Gregor Reisch); none of his contemporaries are mentioned by Moscato. However, in his dissertation, Shmueli has already underlined the importance of the non-Jewish cultural context for a better understanding of the sermon and introduced Gioseffo Zarlino's treatise on music (*Le Istitutioni Harmoniche*, Venice 1558) as a principal non-Jewish source of Moscato.³⁹ Nevertheless Moscato's first sermon is, in my opinion, not influenced by Zarlino, but by Francesco Giorgio Veneto, as Moshe Idel has already suggested.⁴⁰ Idel noted in the first sermon of Moscato the use of "מוסיקה אלהית," an unusual expression in former Jewish authors, and noticed that the same expression is attested in *De harmonia mundi* by Francesco Giorgio Veneto. Idel's intuition was right! But Moscato agrees with Giorgio Veneto not only in the use of this expression, but also displays the same vision of the world. Also, some particular interpretations are closely drawn from the *De harmonia mundi*. Let's take some significant examples. After explaining the origin of the discovery of music, Moscato goes on to deal with the harmony in the world, whose natural proofs are, for him, the balanced mixture of the four elements and the sequence of the seasons.

In nature, the elements are in a wonderful relationship with each other, distributed according to lightness and weight. If it was not so, the world could not even subsist for an hour. The mixture, which originates in the lower beings through the composition of the elements, has already been described as a harmonical mixture of the four primary qualities with the mixture of the four elements. ... Also the seasons follow each other gradually and orderly. This is all the more true for the beings in accordance with the increase of their perfection.⁴¹

³⁹ Shmueli, "Higgajon," 17–19. It may be that Moscato knew Zarlino's treatise, which is also mentioned in the censorial book lists, which the Mantuan Jewish community in 1595 compiled for the expurgation through the censorial authorities. See Shifra Zippora Baruchson, *Books and Readers: The Reading Interests of Italian Jews at the Close of the Renaissance* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993), 189 (Hebrew). But Zarlino himself follows Francesco Giorgio Veneto (without quoting him explicitly). Compare for example pp. 13 and 14 of Zarlino's *Istitutioni* with *De harmonia mundi*, I, tonus 4, chap. 10 and I, tonus 3, chap. 13.

⁴⁰ Moshe Idel, "The Magical and Theurgic Interpretation of Music in Jewish Sources from the Renaissance to Hassidism," *Yiwal* 4 (1982): 33–63, here 51 (Hebrew).

⁴¹ Moscato, *Nefuzot Yehudah*, 1b.

Very similar is the explanation of Giorgio Veneto regarding the distribution of the elements in all things in the universe:

Therefore, the elements and the primary grounding of those things, of which all is made up, are four. ... So God, according to a very consonant number (as we will explain soon), distributed the superior, lower and middle things among those four elements and divided this construction into four parts of the world: i.e., east, west, south and north; and the heaven through that threefold partition into fire, ether, water and earth. From heaven the four seasons originated: spring, summer, autumn and winter. From it derives the fourfold substance, namely corporeal, animating, sensitive and rational. On this fourfold substance depend the four corporeal qualities: warm, cold, wet and dry.⁴²

The most interesting point of agreement between Moscato and Giorgio Veneto is in the conception of the human being as a musical instrument. Moscato quotes in his description *Margarita Philosophica* by Gregor Reisch (first printed in 1496), which compares the human body with a glass vessel that begins to vibrate and to emit harmonious sounds when it is struck by the breath of God infusing the soul in the body.⁴³ Moscato rejects this example because in this way free will is not recognized in man. Instead, Moscato proposes another analogy that he presents as his own idea with the following words:

But this example, in my opinion, doesn't suit properly man, because free will is not mentioned there. In order to take in the comparison the soul and the spirit of life, which permeates myself, [it is better] to compare them with the "kinnor," named in the foreign language "organo." It is built according to so apt proportions and relations that it can give out both very pleasant and loud sounds. It only works if a mechanism blows air into it, however all this is worthless till the musician plays, because they are his hands that perform an artistic music. Now, man is like this "kinnor," because his body is well built and well proportioned and ready

⁴² *De harmonia mundi*, I, tonus tertius, chap. 12, 50^{r-v}: "Quatuor igitur sunt elementa et primaria fundamenta rerum, ex quibus omnia componuntur. ... Ideo per elementa illa quadrifaria, suprema, inferiora, et media consonantissimo numero (ut statim disseremus) distribuit dividens [i.e., Deus] machinam hanc in quatuor mundi partes: Eurum, Zephyrum, Austrum et Boream, et caelum per illas triplicitates, igneam, aëream, aqueam et terream. A quo caelo quatuor tempora ver, aestas, autumnus et hyems. Unde favor ad quadruplicem substantiam, corpoream, vegetabilem, sensitivam et rationalem. Quam subsequuntur quatuor corporeae qualitates, calidum, frigidum, humidum atque siccum."

⁴³ This comparison is not in Reisch's *Margarita Philosophica*, but in Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera. See Adler, *Hebrew Writings*, 530 note 87.

to receive the superior form, which among the inferior beings through its power can cause wonderful and melodious sounds.⁴⁴

The comparison of man to the *kinnor* or *nevel* is a widespread analogy. This motif is hinted at as early as in the writings of Philo of Alexandria, as well as being a well-known topic in Kabbalah literature. Abraham Abulafia (thirteenth century) described the human body as a *kinnor* or a musical instrument.⁴⁵ But Moscato doesn't refer to this tradition. He quotes only Isaak Arama (*Akedat Yizhak*, sidrah Noah, chapter 12) in order to explain the agreement between macrocosm and microcosm, compared to two equally tuned musical instruments.⁴⁶

The "new" interpretation of Moscato is clearly drawn from the *De harmonia mundi*. In the third "Song," Giorgio Veneto deals widely with the human body and the soul. Regarding the soul, he distinguishes an inferior form (Hebrew *nefesh*) common for all animals and a superior form (Hebrew *neshamah*) that only man has and which comes directly from God. In order to praise God, man has to purify his soul and body, because only through a pure body and a pure soul can man become a musical instrument like King David.⁴⁷ Then, regarding the human body as an organ Giorgio Veneto says the following:

⁴⁴ Moscato, *Nefuzot Yehudah*, 3b.

⁴⁵ See Moshe Idel, "Music and Prophetic Kabbalah," *Yiwal* 4 (1982): 150–169, here 153–155 (Hebrew).

⁴⁶ About the idea of microcosm and macrocosm in Jewish tradition, see Johann Maier, "Mikrokosmos und Makrokosmos in spekulativen Traditionen des Judentums," in *Unus Mundus. Kosmos und Sympathie. Beiträge zum Gedanken der Einheit von Mensch und Kosmos*, ed. Thomas Arzt and Maria Hippus-Gräfin Dürckheim and Roland Dollinger (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 431–457. For the idea of micro- and macrocosm in the history of philosophy, see George Perrigo Conger, *Theories of Macrocosms and Microcosms in the History of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922).

⁴⁷ *De harmonia mundi*, III, tonus octavus, Concen. VII, p. 118^v: "Et cum multa instrumenta praetulisset [i.e., David], tandem excitationem istam ad laudem concludit dicens: כל הנשמה תהלל יה col anessama thelel iah: quod nostri interpretati sunt, Omnis spiritus laudet Dominum. Sed melius dixissent: Omnis anima, iam perfecta videlicet, laudet Dominum: anessama enim animam puram, et divinam significat, prout a Deo emanat. Ideo quando tractatur de primaeva infusione animae a Deo in hominem dicitur: Et insufflavit in faciem eius nismat haiim, quod nos interpretatum habemus spiraculum vitae. Nam advertendum est, quod hoc vocabulum anessama non habetur in usu, sed magno mysterio ipso utitur scriptura, quando Deus animam infudit homini, et in fine hymnorum, ubi excitatur homo ad reddendam Deo perfectam laudem, quam minime solvit, nisi anima purificata penitus sit, sicut erat quando a principio infusa fuit. Et quousque foeditatem corporis sentit, non nismat aut nessama, quod idem est, dicitur in scriptura sacra Hebraice, sed nephes quod significat animam aliqua animalitate foedatam. Ad primam igitur puritatem reverti debet, si Deum (ut conveniens est) laudare cupit. Nec tantum expurgata ipsa esse debet, sed expurgasse etiam debuit

The prophet [i.e., David] firstly says: *Praise the Lord with strings and organ* (Ps. 150,4): our body is said in many passages of the Scriptures to be an organ, because the soul works and feels through its nerves, veins and arteries like the sound through the pipes of the musical organ. Indeed, as the world (according to opinion of Dorylaeus Pythagorean) is the organ of God, so is the body the organ of the soul, whose nerves, muscles, bones and all arteries, are either called pipes or strings of this corporeal organ. In fact strings in Hebrew are called מינים *minim*, which we can translate into species or genera: genera namely of many inner arteries, which the divine zither player in another passage excites in saying: Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name (Ps. 103:1).⁴⁸

As well as by Giorgio Veneto and also by Moscato the idea of man as a microcosm is closely correlated with the vision of universal harmony. Like Giorgio Veneto, Moscato describes the musical instruments that are mentioned in the Psalms, and then concludes: “Since man contains all these instruments in himself, he is called ‘little world.’ He is the well proportioned *kinnor*, about which we dealt at length.”⁴⁹

Only if the “man-kinnor” is well “tuned” with God, does he enter in consonance with the superior music of the planets, of the angels, and of God himself.⁵⁰ Man can reach this consonance only if he believes in the Torah of God and performs his commandments. Moscato describes the Torah as the highest science, the eighth discipline in the learning system of *trivium* and *quadrivium*, the perfect teaching that can not at all be modified. God’s Torah is finally perfect harmony, which only the sons of Israel can play with their *kinnorim*.

corpus, quod inhabitavit, ut et ipsum conveniat in celebres opificis laudes, ut supra tetigimus.”

⁴⁸ *De harmonia mundi*, III, tonus octavus, Concen. VII, 118^v: “Quod propheta [i.e., David] praemiserat dicens: Laudate eum in chordis et organo (Ps. 150:4): Organum enim passim dicitur corpus nostrum, per cuius nervos, et venas, et arterias anima operatur, et sentitur, sicut sonus per fistulas organi instrumentalis. Sicut enim mundus (Dorylao Pythagorico teste) est organum Dei: sic corpus est organum animae, cuius nervi, muscoli, ossa, et arteriae omnes, nunc fistulae, nun chordae dicuntur huius corporei organi: quae chordae Hebraice dicuntur מינים *minim*, quod proprie interpretantes possemus dicere species, vel genera: Genera videlicet multiplicium arteriarum interiorum, quas omnes divus Citharoedus in laudem principis alibi simul cum anima excitat dicens: Benedic anima mea dominum, et omnia quae intra me sunt, aut omnia interiora mea, nomini sancto eius (Ps. 103:1).”

⁴⁹ Moscato, *Nefuzot Yehudah*, 7b. Compare also *De harmonia mundi*, III, tonus octavus, Concen. VII, 117^v: “Quid sibi velint illa instrumenta, quae multa commemorantur in Davidicis hymnis.”

⁵⁰ Moscato, *Nefuzot Yehudah*, 4a.

This is the Torah, which Moses put before the sons of Israel, he put it into their minds in order that this song was forever among the sons of Israel and this song gave out by means of the melody of their kinnorim, a beautiful, excellent sound. ... This is the way of the belief that is hinted through the holiday of “Shemini Azeret,”⁵¹ seal of all holidays, which was established in order to teach that it [i.e., belief] is the eighth of the seven disciplines; it was revealed and raised above all others. It is our specific, exclusive property, because it was named in Israel’s name.⁵²

Sukkot is a holiday intended for all of mankind, but the eighth day is an extra holiday only for the Jewish people. On this day in Israel (in the Diaspora a day later) the celebration of *Simḥat Torah* also falls. That is, in the interpretation of Moscato, proof of the exclusiveness of Israel. Only Israel among all nations was chosen by God and received His Torah as revelation. Only Israel owns the eighth discipline and can reach the perfect knowledge. Since the Torah, according to the Jewish tradition, was used by God as a model for the creation, the man-microcosm can be only the man who lives according to the Torah.⁵³

Moscato’s correlation of God-Cosmos with Harmony-Torah-(Jewish) Man is clearly drawn from Isaak Arama. In *Akedat Yizḥak* (“The Binding of Isaak”) Arama compares the correlation between man as a microcosm and the macrocosm to two equally tuned musical instruments. The harmony of the world depends on the perfect consonance of the minor instrument (microcosm) with the large instrument (macrocosm). Because God took the Torah as a model for creating the world and man, the tuning of the different strings of both instruments can be established only through observance of the precepts of the Torah, which was delivered to Israel:

All strings of the whole disposition of earth and heaven is ordered and founded on the divine Torah: God was looking at it and created the world ... its precepts and laws are engraved on the orders of the world, which is the “large instrument,” as well as on the heart of the man, the microcosm, in which the human instincts and its laws are carved. When the divine Torah through the chosen people was delivered, was also given in its hand the secret of this melody and the order of its performance, in order to mend at the beginning the instinct of the heart, which is by nature corrupt because of the material.⁵⁴

⁵¹ “Shemini Azeret” literally means the assembly of the eighth (day) on the day after the seventh day of Sukkot.

⁵² Moscato, *Nefuzot Yehudah*, 5b.

⁵³ Maier, “Mikrokosmos und Makrokosmos,” 435–436.

⁵⁴ *Akedat Yizḥak*, sidrah Noah, chapter 12. Hebrew Text quoted by Adler, *Hebrew*

The substantial difference between Moscato and Giorgio Veneto consists of this point. According to Giorgio Veneto's interpretation of universal harmony, it is not the belief in the Torah, but the belief in Christ, which allows man to be in perfect consonance with God. The man in the center of the universe, as represented by Giorgio Veneto in his sketch, is not the human being as such in his natural condition, but the Christian man, whose nature has been redeemed and purified by Christ. Also, Giorgio Veneto acknowledges that man is "tuned" with God through the observance of the Law and of the Ten Commandments as is symbolized by the ten strings of the psaltery.⁵⁵ But the observance of the Law and of the Ten Commandments is only the first step. The next and essential step is the belief in Christ, of whom Moses was the prefiguration.⁵⁶ Human nature was, after the original sin, irreparably corrupted. Only Christ, who resumes and surpasses the Mosaic law, through his incarnation, death, and resurrection, could restore the original perfection.⁵⁷ This is, according to Giorgio Veneto, the indispensable condition in order to reach the consonance with God. In Giorgio Veneto and Judah Moscato the humanistic culture

Writings, 94, No. 17–18. For the correlation of God-Cosmos-Harmony with Harmony-Torah-(Jewish) Man, see Maier, "Mikrokosmos und Makrokosmos," 435–436.

⁵⁵ *De harmonia mundi*, "Proemium in tertium novissimum canticum": "Cantabo utique de homine, qui est novissimum dei opus, cum opifice concordandum, per legis, et decem praeceptorum observationem, quae per psalterium decachordum, in quo psallebat Propheta, indicantur. ... Et tunc concinna persolvuntur cantica, quando bene chordatis instrumentis corporis, spiritus et animi, reddimus Deo pro virili nostra debitas laudes, et concinna opera. ... Perfectissima autem et plenissima cantica (Deo favente) persolvemus quando laudabimus cum in excelsis simul cum angelis, in illo beatorum choro resonantibus, non solum lingua, sed spiritu, anima, corpore, et omnibus membris, in laudem opificis, cui omnia debent gloriam, et honorem in saecula. Et hoc persolvemus diapasonica consonantia octo tonorum, sicut in duobus praemissis canticis perfecimus."

⁵⁶ See, for example, *De harmonia mundi*, II, tonus quartus, chap. 13, 264^r: "Confitemur insuper cum Apostolo Christum esse finem legis ad iustitiam omni credenti" and *De harmonia mundi*, III, tonus quartus, chap. 8, 47^r: "Adveniente autem vero restitutore humani generis Christo, cuius Moses typum gessit omnia plene subiecta homini iterum fuere."

⁵⁷ *De harmonia mundi*, II, tonus quintus, chap. 2, 268^r–269^r; III, tonus octavus, Concen. III, 116^r: "Qui [i.e., Christus] omnia iudicaturus iterum ait: De omni verbo ocioso, quod locuti fuerint homines, reddent rationem in die iudicij; multo magis de omni, quod factum fuerit contra praecepta tam affirmativa quam negativa, in quibus omnibus cum Deo penitus concordare, et convenire debemus. A quibus non sumus exempti, cum omnia illa concludantur in brevi, sed mysterioso verbo evangelico, in quo absorbetur tota perfectio omnium praeceptorum dicente Christo: Ab his duobus mandatis, amore videlicet Dei et proximi, tota lex dependet etc."

of the Renaissance finds its limit in their religious vision of the world.⁵⁸ The Jewish sources are interpreted by Giorgio Veneto with the help of Christian theology, and the Christian model is implicitly incorporated and integrated by Judah Moscato into Jewish tradition. Moscato wrote for Jewish readers, but the knowledge of his works was not limited to Jewish readers. Together with Giorgio Veneto, Moscato is one of the sources, to which the authors of the pansophic works in the seventeenth century refer.⁵⁹ When the epistemology of Descartes and Galileo is affirmed, the idea of the harmonic order of the universe will remain valid, however, it will no longer be sought in the mystical interpretation of musical ratios but on the basis of physical-mechanics relationships. In this new conception of the world, there is no longer any room for authors such as Giorgio Veneto and Moscato.

⁵⁸ About the conception of man as “homo christianus” and “homo judaicus” in the Renaissance, see Giuseppe Veltri, “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 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 249–278, esp. 273–276.

⁵⁹ About the diffusion of Giorgio Veneto’s works in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Vasoli, *Profèzia e ragione*, 401–403; idem, “Dall’ Apocalypsis Nova al De Harmonia Mundi,” 285–291; Secret, *Hermétisme*, 65–89. Moscato is quoted by Athanasius Kircher in Vol. II, first part, 85 of *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (Rome, 1652–1654). See Giuseppe Veltri and Gianfranco Miletto, “Jewish Musical Theories and their Aftermath in the “Prisca theologia””: On the Sources of Athanasius Kircher’s Musurgia Universalis,” *EAS Newsletter* 13 (2003): 18–26.

ANGELIC EMBODIMENT AND
THE FEMININE REPRESENTATION OF JESUS:
RECONSTRUCTING CARNALITY IN THE
CHRISTIAN KABBALAH OF JOHANN KEMPER

ELLIOT R. WOLFSON

When we were Hebrews we were
orphans and had only our mother,
but when we became Christians we
had both father and mother.

Gospel of Philip

In the long and variegated history of Judaism, ideas expressed regarding the nature of the body have been reflective of both internal and external considerations and perspectives. It should come as no surprise that the issue of embodiment has occupied a major role in the delineation of boundaries that stubbornly separate and bridges that flexibly connect Judaism and other liturgical-faith communities. Especially, though not exclusively, the complex and often acrimonious relationship between Judaism and Christianity has revolved about perceptions of the body. The Early Modern Period is no exception to this rule, but there is something unique that was underfoot at this time given the increased loosening of the borders between Jews and Christians and the consequent challenge to maintain assertions of separateness and inassimilability.¹ Conversion, in particular, is a phenomenon that can shed much light on the prevailing understanding of the body and the role the latter plays in shaping the identity of one's self and the other.²

One of the most fascinating Jewish converts to Christianity in the Early Modern Period was Moses ben Aaron ha-Kohen of Cracow (1670–1716), who received the name Johannes Christianus Jacobi when

¹ Particularly relevant to this study is the essay by Richard Popkin, "Christian Jews and Jewish Christians in the 17th Century," in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard H. Popkin and Gordon M. Weiner (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 57–72.

² See, for instance, Steven F. Kruger, *The Spectral Jew: Conversion and Embodiment in Medieval Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

he was baptized by Johannes Friedrich Heunisch on July 25, 1696 in Schweinfurt, Germany. The manuscripts of his Hebrew works, written in the early part of the eighteenth century during his tenure as Hebrew tutor at Uppsala University in Sweden, indicate, moreover, that he adopted the new surname Kemper.³ The story of Kemper's spiritual odyssey and the intricacies of his attempt to prove the truth of his new faith on the basis of kabbalistic, and especially zoharic, sources have been studied by a number of scholars.⁴ In a previous study, I explored in great length the intricate effort of Kemper to demonstrate that the messianic faith of Christians was in fact the truly ancient esoteric tradition of Judaism.⁵ Needless to say, the polemical strategy of Kemper yielded an interpretation of the Kabbalah that differs dramatically from the texts upon which he commented. Indeed, the utilization of Jewish mystical lore, specifically the *Zohar*, to substantiate the Jewish roots of Christianity, on the part of Kemper places him in close proximity to the Christian Kabbalists of the Renaissance. In a fundamental way, however, Kemper differs from the notable Christian humanists who availed themselves of kabbalistic doctrine. Kemper's rabbinic background imposed upon him the need to preserve the nomian framework of Kabbalah even as he sought to undermine that

³ The details of Kemper's conversion are narrated in the biographical account published on the occasion of his baptism under the title *Unterthäniger Bericht* (Aldorf, 1696). I am indebted to Joseph Eskhult for providing me with a copy of this invaluable document during my visit in January 2004 to the *Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences* on the campus of Uppsala University.

⁴ Hans Joachim Schoeps, "Rabbi Johan Kemper in Uppsala," *Särtryck ur Kyrko-historisk Arsskrift* (1945): 146–177; idem, *Barocke Juden, Christen, Judenchristen* (Bern and Munich: Francke, 1965), 60–67, translated into English by G.F. Dole, "Philosemitism in the Seventeenth Century," *Studia Swedenborgiana* 7 (1990): 10–17; idem, *Philosemitismus im Barock: religions- und geistesgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1952), 92–133; idem, "Philosemitism in the Baroque Period," *Jewish Quarterly Review* n.s. 47 (1956–1957): 139–144, esp. 143; Shifra Asulin, "Another Glance at Sabbatianism, Conversion, and Hebraism in Seventeenth-Century Europe: Scrutinizing the Character of Johan Kemper of Uppsala, or Moshe Son of Aharon of Krakow," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 17 (2001): 423–470 (Hebrew). On the probable relationship of Kemper and Swedenborg, see Marsha K. Schuchard, "Emanuel Swedenborg: Deciphering the Codes of a Celestial and Terrestrial Intelligencer," in *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, ed. Elliot R. Wolfson (New York and London: Seven Bridges Press, 1999), 181–182; idem, *Why Mrs Blake Cried: William Blake and the Sexual Basis of Spiritual Vision* (London: Century, 2006), 64–65.

⁵ Elliot R. Wolfson, "Messianism in the Christian Kabbalah of Johann Kemper," in *Millenarianism and Messianism in the Early Modern European Culture: Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World*, ed. Matt D. Goldish and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 139–187.

framework by arguing that belief in Jesus, which is attested in the mystical teachings and practices, surpasses Jewish ritual. In contrast to the typical profile of the Christian Kabbalist, including a figure like Guillaume Postel, who affirmed a form of Christian Judaism predicated on the belief that Christians must acknowledge the origins of their religion in Mosaic law,⁶ Kemper upheld the theurgical import of the kabbalistic symbols that he appropriated. The literary works composed by Kemper display an astonishing blend of Jewish learning (including Halakhah, Aggadah, Kabbalah) and Christian doctrine, and the thread that ties these two together is the theosophic orientation derived primarily from the zoharic corpus. While the intricate weaving of these different strands fostered a worldview that deviated from the traditional Kabbalah, it is also true that Kemper's Christological readings on occasion illumine the site where the doctrinal lines thought to separate the two Abrahamic faiths begin to be blurred.

In this essay, I will elaborate on a theme that I discussed briefly in the aforementioned study, the feminine construction of Jesus in the writings of Kemper.⁷ I will not only amplify my earlier analysis here, but I will draw out the implication of this imagery for Kemper's conception of the body.

The representation of Jesus in female images—and this is to be distinguished from the depiction of the masculinity of Christ in effeminate, emasculated, or asexual terms⁸—is much older in the history of Christian symbolism and most likely related to the appropriation of speculation on Sophia and the Holy Spirit from Jewish sources in an otherwise predominantly masculine Christology,⁹ a tendency that is well-attested,

⁶ Marion L. Kuntz, *Guillaume Postel: Prophet of the Restitution of All Things: His Life and Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 130–133; Bernard McGinn, “Cabalists and Christians: Reflections on Cabala in Medieval and Renaissance Thought,” in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews*, 25. In the preface to the second translation of the *Zohar*, Postel declares his aim as showing that Christ is the “purpose of the law,” *finis enim Legis est* (cited by McGinn, “Cabalists and Christians,” 24).

⁷ Wolfson, “Messianism,” 148–150.

⁸ See the trenchant discussion of this matter, including a lengthy response to Bynum, in Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, second edition, revised and expanded (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 246–250, 364–389. See also David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 97–123.

⁹ A possible scriptural source for the maternal imagery is the description in Matthew 23:37 (with parallel in Luke 13:34) of Jesus as the “hen that gathers her brood under her wings,” which should be read intertextually with Deuteronomy 22:6. See Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female*

for instance, in a number of documents from Late Antiquity that have been classified as exemplary of the multifaceted phenomenon known as Gnosticism.¹⁰ I will refrain here from delineating the relevant textual and material sources that attest to this phenomenon as to do so responsibly would take us too far afield.¹¹ Without engaging the matter of historical precedent or influence, let me note that the relaxing of the gender/sex correlation implied by this symbolic identification can be

(New York: Crossroad, 1983), 92–96; idem, *Women, Men, and the Bible*, revised edition (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 47; Elaine Guillemin, “Jesus/Holy Mother Wisdom (Mt. 23:37–39),” in *The Lost Coin: Parables of Women, Work and Wisdom*, ed. Mary Ann Beavis (London and New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 244–267.

¹⁰ Numerous scholars have written on this dimension of Gnostic literature, and here I will make reference to two relevant studies: James M. Robinson, “Very Goddess and Very Man: Jesus’ Better Self,” in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 113–127, and in the same volume, Karen L. King, “Sophia and Christ in the *Apocryphon of John*,” 158–176.

¹¹ On this theme in the late middle ages, especially among Cistercian monks in the twelfth century, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 110–169; idem, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 260–269; Jean Leclercq, *Women and St Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. Marie-Bernard Saïd OSB (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1989), 109–114. See also Joan Gibson, “Could Christ Have Been Born a Woman? A Medieval Debate,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 8 (1992): 65–82. This theme continued to flower in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as is attested, for example, in the theological imagination of Julian of Norwich, who depicted Jesus as the generative mother, as well as in the sermons of Meister Eckhart, who applied the expression “a motherly name” (*ein müeterlich name*) to the Father to designate the pure potentiality of the divine to conceive the Son, the Nothingness of the “natural power” (*nâtürlîchen kraft*) for generation, as opposed to “fatherhood” (*vaterlicheit*), which is the primordial fullness of the “personal power” (*persônlichen kraft*), the active source of bearing. See *Julian of Norwich’s Showings*, translated from the critical text with an introduction by Edmund Colledge, O.S.A. and James Walsh, S.J., Preface by Jean Leclercq (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 293–299, 300–305, 340; Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 129–135, 140–141, 148 note 130, 151, 159 note 160, 168, 195; Sarah McNamer, “The Exploratory Image: God as Mother in Julian of Norwich’s Revelations of Divine Love,” *Mystics Quarterly* 15 (1989): 21–28; Denise Nowakowski Baker, *Julian of Norwich’s Showings: From Vision to Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 108, 112–113, 118–120, 124, 128–134, 166; Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *Julian of Norwich and the Mystical Body Politic of Christ* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 59, 76, 89–95, 110–111, 155–156, 160; Grace Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, new edition (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 104, 111, 115–124, 143, 158; Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 222–234, 290, 302, 312; Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man From Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 84–86, 139–140.

seen as an important catalyst for the exegetical strategy employed by Kemper in his articulation of the female persona of Jesus. The uniqueness of Kemper's approach, however, is brought into sharp relief when one considers, for instance, the view of Postel that Mary and the female savior, who bore the name Joanna, were personifications of *Shekhinah* in the material world.¹² In spite of the longstanding tradition that allocated a maternal nature to Jesus, there is no attempt on Postel's part (or any other thinker, to the best of my knowledge) to render the male Savior in these terms. The approach of Kemper is closer to the deployment of female characteristics to describe the gender of Jesus that is attested in some of the radical Moravians, who flourished later in the eighteenth-century under the leadership of Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a charismatic Protestant preacher whose teachings and practices began to take root in the Wetteravia area of Germany and then spread to other parts of Europe and eventually made their way to Lutheran and Calvinist colonies in North America. Adherents to this Moravian sect did not challenge the traditional view that the biological sex of Jesus was male, but they did avow that from a gender perspective it was feasible to use female images figuratively to describe the attributes and functions of Christ, such as the metaphor of the nursing mother or the portrayal of the side wound either in the form of the womb from which believers are spiritually reborn or as the vagina through which souls are erotically united with the deity.¹³ The belief in a maternal Jesus, coupled with the symbolic representation of the Holy Spirit as mother,¹⁴ and the practical bestowing of the right to preach and to hold other ecclesiastical offices on women,¹⁵ put these Moravians in conflict with the more

¹² Yvonne Petry, *Gender, Kabbalah and the Reformation: The Mystical Theology of Guillaume Postel (1510–1581)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 40, 91–93.

¹³ Aaron S. Fogleman, "Jesus Is Female: The Moravian Challenge in the German Communities of British North America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60 (2003): 295–332; idem, *Jesus Is Female: Moravians and Radical Religion in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 73–104. My summary account is indebted to the research of Fogleman, as is my knowledge of other relevant sources cited in the following two notes.

¹⁴ Craig D. Atwood, "The Mother of God's People: The Adoration of the Holy Spirit in the Eighteenth-Century *Brüdergemeine*," *Church History* 68 (1999): 886–909; Steven Kinkel, *Our Dear Mother in the Spirit: An Investigation of Count Zinzendorf's Theology and Praxis* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), 83–197.

¹⁵ Otto Uttendörfer, *Zinzendorf und die Frauen: Kirchliche Frauenrechte vor 200 Jahren* (Herrnhut: Verlag der Missionsbuchhandlung, 1919), 20–35; Beverly Prior Smaby, "Forming the Single Sisters' Choir in Bethlehem," *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society* 28 (1994): 114; *Moravian Women's Memoirs: Their Related Lives, 1750–1820*, ed. and

mainstream Protestant clergymen, who were politically threatened by the possibility of a social egalitarianism, however limited it may have been, in their church communities.

Leaving aside the question regarding the possible influence of kabbalistic ideas on Zinzendorf,¹⁶ it is noteworthy that the feminization of the suffering Christ proffered by this German pietist bears a striking affinity with Kemper's portrayal of Jesus in female topoi based on his Christological appropriation of zoharic symbolism informed by the eschatological standpoint of seventeenth-century Sabbatianism, and particularly the identification of a male messianic figure with feminine configurations of the divine.¹⁷ When judged from this perspective, the views proffered by Kemper can be placed in a larger historical context that can shed light on his distinctive understanding of the body. What Kemper expressed reflects a much older polemical tactic employed by both Jews and Christians in their respective efforts to belittle the opposing faith by associating it with corporeality, typically engendered as feminine, in contrast to true spirituality, which is characterized as masculine. With his idiosyncratic amalgamation of Jewish esotericism and Christian piety, Kemper subtly undermines this line of attack by concomitantly ascribing a spiritual status to the somatic and a somatic status to the spiritual. The polemically-charged female characteristics are adopted by Kemper and transferred to the incarnate Christ. The ostensibly broken body, the humbling of the divine taking on the investiture

trans. Katherine M. Faul (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), xxvii–xxxii; Peter Vogt, "A Voice for Themselves: Women as Participants in Congregational Discourse in the Eighteenth-Century Moravian Movement," in *Women Preachers and Prophets Through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 227–247.

¹⁶ This point has been argued most forcefully by Marsha K. Schuchard, "Dr. Samuel Jacob Falk: A Sabbatian Adventurer in the Masonic Underground," in *Millenarianism and Messianism*, 209; idem, *Why Mrs Blake Cried*, 17–20, 23–24, 27–28, 33. For an alternative analysis of Zinzendorf's attitude toward Judaism, see Christiane Dithmar, *Zinzendorfs nonkonformistische Haltung zum Judentum* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2000).

¹⁷ Regarding this theme, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "The Engenderment of Messianic Politics: Symbolic Significance of Sabbatai Ševi's Coronation," in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Mark R. Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 203–258; idem, "Constructions of the Shekhinah in the Messianic Theosophy of Abraham Cardoso With an Annotated Edition of *Derush ha-Shekhinah*," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 3 (1998): 11–143. See also Bruce Rosenstock, "Messianism, Machismo, and 'Marranism': The Case of Abraham Miguel Cardoso," in *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*, ed. Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 199–227, esp. 214–217.

of the material world, is thereby redeemed and upheld as an icon of a new form of textual embodiment, affording an opportunity to the one who accepts Jesus, and especially to the Jew whom Kemper is seeking to convert as part of his own messianic scheme, to transmute the flesh into word by patterning itself on the Word made flesh.¹⁸ In treating the body as the text that is an image of the text that is a body, Kemper is greatly influenced by the kabbalistic notion of the hyperliteral body, that is, the presumption that the body in its most elemental form is composed of the Hebrew letters that are contained in the Tetragrammaton, the mystical essence of Torah.¹⁹ A critical difference, of course, lies in the fact that, for Kemper, the textualization of body is fostered not by visually contemplating the divine name through exegetical study of and practical commitment to the Written Torah, the *guf elohi*, but by being incorporated through faith into the *corpus Christi*, the Logos (*memra*) that is the primordial Torah, but which is also identified as the “new Torah” (*torah ḥadashah*),²⁰ which is the Oral Torah composed of the dicta of Jesus conserved in the Gospels.²¹

We can speak, therefore, of reciprocity between Jesus and the human: just as the body of the former is the image that becomes text, so the body of the latter is an image of that text. According to Kemper, this is the correct interpretation of the scriptural notion that Adam was created in God’s image (*zelem elohim*)—the image is indeed corporeal, but it refers specifically to the body of Christ. As he expressed it in *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, “He created the world and Adam in his image and his likeness as the apostles discerned when Jesus broke the bread.”²² Or

¹⁸ Interestingly, the interpretation of incarnation as a textual embodiment that I have elicited from Kemper bears a striking affinity with the view proffered in the allegedly Valentinian *Gospel of Truth*. See Elliot R. Wolfson, “Inscribed in the Book of Living: *Gospel of Truth* and Jewish Christology,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007): 234–271, esp. 264–268. Also relevant is the interpretation of Origen offered by Virginia Burrus, “*Creatio Ex Libidine*: Reading Ancient Logos Differently,” in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart (New York: Routledge, 2005), 141–156.

¹⁹ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 190–260.

²⁰ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 152b: Metatron, which is the angelic name of Christ, is there identified as the “Oral Torah” on account of the “new Torah.” See also *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fols. 53b, 223a.

²¹ *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fols. 201b–202a; *Avodat ha-Kodesh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 139b. For citation and analysis of other passages in Kemper’s compositions related to this theme, see Wolfson, “Messianism,” 150–152.

²² *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fols. 53a–b.

again, commenting in *Matteh Mosheh* on a statement in the *Zohar* that “Daniel’s image [*diyokneih*] did not change even when he was in the lion’s den and therefore he was saved,”²³ Kemper explained that this is because “he believed in the Messiah, who is the divine image and his semblance [*zelem elohim u-temunato*]. Therefore, Daniel had a proper human image [*zelem ha-adam ha-yashar*] like the one through which the holy One, blessed be he, created Adam, and Adam in his transgression destroyed that image, but the one who believes in Jesus Christ becomes a new man [*adam hadash*] and he receives the primordial image [*ha-zelem ha-kadmon*].”²⁴ Kemper is obviously influenced by the typological relationship between Adam and Jesus that had a profound influence on the history of Christianity based principally on the view set forth in the epistles by Paul or by those who amplified his approach.²⁵ In line with the Pauline anthropology, Kemper maintains that through Jesus the punishment of death incurred by humanity as a result of the fall is overcome. We can speak, accordingly, of Jesus rectifying the sin of Adam. Kemper departs from the more standard Christian perspective, however, by resisting the distinction between the “natural body” of the first Adam and the “spiritual body” of the last Adam. Being reborn in Christ does not mean, as it did for the author of Ephesians (4:22–23), that one puts on the “new man” by being renewed in spirit or mind; it entails rather that the divine image with which Adam was created, the image borne by Jesus in his physical embodiment, is restored to the person that proclaims faith in the Messiah. Remarkably, in the continuation of this discussion, Kemper writes that “when the Jews were circumcised, by means of this sign they received and were garbed in the new man.”²⁶ That the divine image relates to the somatic and not to the pneumatic is made explicit by Kemper in another passage: “The corporeal human [*adam gufani*] is created in the image of the likeness of the icon of the man above [*zelem demut diyokna adam she-lema’alah*], and this is the Messiah.”²⁷ I would suggest that this

²³ *Zohar* 1:191a. In the Lublin *Zohar* used by Kemper, which was published in 1623, the reference is to the section on Genesis, 427.

²⁴ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 81b–82a.

²⁵ Robin Scroggs, *The Last Adam: A Study in Pauline Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966); William D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 36–57, 120, 268, 304.

²⁶ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 82b.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 95b. See *ibid.*, fol. 99a, where the attribution of the term *hok* to the Messiah is explained by the fact that “his image was engraved with the face of a human, for he is the divine image” (*she-diyokno hakukah bifnei adam she-hu zelem elohim*).

orientation betrays the influence of rabbinic and kabbalistic sources on Kemper. Further evidence for this influence can be seen in the fact that Kemper perceived his own literary productions—explications of the oral text of the Gospel by way of interpreting the hidden Christological meaning embedded in zoharic passages—as a means to participate in the mystery of incarnation. The texts of Kemper embody, as it were, an alternate notion of transubstantiation whereby the body and blood of Christ are not bread and wine but parchment and ink.²⁸ This is not to deny that Kemper avails himself of the more standard Eucharistic symbolism.²⁹ He is particularly fond of decoding references in biblical, rabbinic, and zoharic sources to “bread” (*lehem*) as denoting the “body of the Messiah” (*guf ha-mashiah*).³⁰ My point is, however, that, in Kemper’s thinking, the older symbolic identification of the body of Christ as bread assumes a textual connotation: the secret of the bread, which is the body, is the New Testament (*berit hadashah*) that is distributed to and consumed by the faithful.³¹

Sabbatianism and Kemper’s Christian Kabbalah

Before proceeding to the main topic of this analysis, it is necessary to address the question of the influence of Sabbatianism on Kemper. I must admit forthrightly that there is no precise text that substantiates the claim for a direct impact of Sabbatianism on Kemper’s feminine representations of Jesus. My methodological assumption, however, is that the bearing of a monumental historical event on occasion can be ascertained by the unspoken concealed in the background as much as by the spoken revealed in the foreground.³² Moreover, as a number of scholars have noted, there is an undeniable link between Kemper’s con-

²⁸ The view I am attributing to Kemper has an interesting parallel to the fourteenth-century Rhenish Dominican mystic, Henry Suso. See Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns As Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 178–180, and idem, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 197–232, esp. 204.

²⁹ See, for instance, *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 146b–147a.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, fols. 102a, 113b–114a, 145b–146a.

³¹ *Beriah ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 22b.

³² For an elaboration of this methodological claim, see Elliot R. Wolfson, “Martyrdom, Eroticism, and Asceticism in Twelfth-Century Ashkenazi Piety,” in *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. Michael Signer and John Van Engen (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 171–175.

version and the heretical messianic movement.³³ The individual case of Kemper should be viewed as an exemplar of two opposing trends that ensued in the wake of the Sabbatian movement: on the one hand, the increased polemical exchange between Jews and Christians,³⁴ and, on the other hand, the apocalyptic hope for a reconciliation between Judaism and Christianity to be realized through baptism.³⁵ Indeed, as Kemper himself intimates, both in the German report of his conversion as well as in the introduction to his massive Hebrew commentary on select zoharic passages (the treatise, which was composed in 1711, was given two titles, *Matteh Mosheh* and *Makkel Ya'akov*, reflecting respectively the author's Jewish and Christian names), his decision to convert was in some measure related to the disappointment that he, like many other Jews in Poland, felt over the failed prediction by the prophet Zadoq of Horodna concerning the return of Sabbatai Zevi in 1695.³⁶ The disenchantment with Sabbatianism should not be viewed as the single, or even the definitive, reason to explain Kemper's enchantment with Christianity, but there can be little doubt that it served as a catalyst as his own autobiographical recounting suggests.³⁷ The conversion afforded Kemper an opportunity to transfer and thereby sustain the messianic enthusiasm he discerned in kabbalistic lore, especially in the zoharic homilies refracted through the historical prism of Sabbatian eschatology.

³³ Gershom Scholem, *Studies and Texts Concerning the History of Sabbateanism and Its Metamorphoses* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1982), 94 note 72 (Hebrew); Yehuda Liebes, *On Sabbateanism and Its Kabbalah: Collected Essays* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1995), 172 and 222 (Hebrew); idem, "A Profile of R. Naphtali Katz of Frankfort and His Attitude Towards Shabbateanism," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 13 (1996): 301–302 (Hebrew); Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500–1750* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 84.

³⁴ Elisheva Carlebach, "Sabbatianism and the Jewish-Christian Polemic," in *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division C, Vol. II: Jewish Thought and Literature (1990): 1–7; and idem, "The Last Deception: Failed Messiahs and Jewish Conversion," in *Millenarianism and Messianism*, 125–138.

³⁵ Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 123.

³⁶ *Unterthäniger Bericht*, 10–11; *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 6b–7a. Kemper refers to the former reference in the latter as his "book of confession," *sefer hoda'ah*, which he composed in German. On the figure of Zadoq of Horodna, see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1956), 303; Isaiah Tishby, "The Report of the Redemption of R. Zadoq of Grodno in 1695," *Zion* 12 (1947): 88 (Hebrew).

³⁷ In *Beriah ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fols. 123b–124a, Kemper recounts the example of several Jewish children who sought to affirm their faith in Jesus prior to their death, one of them dated to 1681.

Support for my conjecture may be elicited from the following statement of Kemper in a section of the zoharic commentary called *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*: “The verse ‘Through this Aaron shall enter into the shrine’ [*be-zo’t yavo aharon el ha-kodesh*] (Lev. 16:3) also was a cause to mislead the Jews with respect to the Messiah ... for they took the word *be-zo’t* numerically as 408 [believing that] then Aaron, the anointed high priest [*mashiaḥ kohen gadol*], would enter the holy of holies ... but in their confusion is support for the Christians, since the Jews themselves acknowledge that the Messiah is a high priest and this accords with the New Testament.”³⁸ The messianic calculation to which Kemper alludes is the widespread date of 1648, which was endorsed by Kabbalists from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the time of the eschaton based on a passage in the *Zohar* that set this year as the time of the final resurrection.³⁹ That 1648 was a year of great massacres against the Jews in Poland only added to the redemptive significance of this date, and it is thus not a surprise that some of the early Sabbatians linked the messianic calling of Sabbatai Zevi to this date.⁴⁰ In another passage from the same treatise, Kemper refers even more specifically to the murder of thousands of Jews in the Ukraine during 1648/49.⁴¹ While he does not allude specifically to Sabbatian messianism tied to that date, the possibility for such an interpretation is enhanced by his further identification of the Messiah as the high priest, a theme that is implied as well in the well-attested identification of Sabbatai Zevi and Metatron.

The messianic task that Kemper set for himself was to articulate a religious philosophy that would simultaneously promote Christianity for Jews and Judaism for Christians. The execution of this charge was facilitated primarily by his conviction that the secrets encoded by the “hidden language” (*lashon nistar*) of the *Zohar*,⁴² as well as allusions to esoteric knowledge found in other Jewish texts,⁴³ are to be inter-

³⁸ *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 226b.

³⁹ *Zohar* 1:139b.

⁴⁰ Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi: The Mystical Messiah*, trans. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 88–93, 141.

⁴¹ *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fols. 173b–174a.

⁴² *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 25b. See also *ibid.*, fol. 92a. The inability on the part of Jews to discern the truths about Jesus from their own mystical sources indicates that “even the wisdom of kabbalah has been lost” (*ibid.*, fol. 49a).

⁴³ See, for instance, *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 29b, where reference to a “great secret” (*sod gadol*) in Abraham Ibn Ezra is explicated in a Christological manner. See *ibid.*, fol. 98a.

preted as references to Jesus. To insist on a Sabbatian context to explain Kemper's actions and teachings, then, is not to deny that his agenda fit in well with the larger cultural patterns of his time. Additionally, the blurring of rigid theological boundaries separating the two faiths is attested in older kabbalistic sources, including several key zoharic passages, which undoubtedly served as the textual ground in which Kemper anchored his spiritual hybridity. Notwithstanding the validity of both of these assertions, I think it reasonable to claim that he was beholden primarily to a subversive hermeneutic that pushed the halakhic tradition to its limit by narrowing the gap between transgression and piety, an orientation that resonated especially well with the characterization of Jesus as advocating the fulfillment rather than the destruction of the law. Kemper's approach to halakhah and the messianic dispensation accords with Sabbatian ideology, which I have labeled "hypernomian," in contrast to Scholem's taxonomy "antinomian," predicated on the presumption that overturning Jewish ritual is itself a ritualistic gesture.⁴⁴ Indeed, as Scholem himself observed in one context with regard to the Sabbatians, "It is by no means disobedience or apostasy which appears in this abrogation of the Torah, but rather a changed situation in the world."⁴⁵ The breaking of the law is not an end in and of itself nor is it the means to some greater end; it is reflective of a different ontic condition that is commensurate to an internal transformation of the spirit. Transgressing the edicts of the Torah, however, yielded the invention of new forms of ceremonial behavior appropriate to the eschatological resolution of history.⁴⁶ Redemption is realized through keeping the faith, but it is a faith manifest in the piety of nonobservance. The logic of paradox, a logic that claims the middle excluded by Aristotle's excluded middle, is encapsulated in the identification of the messiah and the serpent, an idea expressed in embryonic form in kabbalistic sources from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but articulated explicitly in Sabbatian sources

⁴⁴ See Elliot R. Wolfson, "Beyond Good and Evil: Hypernomianism, Transmorality, and Kabbalistic Ethics," in *Crossing Boundaries: Essays on the Ethical Status of Mysticism*, ed. William Barnard and Jeffrey J. Kripal (New York and London: Seven Bridges Press, 2002), 103–156, esp. 132–143, and the revised version in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 186–285, esp. 277–283.

⁴⁵ Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, 74.

⁴⁶ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 293–294; Wolfson, "Messianism," 164–165.

through the numerical equivalence of the Hebrew terms *mashiah* and *nahash* (both equal 358).⁴⁷

I note, parenthetically, that Kemper employs this numerology in his own writings.⁴⁸ For example, in a passage in *Me'irat Enayim*, his commentary on Matthew, Kemper invokes the numerological correspondence of *mashiah* and *nahash* in an attempt to establish the “great mystery” (*sod gadol*) that Jesus had the potency to overpower Satan, the primordial serpent (*nahash ha-kadmoni*), a belief exemplified typologically in the narrative (Exod. 7:9–12) about the staff of Aaron⁴⁹ turning into the serpent that swallowed the serpents of the Egyptian sorcerers as well as the narrative (Num. 21:6–9) about the copper serpent (*nehash nehoshet*), hoisted on a staff by Moses to heal the Israelites by fiery serpents (*ha-nehashim ha-seraphim*).⁵⁰ From Kemper’s standpoint, the mystery of Jesus conquering Satan entails recognition on the part of the faithful that Jesus and Satan are one, just as the rod of Moses could turn into a snake, a notion facilitated by the identification of Jesus as Metatron,⁵¹ and the further depiction of the latter in zoharic sources as embodying the polarity of good and evil.⁵² How more powerfully could the identity of opposites be expressed? When this breach with Aristotelian logic is applied to the question of ritual action, then it becomes clear that compliance to law is transgression, whereas transgression is compliance to law. The acceptance of this paradox should militate against the opinion that Sabbatian messianism entails a definitive departure from the nomian framework. To obliterate the halakhic world entirely would be

⁴⁷ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 297; idem, *Sabbatai Zevi*, 227, 235–236, 391, 813; Liebes, *On Sabbateanism*, 172–182.

⁴⁸ For instance, see *Karsei ha-Mishkan*, MS Uppsala Heb. 26, fol. 5b.

⁴⁹ To be precise, Kemper conflates the scriptural narrative about the staff of Aaron being changed into a serpent (Exod. 7:9–12) with the passages that describe the staff of Moses being turned into a serpent (*ibid.*, 4:2–5).

⁵⁰ *Me'irat Enayim*, MS Uppsala Heb. 32, fol. 124b.

⁵¹ Daniel Abrams, “The Boundaries of Divine Ontology: The Inclusion and Exclusion of Metatron in the Godhead,” *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 318; Wolfson, “Messianism,” 149; Asulin, “Another Glance,” 452–458.

⁵² For discussion of some relevant passages, see Wolfson, “Messianism,” 186–187 note 236. See also Asulin, “Another Glance,” 449–451. In *Beriah ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 6b, Kemper writes that, in his opinion, the serpent who seduced Eve was spiritual in nature “since his form was like the form of an angel . . . and, in particular, he was garbed in the form of the supernal angels that are beneath the throne of glory. Therefore, she surmised that he was divine.” See, however, *ibid.*, fol. 60a, where Kemper writes that Christian sages suppose that “Satan was garbed in a physical serpent.”

to erase the very context that offers one an opportunity to realize the paradox of messianic spirituality by which one exceeds and extends the boundary of law.⁵³

Oral Torah as Christ Incarnate

The scriptural image of the staff of Moses provides a key to unlocking the secret of Kemper's messianic self-understanding, as may be gathered from his comment explaining the titles he had chosen for the first part of the zoharic commentary: "It is called *Matteh Mosheh* on account of my previous name *mosheh* and *Makkel Ya'akov* on account of my current name, for I struggled against the Jews and I prevailed."⁵⁴ On the most basic level, as I noted above, the titles *matteh mosheh*, "staff of Moses" (Exod. 4:2-4), and *makkel ya'akov*, "rod of Jacob" (Gen. 30:37), correspond to the author's Jewish and Christian names. An additional factor, however, is intimated in the gloss Kemper provides on the second title, a paraphrase of the scriptural narrative in which the angel says to Jacob "Your name shall no more be called 'Jacob' but 'Israel,' for you struggled with gods and people, and you prevailed" (ibid., 32:28). Kemper's paraphrase is noteworthy as he leaves out the reference to "gods" (*elohim*) and adds "Jewish" (*yehudim*) to "men" (*anashim*), signifying thereby that he was victorious in his battle with fellow Jews. The nature of the struggle is elucidated in the continuation where Kemper interprets God's command to Moses to strike the stone in order to bring water therefrom (Exod. 17:6) as an order to discipline the "children of Israel who stand today on bitter waters, the holy of holies, that is, on Jesus Christ, who went before Israel in the desert to bring forth living water for them."⁵⁵ The rejection of Jesus on the part of the Jews turned the living water into bitter waters, but Kemper is charged with the mission of Moses to strike the "hard rock" to extract water, which he understands as the task of converting Jews, rendered in the archaic idiom *lekayyem nefashot me-yisra'el*, by demonstrating the truths of Christianity through heeding the obligation "to come and to

⁵³ See references above, note 44.

⁵⁴ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, title page. Compare *Me'irat Enayim*, MS Uppsala Heb. 32, fol. 93a, where Kemper, who is designated by the titles *rav* and *rabbi*, is also described as "one who returned to the faith in the Messiah" (*ba'al teshuvah el emunat ha-mashi'ah*). See ibid., fol. 98a, and *Leket he-Ani*, MS Uppsala Heb. 26, fol. 149a.

⁵⁵ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 1a.

enter into the chamber of chambers of the treatises of the ancient tradition [*lavo ve-likkanes be-ḥadrei ḥadarim be-sifrei kabbalah ha-yeshenah*], which is *Sefer ha-Zohar*, the most ancient of all books that are found today amongst the community of Jews, who desire to be called by the name ‘assembly of Israel’ [*keneset yisra’el*].”⁵⁶ Kemper, no doubt, believed that his Christian faith demanded that he provide the mystical justification for Jews to recognize not only the validity of Christianity but to discern that the roots for Christianity spring from the soil of Judaism, especially the garden of kabbalistic mysteries. Indeed, as Kemper argues, the protracted exile for the Jewish people must be understood primarily as a pneumatic condition related to the fact that Satan closed the opening to faith for them. Redemption from the diasporic state, therefore, consists of unlocking the gate that has been bolted so that Jews will acknowledge the messianic standing of Jesus.⁵⁷ Kemper doubtlessly deemed the worth of his own existence in terms of this mission. His gathering passages from the zoharic corpus that disclose the Judaic basis for Christianity, therefore, has the same salvific power accorded the rod of Moses, which could transform water from bitter to sweet, a power that could facilitate the return of errant Jews who opposed Jesus and his teaching. The fulfillment of this duty binds Kemper directly to Moses, the “first redeemer” (*go’el ri’shon*) or the “corporeal redeemer” (*go’el gufani*), the typological paradigm for Jesus, “the final redeemer” (*go’el aḥaron*) or the “spiritual redeemer” (*go’el ruḥani*).⁵⁸ The centrality of this exegetical pattern, which is reminiscent of the connection made between Moses and Sabbatai Zevi in Sabbatian texts,⁵⁹ can be seen in Kemper’s assertion that the angel of the Lord (*mal’akh yhwḥ*) that appeared to Moses in the epiphany of the burning bush (Exod. 3:2) was Jesus, “the redeemer who was first and last” (*zeh ha-go’el ri’shon ve-aḥaron*).⁶⁰ According to this text, it is not merely the symmetry between Moses and Jesus that is vital,⁶¹ but that the latter, in virtue of his angelic glory, was both the first and last redeemer, bringing about the physical and spiritual liberation.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 1b.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, fols. 78a–b.

⁵⁸ See *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fols. 36b, 74a.

⁵⁹ For references, see Wolfson, “Messianism,” 176 note 100.

⁶⁰ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 105b. See *ibid.*, fol. 150b.

⁶¹ On occasion Kemper also notes the asymmetry between Moses and Jesus, and, in fact the superiority of the latter vis-à-vis the former. See, for instance, *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 114a.

To treat the messianic pairing of Jesus and Moses in Kemper's thought adequately would require a separate analysis. I will here cite and analyze one passage from *Matteh Mosheh* in order to adduce the main points of this affinity. The zoharic passage that Kemper explicates reads as follows:

"And the spirit of God" (Gen. 1:2), this is the spirit of the Messiah.⁶² Immediately, he was "hovering" on the face of the waters of Torah, and immediately there was redemption, as it said, "And God said, 'Let there be light'" (ibid., 3). "So the Lord God banished him" (ibid., 3:23), from the hand of the Messiah who was in the Garden of Eden. ... And why? "To till the soil" (ibid.), which is the *Shekhinah*. ... "And stationed east of the Garden of Eden the cherubim" (ibid., 24), these are the Messiah son of David and the Messiah son of Joseph, for he drew forth the spirit of Messiah [*de-mashkha ruha di-meshiha*] concerning whom it is said "and the spirit of God," and this is Shiloh about whom it is said "I will emanate the spirit" (Num. 11:17), for *shiloh* is numerically equal to *mosheh*. "And stationed east" [*va-yashken mi-kedem*], for he placed Shiloh before [*de-akdim*] both of them, so that he would be hovering over the face of Torah and the redemption would be dependent on him.⁶³

This zoharic text, according to Kemper, proves clearly that "the Messiah is divine [*elohim*] because he is comprised in the expression 'spirit of God' [*ruah elohim*], and this Messiah will be the redeemer [*go'el*]." ⁶⁴ We are told, moreover, that the redemption is spiritual (*ruhanit*) and not physical (*gufanit*),⁶⁵ a point that Kemper contends was recognized by the Jews themselves, for instance, in the midrashic interpretation of the light mentioned in Genesis 1:4 as a reference to the luminosity stored away for the righteous in the eschatological future.⁶⁶ Commenting on the zoharic author's assertion that the two cherubim mentioned in Genesis 3:24 can be decoded symbolically as alluding to the two messianic figures, the Messiah son of David and the Messiah son of Joseph, Kemper avers that "our Messiah is the son of David, but he also is called the son of Joseph, and he is the 'way to the Tree

⁶² The zoharic exegesis is based on earlier aggadic sources, for instance, *Genesis Rabbah* 2:4, ed. Julius Theodor and Chanoch Albeck (Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1965), 17.

⁶³ *Zohar* 1:263a (*Hashmatot*). In the Lublin edition, the reference is to the section on Genesis, 82–83.

⁶⁴ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 94b.

⁶⁵ On the distinction between the spiritual redemption (*ge'ullah ruhanit*) and physical redemption (*ge'ullah gufanit*), see *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 29b.

⁶⁶ *Genesis Rabbah* 3:6, 21.

of Life' (Gen. 3:24), as it says in the New Testament."⁶⁷ Kemper was critical of the Pharisaic tradition (*kabbalah*) that there are two distinct saviors, asserting instead that Jesus could be depicted as both the Messiah of David and the Messiah of Joseph.⁶⁸ To ascertain the identification of the two messiahs as the cherubim, one must recall the opinion transmitted in the name of R. Qatina that the cherubim were male and female.⁶⁹ The twofold messianic doctrine, therefore, reflects the assumption regarding the androgynous unity of the Godhead. If we assume, as I think we should, that Kemper had this idea in mind, then it can be argued plausibly that his description of Jesus is parallel to the belief proffered by some Sabbatians that Sabbatai Zevi was an amalgam of both messianic figures and hence he personified the divine androgyne in his own being.⁷⁰ Further support for this suggestion may be gathered from the continuation of the zoharic text where Moses is identified with Shiloh based on the fact that both names numerically equal 345.⁷¹ Insofar as the name Shiloh (based on its usage in Gen. 49:10) assumes messianic significance, we can surmise that Moses, too, is accorded such a role. This is the import of the zoharic claim that "he drew forth the spirit of Messiah" (*de-mashkha ruha di-meshiha*). Tellingly, Kemper glosses the passage, "He 'drew forth the spirit of Messiah,' that is, the Messiah was garbed in a body of skin and flesh, and this is the one called Shiloh, and it is easy to understand."⁷² Notwithstanding Kemper's aside that this matter is "easy to understand," the passage is dense. Ostensibly, there is a shift from Moses to Jesus, as the name "Shiloh," which is a nickname for Moses, is applied to the incarnate form of Christ. In Kemper's scheme, Moses typologically foreshadows Jesus, and just as Moses exemplifies the divine agency configured in the

⁶⁷ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 95a. I assume that the reference to the New Testament is to the apocalyptic Tree of Life mentioned in Revelation 2:7, 22:2. For a useful survey, consider Robert Starke, "The Tree of Life: Protological to Eschatological," available at <http://www.kerux.com/documents/KeruxV11N2A3.asp>.

⁶⁸ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 57b–58a, 100a–b; *Me'irat Enayim*, MS Uppsala Heb. 32, fol. 101a.

⁶⁹ Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 54a; Baba Batra 99a.

⁷⁰ Elliot R. Wolfson, "Engenderment of Messianic Politics," 203–258; and idem, "Constructions," 57–89.

⁷¹ On this numerical equivalence, see also *Zohar* 1:25b. Based on the zoharic passages, this numerology appears in many later kabbalistic works.

⁷² *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 95a.

form of an anthropos, an idea enhanced by the fact that the letters of the name *mosheh* can be transposed into the word *ha-shem*, “the name,”⁷³ which alludes to the Tetragrammaton whose numerical value is forty-five ($yod + he + vav + he = [10 + 6 + 4] + [5 + 1] + [6 + 1 + 6] + [5 + 1]$), the same value of the word *adam* ($alef + dalet + mem = 1 + 4 + 40$),⁷⁴ so Jesus is the potency of God adorned in the corporeal body. As Kemper puts it in one context in *Matteh Mosheh*, “the letters of *mosheh* are a transposition of *ha-shem*, and the *shin* of *mosheh* is also the first letter of the word *shem*, and what remains [in the word *mosheh*] is *mah*, that is [the letters] *mem he*, which is the numerical value of *adam*, the fourth in the throne of the chariot, which consists of three creatures and the human who is the fourth, and all of them gaze upon him.”⁷⁵ The fourth visage contemplated by Ezekiel is the human image, which complements the three angelic beasts, the ox, the eagle, and the lion. According to Kemper, the human form is to be identified with Moses, as the latter bears the name (*mosheh = ha-shem*), and the name is YHWH, the numerical value of the words *mah* ($mem he = 40 + 5$) and *adam* ($alef, dalet, mem = 1 + 4 + 40$). We may infer that Kemper tacitly assumed that remarks about Moses culled from zoharic homilies can be transferred easily to Jesus. It is plausible to presume, moreover, that Kemper saw himself as the bridge that connects the two redeemers and thus he believed he was in the unique position to complete the spiritual redemption (*ge’ullah ruhanit*) inaugurated by Jesus as the consummation of the corporeal redemption (*ge’ullah gufanit*) initiated by Moses.⁷⁶ The former is surely higher than the latter, but the latter is indispensable to attain the former. The body is not to be discarded but liberated through the spirit of God that is embodied in the redeemer.

⁷³ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 113b–114a. The decoding of the name *mosheh* as *ha-shem*, and the further claim that Moses is typologically related to Jesus, is repeated in *Beriah ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 270a.

⁷⁴ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 96b–97a. In that context, not only are the letters of *mosheh* transposed into *ha-shem*, but the word itself is broken down into its three constituent letters, *shin*, *mem*, and *he*, the first stands metonymically for the word *shem*, that is “name,” and the remaining *mem* and *he* are an encoded reference to the Tetragrammaton, since the numerical value of the latter is forty-five ($mem + he = 40 + 5$), which is also the numerical value of *adam* ($alef + dalet + mem = 1 + 4 + 40$). Moses, consequently, is identified as the fourth beast in Ezekiel’s chariot, which had the face of a human. If we further apply the zoharic interpretation, then we can conclude that the fourth beast should be identified as the *Shekhinah*, and hence Moses, like Jesus, symbolically embodies the divine presence.

⁷⁵ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 96b–97a.

⁷⁶ *Beriah ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 29b. See *ibid.*, fol. 109b.

In another passage in *Matteh Mosheh*, Kemper develops this symbolic nexus in conjunction with a passage from the author of *Tikkunei Zohar*, “‘And the Lord showed him a tree’ (Exod. 15:25), this is the Tree of Life, and by means of it ‘the water became sweet’ (ibid.), and this is Moses, the anointed one [*mashiah*], concerning whom it is said ‘the rod of God is in my hand’ (ibid., 17:9). The ‘rod’ refers to Metatron, who is from the side of life and from the side of death. Thus he turns into a rod if he is an assistant [*ezer*] from the good side, but he turns into a serpent if he is in opposition to him [*kenegdo*].”⁷⁷ Commenting on this text, Kemper writes: “Jesus is the Tree of Life, and he is sweetened water to the one who has faith in him, and the rod of indignation to the one who denies him, for then he turns into the serpent, as he did before Pharaoh, as he was from the sect of unbelievers.”⁷⁸ Kemper’s interpretation of the zoharic passage leads him to identify Jesus and the serpent, which may be an echo of the aforementioned Sabbatian identification of *mashiah* and *naḥash*, a possibility that is enhanced by the depiction of the savior as the Tree of Life that imparts blessing and comfort to all who cleave to it, spiritual sustenance that is expressed not in ritual obedience to the Pentateuch of Moses, the Written Torah, literally the “Torah of letters” (*torah shel otiiyyot*), but in the declaration of faith, which is the Torah of the Tree of Life, the “teaching of the Gospel” (*torat even gillayon*), the “messianic Torah” (*torat ha-mashiah*), the “just Oral Torah” (*torah she-be-al peh ha-yesherah*), the Word of God instantiated in the figure of Jesus.⁷⁹ The textual body suggested by the Prologue to John is here broadened to the Gospels more generally as they embody the dicta of Jesus. The measure of corporeality is thus displaced from the literal body, that is, the body made up of graphemes, or, in rabbinic nomenclature, the Written Torah, the “Torah of letters,” the “Old Testament” (*berit yeshenah*), to the verbal body, that is, the body that is made up of phonemes, the *ipsissima verba*, the “teaching of the Gospel” that was actually spoken by Christ, which is identified further as the “just Oral Torah,” the “New Testament” (*berit ḥadashah*).⁸⁰ One cannot fail to note the irony here—the apostate Kabbalist recasts the most distinctive symbol of rabbinic culture, the Oral Torah, in a Christological mold: the dicta of Jesus, rather than the legalistic and folkloristic sayings of

⁷⁷ *Zohar* 1:27a.

⁷⁸ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 69a.

⁷⁹ See above, note 21.

⁸⁰ *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 22b.

the talmudic sages, constitute the Oral Torah in its most precise sense. More importantly for this particular analysis, the composition of bodiliness is directly related to this alternate conception of textuality. I hasten to add, however, that just as, rabbinically, the distinction between oral and written should not be treated in a dichotomous manner—the Oral Torah is itself written and the Written Torah must be read orally—so for Kemper, we must be on guard against rigidly bifurcating the two. Jesus is the Oral Torah, but he is also the embodiment of the inscribed text of Scripture when the latter is understood in its kabbalistic sense as being the name that is the Word. Commenting on a zoharic description of the Messiah as one who is sustained by the Written Torah and Oral Torah, which are symbolized by milk and wine, that is, the attributes of mercy and judgment,⁸¹ Kemper notes that the “supernal Logos” (*ma’amar ila’ah*) comprises both kinds of Torah central to rabbinic lore, but the Oral Torah consists of the effort “to understand the new instruction [*ha-torah hadashah*], that is, the proclamation of Jesus [*keri’at yeshu’a*], which he uttered through the holy mouth, and he gladdened the heart of those who heeded him in perfect faith.”⁸² Insofar as the Logos contains both the Written Torah and Oral Torah, and the latter is identified more specifically as the interpretative explications of the former—the new Torah⁸³—that issue directly from the mouth of Jesus, there is no basis to bifurcate sharply between the logocentric and grammatological. The Logos is not merely a text that is performatively spoken in contrast to one that is written; it is rather positioned between and thus it is spoken as written, and written as spoken. The word of Jesus declaimed phonologically is the voice of God inscribed orthographically. In the simpler terms that Kemper employs, Jesus is called the “finger of God on account of the fact that he writes on the tablet of people’s hearts and instructs them in the way.”⁸⁴

⁸¹ Zohar 1:240a (Lublin edition, 506).

⁸² *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 101b.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, fol. 136a.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 78b. On the inscribing of matters on the tablet of the heart, see *ibid.*, 99b.

Jesus as Shekhinah

Perhaps one of the more innovative ways that Kemper expressed the reinscription of the body is in terms of the identification of Jesus and *Shekhinah*. To appreciate the originality of this approach, it would be beneficial to review some of the basic tenets associated with *Shekhinah* in the symbolism of zoharic Kabbalah, as the latter served as the basis for Kemper's own blend of Jewish esotericism and Christian piety. *Shekhinah*, the rabbinic term for the indwelling of God's presence in the world, is the designation of the last of the ten *sefirot*, the luminous emanations that collectively make up the pleroma of the divine. A plethora of symbols are associated with *Shekhinah*, but for the purposes of this analysis I would like to focus on the two-faced characterization of *Shekhinah*, which is expressive of an ontological principle affirmed by practitioners of the occult wisdom from the inception of Kabbalah as a literary-historical phenomenon: The divine configuration, both in its totality and in each of its constituent elements, displays the quality of androgyny: masculinity is aligned with mercy, the act of bestowing, and femininity with judgment, the act of constricting. Although it is commonly believed that *Shekhinah* is singularly associated with feminine images, sometimes even portrayed by scholarly enthusiasts and enthusiastic scholars alike as the kabbalistic analogue to the mythical goddess or great mother, in fact, this gradation is no exception to the rule I articulated; on the contrary, *Shekhinah* is emblematic of the androcentric conception of androgyny that informs the traditional Kabbalah. Hence, in relation to the upper nine *sefirot*, *Shekhinah* is engendered as feminine, as its function is to receive the overflow by way of the phallic *Yesod*, but, in relation to the realms of being outside the world of emanation, *Shekhinah* is engendered as masculine, as its function is to sustain existence below by channeling the overflow of blessings from above. The point is illustrated in a poignant way in a zoharic passage where the image of the redeeming angel, *ha-mal'akh ha-go'el* (Gen. 48:16), is applied to *Shekhinah*, "the angel that is sometimes male and sometimes female. When it bestows blessings on the world, it is male, and it is called 'male,' like a male that bestows blessings on a female, but when it stands in judgment on the world, then it is called female like a female that is pregnant."⁸⁵ In the execution of judgment, *Shekhinah* restrains

⁸⁵ *Zohar* 1:232a.

the effluence pouring forth from above and she is thus compared to a pregnant woman that holds the fetus within the womb where gestation takes place. By contrast, in disseminating blessing to the worlds below, *Shekhinah* assumes a masculine persona, for she is like the man that fills the woman with seminal discharge.⁸⁶

With this brief introduction, we can turn our attention back to Kemper. The first striking thing to note is Kemper's repeated identification of Jesus with *Shekhinah* or with terms and/or images that are often associated with this potency. The basic assumption undergirding this equation is summed up in the following remark in *Matteh Mosheh*: "The Messiah and *Shekhinah* are one thing, that is, the efflux [*ha-shefa*] that was in the earth prior to the incarnation of Jesus [*hitgashmut yeshu'a*], which went with them in the desert, was called *Shekhinah*, but when he was embodied and became human, then he was called 'Messiah,' the 'central pillar,' the 'Son of the King,' and the like."⁸⁷ Secondly, in many of the relevant passages, the association of Jesus and *Shekhinah* is related to the question of androgyny. For instance, in *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, Kemper writes that all those who believe in Jesus "are called Israel [*yisra'el*], the just ones [*ha-yesharim*] who believe and have faith in the just God [*el yashar*], and he brought these ones out from the iron furnace, the side of impurity, and they ascended to the Son, which is the *Shekhinah*. This is alluded to in the commandments of circumcision and the paschal sacrifice."⁸⁸ The reference to these commandments indicates that the symbolic meaning of both biblical rites is that they are means to cleave to the name of God, which is identified with Jesus.⁸⁹ At play as well in Kemper's view is the rabbinic emphasis, based partially on some allusions in Scripture, on the sacrificial nature of circumcision. Both ritual acts point to Jesus, for, in his embodied state, he is "the sacrifice of the entire world" (*ki yeshu'a hayah korban kol ha-olam*)⁹⁰ as well as the "sign of the holy inscription" (*ot reshima kaddisha*).⁹¹ The "blood of circumcision" (*dam milah*) and the "blood of the paschal sacrifice" (*dam pesaḥ*) coalesce in the figure of Jesus, two forms of the "blood of the covenant" (*dam berit*) that are enacted symbolically in the four cups of red wine that Jews must drink at the Passover seder, the feast that commemorates

⁸⁶ For a more extensive discussion, see Wolfson, *Language*, 68–70.

⁸⁷ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 110a.

⁸⁸ *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 20b.

⁸⁹ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 74b–75a.

⁹⁰ *Me'irat Enayim*, MS Uppsala Heb. 32, fol. 184a.

⁹¹ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 112a.

the past redemption of Egypt and anticipates in this narrative retelling the future redemption.⁹² Instead of viewing Jewish ritual negatively as embracing the corporeal and eschewing the spiritual, Kemper discerns the inner, symbolic intent of the ceremonial actions. To be sure, Kemper accepts the Pauline argument regarding justification by faith rather than by works, and hence he is critical of the rabbis (designated as *ba'alei talmud*) for thinking that they could acquire the world-to-come solely through good actions and not by believing in the messianic calling of Jesus.⁹³ Kemper's approach, however, is more complex, since he looks upon Jesus as the concretization of the law, and, in that respect, the path beyond the law of the body is through the body of the law. As has often been the case in the long history of Jewish-Christian disputations, the particular example of circumcision illustrates the general point of discord. Following Paul and countless other Christian writers, Kemper maintains that circumcision of the flesh is replaced by circumcision of the heart, but he also insists that the original intent of the former, which is still operative for Jews, the people of the body that is the book, precludes any such bifurcation. As I noted above, Kemper even goes so far as to say that by means of the physical circumcision the sign, which is Christ, is inscribed on the male Jewish body, and as a consequence, the "old man" is removed and the "new man" put on (Ephesians 4:21–23). There is no reason to assume that Kemper would have thought that circumcision of the flesh had lost its spiritual meaning for the body politic of Israel. The Jewish rite, moreover, imparts to Gentile Christians as well the knowledge that the bodily circumcision of Jesus is not a trivial matter, as it is only in virtue of his having been circumcised in the flesh that he can become the sign of the covenant (*ot berit*) to transform the phallus (*milah*) into the mouth (*peh*) that is the signifier of divinity (*elohim*).⁹⁴ In *Avodat ha-Kodesh*, Kemper writes explicitly that the term *Shekhinah* is a generic noun (*shem kollel*) as it applies to the Father, "for he has produced a Son whom he has circumcised on the eighth day because Jesus is a branch from the Tree of Life."⁹⁵ The term *shekhinah* is one of the names of Jesus, but it can be expanded

⁹² *Ibid.*, fols. 186b–188a.

⁹³ See, for instance, *Avodat ha-Kodesh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fols. 144a–b.

⁹⁴ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 117b. To understand the chain of associations made by Kemper, one must bear in mind that both *milah* and *peh* equal 85, and *elohim* is 86, the previous sum of 85 plus an extra one for the word itself, a common numerological technique.

⁹⁵ *Avodat ha-Kodesh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 93b.

to denote the Father, inasmuch as the latter engenders the former. The crucial point is that Kemper deviates from the traditional kabbalistic symbolism by applying this key symbol to the masculine hypostases.

In another passage from *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, Kemper elaborates on the identification of Jesus as *shekhinah* by commenting on the zoharic passage from the *Ra'aya Meheimma* stratum where *Shekhinah* is designated the “sign of the covenant” (*ot berit*) from the side of *Yesod*.⁹⁶ Kemper similarly notes in that context that the term *shekhinah* is a *shem kollel* that is attributed to Jesus, for he “dwells with and amidst humanity” (*shokhen bein u-vetokh benei adam*). At the same time, however, Jesus is also identified as the “righteous one who is the foundation of the world” (*zaddik yesod olam*), for he is “the foundation stone, the principle and the foundation, first and last.”⁹⁷ Insofar as Jesus is identified as the covenant—*berit kodesh* or *berit shalom*⁹⁸—and the covenant, according to the kabbalistic understanding, is androgynous, it follows that Jesus must bear this quality. This is the import of Kemper’s observation that Jesus is both *Yesod*, the phallic foundation, and *Shekhinah*, the indwelling presence. The association of Jesus and *Shekhinah* is enhanced by the attribution of other standard symbols of the latter culled from zoharic literature to the former, to wit, “kingship” (*malkhut*) or “heavenly kingship” (*malkhut shamayim*),⁹⁹ “angel of the presence” (*mal'akh ha-panim*),¹⁰⁰ or “archon of the presence” (*sar ha-panim*), also identified as Metatron,¹⁰¹ “angel of the covenant” (*mal'akh ha-berit*),¹⁰² “redeeming angel” (*mal'akh ha-go'el*),¹⁰³ “ark of the covenant, Lord of all the earth” (*aron ha-berit adon kol ha-arez*),¹⁰⁴ the “bread of affliction” (*lehem oni*),¹⁰⁵ “wisdom” (*hokhmah*),¹⁰⁶

⁹⁶ *Zohar* 1:166a.

⁹⁷ *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 116a.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 40b.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 33a; *Me'irat Enayim*, MS Uppsala Heb. 32, fols. 119a, 133b, 135b, 146a.

¹⁰⁰ *Me'irat Enayim*, MS Uppsala Heb. 32, fols. 163b, 186a, 194a.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, fols. 129b–130a, 146b, 202b.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, fol. 179a–b, 186a.

¹⁰³ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 112a. On the identification of Jesus as the angel of God (as described especially in Exod. 14:19–21, the verses whence the 72 letter name is derived), see *Avodat ha-Kodesh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fols. 99b–100a.

¹⁰⁴ *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 230b, based on Josh 3:11.

¹⁰⁵ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 26b.

¹⁰⁶ *Karsei ha-Mishkan*, MS Uppsala Heb. 26, fol. 1a. In some passages, the sophianic nature of Jesus is related to the second of the emanations rather than with the tenth. See, for example, *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 88b. And *ibid.*, fol. 149b: “The Messiah is called *Hokhmah* in the ten *sefirot*, and to him alone belongs the kingship.” In line with this symbolic nuance, Jesus is on occasion designated by

“Matrona” (*matronita*),¹⁰⁷ “orchard of holy apples” (*ḥakal tapuḥin kaddishin*),¹⁰⁸ “opening” (*petah*), or the “opening of the tent” (*petah ha-ohel*),¹⁰⁹ and the curtain (*parokhet*) or veil (*yeri’ah*) through which one must go to enter before the holy of holies.¹¹⁰

Jesus as Mother

In addition to the identification of Jesus and *Shekhinah*, there is another aspect of Kemper’s portrayal of Jesus that reflects an interesting appropriation and transformation of a standard zoharic symbol. I am referring to the ascription of the image of mother to Jesus.¹¹¹ The matter may be illumined from a passage in the introduction to *Matteh Mosheh*. Kemper begins the discussion by mentioning the zoharic idea that the four letters of the name YHWH correspond respectively to the quaternity of the divine persona, Father (*Hokhmah*), Mother (*Binah*), Son (*Tif’eret*), and Daughter (*Malkhut*). Kemper insists, however, that “there is a hidden secret” (*sod nistar*) in the passage of the *Zohar*.¹¹² In the continuation, we learn that the secret of the secret entails the Christological interpretation:

The Father refers to God the Father, the first gradation, the one to whom they pray in the morning prayers “Our Father in heaven” [*avinu she-ba-shamayim*] ... the Mother refers certainly to the Son. Why is he called in the name of the mother? On account of the supernal Wisdom [*hokhmah ila’ah*] in the ten *sefirot*, which is the second of the *sefirot*, and also on account of the fact that he produced [*holid*] everything that was created “in the heavens above and upon the earth below” (Deut. 4:39), for through him were they created, as in the [rendering of] Targum Yerushalmi [on the word *bere’shit*] “by wisdom” [*be-ḥukhma*] and [Targum] Jonathan referred to him several times as the “saying of the Lord” [*memra de-yhwh*], and concerning him John said “In the beginning was the word” (John 1:1) ... Do not be concerned that the Holy Spirit is also called on occasion “mother” ... because for the most part the

the zoharic locution *hokhmah ila’ah*, the “supernal wisdom.” See *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fols. 32a, 34a.

¹⁰⁷ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 27a; *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fols. 216a–b.

¹⁰⁸ *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 179a.

¹⁰⁹ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 77b–78a.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, fols. 64b–65a, 78a.

¹¹¹ Wolfson, “Messianism,” 147–150. Some of the material analyzed there is repeated here.

¹¹² *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 8b–9a.

name “mother” applies to the Son. Moreover, “son” and “daughter” are said with respect to that supernal gradation. He is called “son” when he sits to the right of his Father, “[The Lord has established His throne in heaven] and His sovereign rule is over all” (Ps. 103:19), and before him “every knee will bend down” (Isa. 45:23). Then he is the son who inherits the property of his father. ... And do not wonder that he is contained in the names of both Mother and Son, for in the ten *sefirot* he is also contained in the right and left sides, *Hokhmah* to the right and *Binah* to the left. He is called “daughter” when he descends to earth, “humbled and riding on an ass” (Zech. 9:9)¹¹³ ... and then his power is weakened like a female, and on account of this aspect he assumes the name “daughter.” ... And he is also called “daughter” on account of “all the glory of the princess is inward” (Ps. 45:14), for all his glory was by way of the inner and spiritual and not by the external, for externally he appeared to others like one of them. His glory was inward for he is the Father and he is in the Father. For that reason he is also called *Ze’eir Anpin*, for he diminished and lowered himself to endure suffering on account of humankind, to atone for their sins.¹¹⁴

The configurations (*parzufim*) of the zoharic quaternity are reduced to two, viz., the Father and Son, as Mother and Daughter are treated as variant manifestations of the latter. The Son is called “Mother” on account of his demiurgical capacity, which is related exegetically to both the ancient wisdom tradition about the *memra* preserved in the Aramaic Targumim and the doctrine of the Logos promulgated in the prologue to John.¹¹⁵ I note something of a discrepancy here with the zoharic symbolism according to which *Hokhmah*, the second emanation, is represented figuratively as the Father and *Binah*, the third emanation, as the Mother. There is some slippage in Kemper’s account, for he affixes the maternal images to either the Holy Spirit¹¹⁶—and in this regard there is affinity between Kemper, the Christian Kabbalah of Postel, and the Moravian teaching of Zinzendorf—or to Jesus on account of his identification with *Binah*. Hence his remark that with respect to the *sefirot* Jesus is “also contained in the right and left sides, *Hokhmah* to the right and *Binah* to the left,” correlated respectively with the Son and Mother. Kemper is not consistent, however, for in some passages he associates the hypostasis of the Son with either the supernal *Hokhmah*, the second emanation,¹¹⁷ or with both it and the

¹¹³ Compare *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 49a.

¹¹⁴ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 9a–10b.

¹¹⁵ *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fols. 22b, 28b, 53b–54a.

¹¹⁶ *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 42b.

¹¹⁷ See above, note 106.

lower *Hokhmah*, the tenth emanation. For example, in *Matteh Mosheh*, he writes: “This Messiah is *Hokhmah*, the second gradation of the ten *sefirot*. ... ‘And the spirit of the Lord rests upon him’ (Isa. 11:2), on this lower opening [*pitḥa tata’ah*], that is, the Messiah.”¹¹⁸ For the most part, however, Kemper deviates from the standard symbolism attested in zoharic and other kabbalistic literature. Thus, in another passage in *Matteh Mosheh*, the Trinity is described as consisting of *Hokhmah*, the Father, *Binah*, the Son (based on decoding the word as *ben yah*,¹¹⁹ the son of *yod he*, the letters that signify *Hokhmah* and *Binah*), and the Holy Spirit is the vapor that comes out from their combination and overflows to the prophets.¹²⁰ In short, the zoharic idea of the heterosexual union of Father and Mother, *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, is transformed in Kemper’s mind into the homoerotic (though, apparently, asexual) union of Father and Son. I note, parenthetically, that a similar explanation can be applied to the way Kemper appropriates the formula used by Kabbalists, *le-shem yihud kudsha berikh hu u-shekhinteiḥ*, “For the sake of the unification of the holy One, blessed be He, and his *Shekhinah*.”¹²¹ In the conventional understanding, the words are uttered to unify the masculine and feminine dimensions of the divine, *Tif’eret* and *Malkhut*, the King and the Matrona. However, since for Kemper the *Shekhinah* refers to Jesus, the intent of the liturgical saying is to unify Father and Son, and thus we can speak of a homoerotic reframing of the heterosexual imagery.¹²²

The designation “son” denotes the exalted rank of Jesus as *synthronos*, a term used to mark the function of Jesus occupying a throne to the right of the Father.¹²³ By contrast, the designation “daughter” relates to the mystery of the incarnation, the humbling of Jesus when he takes on

¹¹⁸ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 78b.

¹¹⁹ *Avodat ha-Kodesh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 144a.

¹²⁰ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 46b.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 56b.

¹²² By contrast, the heteroerotic symbolism seems to be preserved in the depiction of the Church as the bride (derived from Song of Songs) in relation to Jesus, obviously, a much older exegetical strategy in the history of Christian spirituality (for references to scholarly discussions, see Wolfson, *Language*, 577 note 30). See also *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 118a. On the explicit characterization of Jesus as the Solomon of the Song, the “king to whom peace belongs,” see *ibid.*, fol. 104b, and *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 24a.

¹²³ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 84b, 97a, 99a, 107a, 115a, 122a, 130b, 131b; *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 142a.

the form of the material world, when he is “weakened like a female,”¹²⁴ and, as a consequence, all the glory of the divine is internalized and concentrated into a single point,¹²⁵ which is designated by the rabbinic locution *bat kol*, literally, “daughter of the voice.”¹²⁶ I note, parenthetically, that during my visit to Uppsala University, I examined the *Zohar* that Kemper used when he wrote his various commentaries,¹²⁷ and much to my surprise, when I opened up the volume I found written on the inside cover opposite the title page “his power was weakened like a female” (*tashash koḥo ki-nekevah*), followed by a directive to look at the zoharic section on *Beha’alotkha* in the book of Numbers.¹²⁸ Comparing the passages that were marked and annotated therein with the citations explicated by Kemper in his various works, I came to the conclusion that this comment was likely written by his own hand. If this supposition is correct, then we must marvel at the fact that of all possible comments, Kemper chose this one to inscribe as an epigraph in the *Zohar* from which he studied and that served as the foundation for his own exegetical excursions. As I have already indicated, the remark “his power was weakened like a female” is a signpost to the mystery of incarnation, and thus I would go so far as to hypothesize that this inscription suggests that Kemper thought of the *Zohar* as the textual instantiation of Christ’s having humbled himself by donning the garment of corruptible flesh. In support of this conjecture, I note that in one place Kemper describes the *Zohar* as a “book that was amassed from manuscripts (which were found from the mouth) of Rabbi Simeon ben Yoḥai.”¹²⁹ This language closely resembles his understanding of the Gospels as the written anthology of the oral teachings of Jesus, which I have discussed above. Be that as it may, the reference made to the

¹²⁴ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 33a.

¹²⁵ Reading the zoharic symbolism closely, Kemper describes both the supernal Wisdom, the second *sefirah*, and the lower Wisdom, the tenth *sefirah*, as points. For him, these refer respectively to Father and Son. See *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 90a.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 15a.

¹²⁷ Uppsala Universitets-Bibliotek obr. 53:99. In the introduction to *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 6a–b, Kemper mentions a handwritten noted placed in the margin of the *Zohar* found in the Uppsala Library. The pagination corresponds to the Lublin edition, and I have little doubt that the copy of the Lublin *Zohar* that I examined at the library in Uppsala is the one used by Kemper. Mention of Jewish mystical texts that Kemper examined at the library in Uppsala is also found in *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 86b.

¹²⁸ *Zohar* 3:156a (Lublin edition, 296).

¹²⁹ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 59b.

passage from the zoharic portion in Numbers is relevant as it contains the statement “I was considered to be a female,” which is placed in the mouth of Moses. Again, we see the analogy that Kemper draws between Moses and Jesus, the redemptive power of both being aligned with the act of degradation that is rendered in gender terms as the powerful male being weakened like a female. The pietistic ideal that emerges from this transformation is for the male to become female, even if we readily acknowledge that the contours of femininity implied thereby reinforce the patriarchal hierarchy.

The weakened state justifies the metaphorical application of the term “daughter” to Jesus and it is also captured in the technical zoharic expression *Ze’eir Anpin*, which literally means the “small face,” set in contrast to *Arikkh Anpin*, literally, the “long face,” and metaphorically, the “long-suffering one.”¹³⁰ Elsewhere Kemper assigns the title *Ze’eir Anpin* to Metatron, the angelic name of Jesus, on account of the fact that “he diminished himself.”¹³¹ This act of diminution accounts for the attribution of the title “lesser wisdom,” *hokhmah ze’ira*, to Jesus, a locution that situates Kemper’s thinking in the trajectory of Sophianic Christology that can be traced back to Late Antiquity.¹³² The theme is elaborated in *Karsei ha-Mishkan*, the third part of Kemper’s zoharic commentary, in an interpretation of the distinction between the two forms of Israel found in *Zohar* 2:216a: “The elder Israel [*yisra’el sabba*] is the Father, the Ancient of Ancients, and the younger [*zuta*] is the Son, *Ze’eir Anpin*, for he diminished himself [*hiz’ir et azmo*] and descended to the earth, and he is the youthful [*na’ar*] Metatron.”¹³³ This identification stems from the fact that in the kabbalistic texts themselves Metatron is characterized both as the glory of God and as the highest angel. This dual role is appropriated by Kemper to express an ancient Christian

¹³⁰ Kemper also attributes the zoharic expression *Atika*, which is a synonym for *Arikkh Anpin*, to the Father. See *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 33b. In *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 94a, the zoharic expression “head of the Infinite” (*resha de-ein sof*) is applied to the Father, and the spirit (*ruah*) that comes out from there to the Son. The expression *Atik Yomin* (based on Dan. 7:13, 22) is attributed to the Father in *ibid.*, fol. 107a.

¹³¹ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fol. 116a; *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 34a.

¹³² *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 34a.

¹³³ *Karsei ha-Mishkan*, MS Uppsala Heb. 26, fol. 68a. On Jesus diminishing his power; see also *Me’irat Enayim*, MS Uppsala Heb. 32, fol. 148a; *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 80b.

belief regarding the angelomorphic Jesus and the hypostatized name.¹³⁴ From the Christological vantage point this implies that the glory is embodied in the form of an angel that is manifest in the world. The technical designation of God as *Ze'eir Anpin*, therefore, is another way of conveying the belief in Jesus humbling himself by assuming the corruptible form of a physical body. In the act of debasement, however, lies the secret of angelification, the mystery of the immaterial donning the garment of the material, of the male becoming female.

Kemper interprets the zoharic passage regarding the augmentation in the supernal world of the one who diminishes himself in this world¹³⁵ as a reference to the mystery of kenosis by means of which Jesus lowers himself into the material world, culminating in his being bound to the cross.¹³⁶ Interestingly, Kemper associates the words attributed to the head of the academy in the aforementioned zoharic text, “the one who is small is great, and the one who is great is small,”¹³⁷ with the words ascribed to Jesus, “whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt. 23:12).¹³⁸ The pietistic virtue of humility is thus tied to the incarnational theology, an idea that can be traced to Phil. 2:3–8. For Kemper, moreover, this mystery entails the feminine transposition of Jesus, which is signified by the technical term *ze'eir anpin*, briefly discussed above. In recent years it has been suggested that this symbol in some kabbalistic sources from the period of the *Zohar* (late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries) was a technical designation of the *Shekhinah* in her feminine comportment.¹³⁹ Curiously, it appears that Kemper’s Christological orientation led him to recover what may have been the original intent of this symbolic

¹³⁴ Jarl E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1985); Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992); idem, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 103–145; Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelmorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998). It seems to me that the influence of Kemper can be detected in the discussion on the angelic nature of the divine Presence in the dissertation on the *Shekhinah* written in Uppsala University by Gabriel N. Mathesius (1734), 42–46.

¹³⁵ *Zohar* 1:122b.

¹³⁶ *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fol. 152a.

¹³⁷ See also *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 20a–21a, 63b.

¹³⁸ See my discussion in *Venturing Beyond*, 288–289.

¹³⁹ Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 119 and 135; Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 110–114.

locution. In another context, Kemper explains this secret by reflecting on a distinction in *Zohar* between the name “Israel,” which signifies the head and the masculine, and the name “Jacob,” which signifies the heel and the feminine.¹⁴⁰ According to Kemper, both names refer to Jesus, the former to his elevated status as the Son seated to the right of the Father, and the latter to his diminished status as a human being in this world, which is depicted by the image of the daughter. As Kemper is quick to point out, the feminine depiction of Jesus does not mean that he was anatomically female, but it suggests that from the perspective of the hierarchy of gender values (relative to a specific cultural context) in his weakened state he can be referred to as female.¹⁴¹

In *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, Kemper links the fact that Jesus is both son and mother to the passage from *Zohar* mentioned above where *Shekhinah* is described as both male and female.¹⁴² It would seem that, in this context, as we find in several other passages, the symbol of mother applies to Jesus in his identity as *Shekhinah*, and in particular in executing judgment in the world¹⁴³ or weeping like the matriarch Rachel over the fate of Israel.¹⁴⁴ In several other contexts in his writings, Kemper reiterates and explains this symbolism in similar terms. For instance, in *Karsei ha-Mishkan*, Kemper cautions the reader “not to be astonished that in the Kabbalah the Messiah is called ‘mother,’ that is, like the bird that hovers over his fledglings, and he guards them beneath his wings so that the bat does not come to devour them, and thus Jesus behaved. . . . This is the way of the secret of ‘Let the mother go’ (Deut. 22:7), that is, the Messiah, for he came for the purpose of guarding his fledglings from every trouble and evil affliction.”¹⁴⁵ In another passage from this composition, Kemper remarks that the “great secret” of the masters of the tradition (*ba’alei kabbalah*) calling Jesus “mother” is related to the idea (derived exegetically from *Zohar* 2:213b) that he gives birth to new souls.¹⁴⁶

By way of conclusion, we might say that in spite of the longstanding tradition to apply maternal tropes to Jesus, related especially to the image of the wounds of the suffering Christ, and in spite of the

¹⁴⁰ *Zohar* 1:266b (*Ra’aya Meheimna*).

¹⁴¹ *Beriaḥ ha-Tikhon*, MS Uppsala Heb. 25, fols. 176a–177b.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, fol. 232a.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, fol. 28b.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, fols. 213a–b; see *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 33a–b.

¹⁴⁵ *Karsei ha-Mishkan*, MS Uppsala Heb. 26, fols. 2b–3a.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 67b.

resurgence of that motif in the wake of some strands of Renaissance occultism and Reformation pietism, Kemper may be distinguished from those who preceded him and from contemporary expressions of this symbolism. Kemper's vast knowledge of the Kabbalah facilitated the utilization of the images of mother and daughter to express the foundational dogmas of Christian faith, the symbol of mother relates to the identification of Jesus as the demiurgical Logos, and the symbol of daughter bespeaks the incarnation of Jesus in the flesh of a mortal human being. Kemper's kabbalistic Christology in a nutshell can be delineated as follows: The way to comprehend the exaltation of the Mother is through the degradation of the Daughter. In terms of the theme of the body, the female images of Jesus indicate a subtle reappropriation on Kemper's part of the Christian barb regarding the carnal nature of the Jews. The Jewish body is problematized to the extent that the Jews reject Christ. Indeed, by stubbornly refusing to recognize and accept the messianic claims of Jesus, the divine presence abandoned the people of Israel, leaving them as beasts divested of their human deportment.¹⁴⁷ By returning to faith in Jesus, however, the Jews, who possess all the "keys of faith" (*maftehot emunah*) in spite of their failings,¹⁴⁸ can redeem their flesh and thereby reclaim the true angelic body to become the new human, which is the word incarnate,¹⁴⁹ the Oral Torah, the Son who bears the image of the Father by being both the Mother exalted above in heaven and the Daughter despoiled below on earth.

¹⁴⁷ *Matteh Mosheh*, MS Uppsala Heb. 24, fols. 16a–b.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 111a.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, fols. 80b–81a.

“ADONAI CON VOI” (1569),
A SIMPLE POPULAR SONG WITH A
COMPLICATED SEMANTIC ABOUT
(WHAT SEEMS TO BE) CIRCUMCISION

DON HARRÁN

Written words are symbols of spoken
words and spoken words are symbols
of mental experience.

Aristotle, *On Interpretation*¹

The portion “symbols of mental experience” (*ton en te psyché pathemá-ton sýmbola*) leaves considerable room for interpretive maneuver. That single texts are susceptible to different readings is a truism as valid for medieval commentary on canonical works as it is for modern literary criticism variously practiced, on texts at large, with traditional, structuralist, or post-structuralist methodologies. In the present report I shall be concerned with a modest Italian popular song, specifically a *villotta*, one of various lighter types of music in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.² “Adonai con voi”—thus it begins—radiates joviality and at first blush appears innocuous; one might easily pass it by. But, looking closer, one is struck by its “odd” vocabulary, which, when probed, turns out to be so provocative as to raise broader questions, of an epistemological nature, about poetry as a vehicle for transmitting ideas and attitudes. What was the author trying to say and why? Whom

¹ *Peri hermeneias*, 1.1.1. I reversed the order of the two clauses (originally “Spoken words ... written words ...”). In music, notated or performed “sounds” are similarly representative of “mental experience.” Aristotle asserted that “rhythms and melodies contain representations of anger and mildness, and also of courage and temperance and all their opposites and the other moral qualities ... [and that] when we listen to such representations we change in our soul”: *Politics*, 8.5.6, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).

² Including the *villanesca*, the *canzone napolitana*, and the *villanella*: they appear in works of greater and lesser composers from the 1530s on. On specific collections of *villotte*, see below; and for Thomas Morley’s description of the *villanella* (and, by implication, the *villotta*) as a form of rustic entertainment, in which composers “make a clownish music to a clownish matter,” see his treatise *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (1597), ed. R. Alec Harman (London: J.M. Dent, 1952), 295.

was he addressing? How did *he* conceive his remarks? How vicariously are *we* to conceive them: in earnest? in jest?

The verses under investigation—and I shall concentrate on the verses rather than the music, which, in the present case, is fragmentary (see below)³—elude a facile explanation: they intimate more than they disclose. In their opaqueness, they typically illustrate the referential power of language, about which Hans-Georg Gadamer wrote that “nothing that is said has its truth simply in itself, but refers instead backward and forward to what is unsaid.”⁴ It is evident that the more meaning one can extract from a poem the more interesting it becomes. Yet the assets of multiplicity are usually countered by the liabilities of uncertainty. Whether these liabilities are to the detriment of the poetry is a question I will ask at the end.

1. *What Is Special about “Adonai con voi”?*

In its poetry and music “Adonai con voi” exemplifies what Alfred Einstein, with his fine-tuned sensibility to varying ethnic types in sixteenth-century Italian lyric poetry, called an *ebraica*, or “song about Jews.”⁵ Few *ebraiche* have been preserved: ten, perhaps eleven, of as many as can be identified, date from the last decades of the fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries and may be ascribed to at least eight different composers, some of them major figures in Renaissance music.⁶

³ The music is rife with its own problems of semantics, in connection with the poetry and apart from it: to what extent does the music reinforce the words? To what extent does it create its own meanings as sound formations? These are heavy questions that ordinarily would demand closer attention. Yet, for present purposes, they can be overlooked not just because the music is incomplete but because the poetry, as dependent as it is on the music for its presentation, can be separated from it for (at least part of) its understanding. Even so, I do in fact address the first question in describing ex. 1 below and, later on, in asking whether there is “anything ‘musically’ Jewish about ‘Adonai con voi.’”

⁴ Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 67.

⁵ In his *The Italian Madrigal*, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949; repr. 1971); see below.

⁶ In order: Alessandro Coppini, “La città bella,” entitled “Canzona de’ giudei” (late fifteenth century); Giovanni Seragli, “Per non trovar,” entitled “Canzona de’ giudei battezzati” (late fifteenth century); Giovanni Domenico da Nola, “Ecco la nimpha ebraica chiamata” (1545); Lodovico Novello, “Quatro hebbree madonne siamo” (1546); Ghirardo da Panico, “Adonai con voi, lieta brigada” (1569; about which below); Orlando di Lasso, “Ecco la nimph’Ebrayca chiamata” (1581; same lyric as in Nola’s

They were written variously for three or more voices as carnival songs (*canti carnascialeschi*) and *canzone villanesche* alias *villotte* (anglicized here to villottas) or *villanelle*. Despite their generic diversity, they constitute, one and all, a single species, the *ebraica*, within the larger complex of *musica popolarasca*.⁷ The *ebraica* thus forms a counterpart to other ethnic or regional types, among them the *moresca*, the *mantovana*, and the *veneziana*. In its subject matter it ranges, to judge from the examples at hand, from Jews at prayer to Jews as converts, moneylenders, (female) prostitutes, tradeswomen, *mohalim* (circumcisers), and butchers. Here and there the texts are peppered with Hebrew words as a seeming label for “Jews” or “Jewishness.”

Composed by Ghirardo da Panico, “Adonai con voi” was published in 1569, specifically as an *ebraica* (so indicated in the heading), in Filippo Azzaiolo’s third book of villottas for four voices, of which only the tenor and bass are extant (see fig. 1).⁸ According to Einstein, the collection is reminiscent, in its contents, of the late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century *frottola*—a relatively simple variety of secular song that originated in the courts of Mantua and Urbino⁹—and could, on textual and musical grounds, have originated in the early 1540s.¹⁰

work above); Andrea Banchieri, “Samuel, Samuel, vu che havite” (1597), and “Latrai nai nai” (1605); Orazio Vecchi, “Tich tach toch” (1597), and “Corrit! corrit! Messer Aron” (1604). For details of sources and editions, see variously below. “Barachim e za chai” is a possible eleventh work, from a German publication (*Musikalischer Zeitvertreiber*, 1609), where it is entitled “Judenschul,” or synagogue; only one of its six voices remains, and the composer, unnamed, may have been Italian.

⁷ No literature proper is available, but *ebraiche* are fleetingly mentioned in various monographs, from Alfred Einstein’s by-now classic study on *The Italian Madrigal* (as above) to, most recently, Judith Cohen, “The Bergamasca: Some Jewish Links,” in *Studies in Honour of Israel Adler*, ed. Eliyahu Schleifer and Edwin Seroussi (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2002), 396–420, and Don Harrán, “Between Exclusion and Inclusion: Jews as Portrayed in Italian Music from the Late Fifteenth to the Early Seventeenth Century,” in *Acculturation and Its Discontents: The Jews of Italy from Early Modern to Modern Times*, ed. David Myers and Peter Reill (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 72–98.

⁸ Filippo Azzaiolo, *Il terzo libro delle Villotte del fiore alla padoana con alcune Napolitane e Bergamasche a quatro voci et uno Dialogo a otto novamente stampate et date in luce* (Venice: A. Gardano, 1569), 4. The collection appears as item no. 417 in Mary Lewis, *Antonio Gardano, Venetian Music Printer, 1538–1569: A Descriptive Bibliography and Historical Study*, 3 vols. (New York: Garland Publishers, 1988–2005), 3:391–392.

⁹ See this writer’s entry on “frottola” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, 29 vols. (London: Macmillan, 2001), 9:294–300.

¹⁰ Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal*, 1:348.

Ebraica di Ghirardo da Panico Bolognese. 4 TENORE

Adonai con voi lieta brigata Ecco de lo valam Ecco de lo valam il gran dotos
re che senza parachin se fat' hono re E noi cantand' andia per la contrada Caiadonai ij
Caiadonai Caiadonai portar il gra bezza il gra bezza d' alto valore che glie da noi fignos
re Barucaba Barucaba Barucaba Barucaba gridian Barucaba per suo diletto Gris
dian Baruca ba per suo diletto.

Figure 1. Ghirardo da Panico, “Adonai con voi,” tenor. Note the handwritten markings: someone, perhaps a singer, altered “Adonai” to (what appears to be) “Avonai”¹¹ and “Caiadonai” (or the Hebrew *hay adonay*),¹² “the Lord liveth!”), in each of its four statements, to “aiadonai”—on both changes, see further below. Courtesy, Bologna, Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, there with the shelf mark R.284.

About Ghirardo da Panico we know little more than his provenance from Panico, a district south of Bologna. It was ruled by a family of counts from feudal times until the end of the fourteenth century. Francesco Vatielli mentions Ghirardo in his early, yet still valuable study on music in Bologna as the composer of two works, both of them villottas in collections by Azzaiolo: “Adonai con voi,” as above, from his third book, and preceding it by twelve years, “Patrone, belle patrone,” from his first (1557).¹³ Ghirardo served as singer in the basilica of San

¹¹ Between two vowels (*a* and *o*) the character had to be a consonant and *v* is graphically the only one possible. Lest it be thought that the handwritten letter was a miniscule abbreviation of the incipient *a* plus *d*, to remind the singer that *d* (written as capital *D*) should be preceded by *a*, it might be mentioned that in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century music prints and manuscripts the first letter was almost always a rubricated initial (and the second almost always a capital) and, to my knowledge, there are no examples of its repetition as a mnemonic aid.

¹² *Adonai* so written after its inscription in the *villotta*, yet otherwise *Adonay* when transcribed from the Hebrew.

¹³ For Azzaiolo and his three volumes of *villotte del fiore*, see Francesco Vatielli, *Arte e vita musicale a Bologna: studi e saggi* (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1927), 22–51, with particular mention of Ghirardo on pages 26, 42, and 50. Transcriptions of Azzaiolo’s

Petronio, perhaps more by constraint than by choice. "He appears," according to Vatielli, "to have belonged to a noble family that had been decorated with the title of count. Yet the family fell on hard times and Ghirardo was obliged to take up the lowly profession of church singer."¹⁴ Franco Piperno, in a recent monograph, groups him with the thirty or so Bolognese musicians represented in sixteenth-century music anthologies.¹⁵

Ghirardo's "Adonai con voi" draws its material, as might be expected, from two sources: the *villotta*, which, in a popular vein, often featured backward, boorish characters who behaved licentiously and spoke obscenities; and the *ebraica*, in which the barbs of the poet and composer were aimed at Jews. Like the early frottolas written for courtly circles, so villottas and *ebraiche* were intended for those who could appreciate their novelties and pleasantries. It comes as no surprise, then, that Azzaiolo's *terzo libro*, the locus for Ghirardo's *ebraica*, was dedicated to Giovan Francesco Isolani, a "Bolognese noble" and the first count of Minerbio.¹⁶ Rather than insult him, the book would have been a source of gratification, for it reinforced his superior standing vis-à-vis the obviously inferior types portrayed in its works, be they rustics or Jews.¹⁷

As novel as the *ebraica* might seem for the sixteenth century, its roots go back to an earlier period, to satirical pieces about Jews in liturgical dramas, Passion plays, and *sacre rappresentazioni*, only to be perpetuated in the *giudiate*, or Jew-baiting scenes, in later theatrical productions. Crescimbeni said of these *giudiate* that "the whole point was to ape and mock the Jews in the strangest ways, now hanging them by the throat, now strangling or torturing them and now making them the butt of every other obnoxious entertainment." They comprise "all sorts of languages corrupted and maimed and blended together, nor do they have any order beyond proceeding with the long-drawn-out tunes of many foolish persons who revel in the joke one plays on the supposed Jew."¹⁸

primo and *secondo libro* can be found in Melanie L. Marshall, "Cultural Codes and Hierarchies in the Mid-Cinquecento Villotta" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southampton, 2004), vol. 2.

¹⁴ Vatielli, *Arte e vita musicale*, 42.

¹⁵ Franco Piperno, *Gli 'eccellentissimi musici della città di Bologna'; con uno studio sull'antologia madrigalistica del Cinquecento* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1985), 43, 47.

¹⁶ A district northeast of Bologna and site of the Rocca and Castello degli Isolani, still owned by the family.

¹⁷ A recurrent theme in Marshall's "Cultural Codes and Hierarchies" (as in note 13).

¹⁸ After Giovanni Mario de' Crescimbeni, *Istoria della volgar poesia*, 6 vols. (Rome:

2. *Adonai* and *Barucaba*

Ghirardo's *ebraica* is, to all intents, about a band of lusty, loutish youths in search of adventure. They roam the streets of Bologna, drinking, singing, dancing,¹⁹ yelling, and swearing. The poet or better poetaster employed Hebrew words seemingly to mock the Jews as both a *nazione* and infidels (it so happens, on the eve of their expulsion from Bologna).²⁰ *Adonai*, "Lord," namely, the Lord Almighty, invoked at the beginning ("*Adonai* be with you, happy company"),²¹ reappears, shortly, as *caiadonai*. *Cai* is probably after the Hebrew *ḥay*, "lives," hence *ḥay adonay*, "the Lord liveth!" (1 Samuel 25:26). Its *c* is as close a rendering of the Hebrew guttural consonant *het* (or in the transcription, *h*) as possible in Italian.

Antonio de' Rossi, 1702–1711), 1:198–199 ("in esse non si tratta d'altro che di contraffare e schernire gli Ebrei in stranissime guise, ora impiccandone per la gola, ora strangolandone ed ora scempiandone ed ora facendone ogn'altro più miserabile gioco ... sono composte ... d'ogni sorta di linguaggi corrotti e storpiati e mescolati insieme: né hanno altro ordine che di condursi con lunghissime cantilene di molti sciocchi personaggi allo spettacolo della burla che si fa al supposto Ebreo"). Expanding on Crescimbeni, Pietro Toschi discusses the *giudicata* in *Le origini del teatro italiano* (Turin: Paolo Boringhieri, 1982, 1st ed. 1955), 333–340.

¹⁹ To judge from the music (see fig. 1 and ex. 1), with its jolly triple-meter insertions.

²⁰ By order of Pius V, the Jews were banished from the papal states, including Bologna, in 1569 (and definitively in 1593). See Daniel Carpi, "Gerush ha-yehudim mi-medinat ha-kenesiyya bi-yemei ha-apifyor Piyyus ha-ḥamishi u-mishpetei ha-ḥakira neged yehudei bolonya (1566–1569)" [The expulsion of the Jews from the papal state in the days of Pius V and the criminal investigation of Bolognese Jews (1566–1569)], in *Sefer zikkaron le-Hayyim Enzo Sereni: ketavim 'al yahadut Roma* [Memorial for Enzo Sereni: writings on the Jews of Rome], ed. Attilio Milano, Salomone Umberto Nahon, and Daniel Carpi (Milan-Jerusalem: Institute for Jewish Studies, 1971), 145–165; and further Mauro Perani, "Documenti sui processi dell'Inquisizione contro gli ebrei a Bologna e la loro tassazione alla vigilia della prima espulsione," in *Verso l'epilogo di una convivenza: gli ebrei a Bologna nel XVI secolo*, ed. Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli (Florence: Giuntina, 1996), 129–154.

²¹ "Adonai con voi, lieta brigada," etc. The expression "Adonai con voi" has an equivalent in the Hebrew *adonay 'immekha* or *'immakh* ("The Lord be with you!"): for example, Judges 6:12 ("The Lord is with you [*adonay 'immekha*], valiant hero") and Genesis 26:28 ("Behold! we saw that the Lord was with you [*adonay 'immakh*]"). It is one in a number of similar Hebrew expressions employed for praising God or invoking His help, among them: *barukh ha-shem* ("Blessed be His name!"), *ha-shem yishmerenu* ("May His name protect us!"), and *be-'ezrat ha-shem* ("with the help of His name"). The lexicographer Abraham Even-Shoshan describes *adonay 'immekha* (or *'immakh*) as "words of blessing or encouragement, meaning the Lord will assist you": in his *Ha-millon he-ḥadash* [The new Hebrew dictionary], 7 vols. plus one-volume supplement (Jerusalem: Qiryat Sefer, 1966–1983), 5:1939. See Jeremiah 1:8, where the Lord responds favorably ("I will be with you [*ittekha*; same as *'immekha*] to save you").

On the surface, all this sounds perfectly respectful. In dialect, *adonai* appears in various harmless distortions (*badonai*, *badanai*, *badonenu*, *ba alai*).²² With the permutation of *adonai* to *caiadonai*, however, the tone might seem to turn insolent. Despite the connection with the Hebrew *hay*, the portion *cai* reads, and could have been heard, if, indeed, the intention was to mimic, as an exclamation for a dog's howl or bark. In a dictionary of Bolognese dialect, *caien*, a masculine substantive, has been defined as “*guaio* [woe or sorrow—D.H.], a word used in particular for dogs when they are beaten or feel pain.”²³ That makes sense: any eye and ear would recognize *cai* and the plural *guai* as phonic variants. What dogs do when maltreated or aching is *cainar*, equivalent, in the same dictionary, to *guaire* and *guaiolare*, that is, squeal, yelp, or whine.²⁴ So how would *cai* translate? I am not sure, but were a dog a human being, it would probably say “Ay!” or “Ow!” or “Ouch!” and continue with “That hurts!”

By the time *hay* changed to *cai*, it lost all sacrality—at least to the uninformed bystander—to become an outright expletive. No Christian singer or listener in Bologna then or now would ever associate *cai* with a Hebrew verb in the jussive or optative subjunctive (“Let [the Lord] live!” “May [the Lord] live!”). But one wonders whether the canine interjection might not have been more nastily intended to denote an “animal” of a specifically “Hebrew” variety, to wit, a Jew. Gregorio Leti (d. 1701) wrote that “almost everywhere they [the Jews] suffer from discourtesies of the rabble, being treated like dogs with insults and injuries.”²⁵

Caià, in Venetian, is described in one dictionary by various epithets, among them *spilorcio*, *mignella*, *spizzeca*, and *avaraccio*, for someone

²² Carlo Battisti and Giovanni Alessio, comps., *Dizionario etimologico italiano*, 5 vols. (Florence: G. Barbèra, 1950–1957), 1:401; Umberto Fortis and Paolo Zolli, *La parlata giudeo-veneziana* (Assisi-Roma: Beniamino Carucci Editore, 1979), 118; Luisa Modena, *Il dialetto del ghetto di Modena e dintorni* (Modena: Edizioni Il Fiorino, 2001), 121.

²³ Carolina Coronedi Berti, comp., *Vocabolario bolognese italiano*, 2 vols. (Bologna: G. Monti, 1869–1874; repr. 1969), 237: “*Caien*, *guaio*. Voce propria de’ cani quando sono percossi, e sentono dolore.”

²⁴ “*Cainar*, *guaire*, *guaiolare*, quasi metter *guai*, o dolersi e rammaricarsi, e si dice comunemente del cane, quando egli ha tocco qualche percossa” (ibid.). Yet *cainar*, more generally, denotes canine barking (“e per qualunque abbaia de’ cani”; continuation).

²⁵ Leti, *L’Italia regnante, o vero Nova descrizione dello stato presente di tutti principati, e repubbliche d’Italia*, 2 vols. (Geneva: Guglielmo e Pietro de la Pietra, 1675–1676): “... dalla Plebaccia soffrono quasi per tutto dell’insolente, essendo trattati come Cani con ingiurie, & affronti” (1:169). On Jews as dogs, see, at length, Kenneth Stow, *Jewish Dogs: An Image and Its Interpretation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

greedy, mean, and stingy, and, further, *mignatta*, for a leech and usurer.²⁶ They fit the conventional image of the Jew, in most persons' minds at the time, as an avaricious moneylender, well known, in the English world, from the character of Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.²⁷ Yet *cai* could also have had a non-Jewish denotation, as suggested by the same Venetian dictionary. There one finds the expression *caia de la brigae*, "which in early times was said to indicate the worst and wickedest doings of a *brigata*."²⁸ We are back, then, to the same bunch of adventurers, who, in the "lieta brigada" of Ghirardo's *villotta*, wandered the streets of Bologna as the stage for their antics.²⁹

The use of *adonai* should be related to that of *barucaba*, an even more potent expression of Jewishness. While *adonai* sometimes occurred in Christian motets, for instance Nicolas Gombert's "Adonai Domine Jesu Christe,"³⁰ *barucaba* could only make sense in a Jewish context.

²⁶ Giuseppe Boerio, comp., *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano*, 2nd rev. and enl. ed. (Venice: Giovanni Cecchini, 1856), 116: "*Caia*, s.f. pilacchera; tignamica; spizzeca; spilorcio; magnatta; mignella; avaraccio," all of which are then said to denote a "uomo avarissimo."

²⁷ See Edgar Rosenberg, *From Shylock to Svengali; Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), and Joseph Shatzmiller, *Shylock Reconsidered: Jews, Moneylending, and Medieval Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

²⁸ "*Caia de la brigae*—dicevasi anticamente per dire 'Il peggiore e il più cattivo d'una brigata'" (Boerio, *Dizionario*, 116).

²⁹ For "lieta brigada," see *capoverso* as printed in fig. 1 above; and for the translation of the whole text, see below.

³⁰ For five voices, from Gombert's *Musica ... (vulgo motecta quinque vocum noncupata) ... liber primus* (1539); in *Opera omnia*, ed. Joseph Schmidt-Görg (Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae, 6), 11 vols. ([Rome]: American Institute of Musicology, 1951–1975), 7:55–60. The text reads "Adonai domine Jesu Christe, imperator caelorum, humillime hospes beatae Mariae: quaesumus clementiam tuam, ut meritis egregiae hospitae tuae hic digne vivere et in caelis nos cum ea facias laetari, Alleluia" ("Adonai, Lord Jesus Christ, ruler of the heavens, [where you are the] most humble host of [your] blessed [mother] Mary: we seek your clemency in order for you to make us, through the merits of your distinguished hospitality, live worthily here on earth and rejoice with her in the heavens, hallelujah!"). Jacquet de Mantua wrote a four-voice motet (1538) to a similar text, as follows: "Adonai Domine Deus, magne et mirabilis, qui dedisti salutem in manu feminae, exaudi preces servorum tuorum" ("Adonai, Lord God, great and marvelous, who placed salvation in the hand of a woman, hear the prayers of your servants"; reminiscent of a passage in the apocryphal book of Judith 16:16, "Adonai, Domine, magnus es tu et praeclarus in virtute," etc.). With one notable difference, however: *Adonai*, in the first text, refers to Christ the son, and in the second, to God the Father. See Jacquet, *Opera omnia*, ed. Philip T. Jackson and George Nugent (Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae, 54), 6 vols. ([Rome]: American Institute of Musicology, 1971–1986), 4:52–54. It should be forewarned that not every *Adonai* necessarily means "the Lord": it could be first person in the preterit tense of the Italian verbs *adonare*, "to knock down," or *adunare*, "to convene." In the Neapolitan

The locution derives from “Barukh ha-ba” (Psalm 118:26).³¹ Christians who observed the Jews in their everyday activities would have noted how often *barukh* crossed their lips, particularly at the opening of blessings (“barukh attah adonay” [blessed are You, Lord]). On the ubiquity of these blessings, the early seventeenth-century Venetian rabbi Leon Modena, in his manual on Jewish rites as explained to a Christian audience, said that the faithful “are bound by the rabbis to say a blessing, and give praise to God, not only for every favor they receive and in prayers, but also for every unusual event that happens to them and for every act that they perform and for every good-tasting food that they eat and liquid that they drink, and for every precept that they observe in accordance with the Law [*torah*] or [the rulings of] the rabbis,” etc.³²

But benedictions with *barukh* are one thing, *barucaba* as a salutation is another. It figures prominently in the aforementioned psalm verse (“Barukh ha-ba,” etc.) as part of the Hallel, or laudatory psalms 113–118, recited on the Three Pilgrim Festivals, Ḥanukkah, and, in shortened form, the New Moon. To mark the end of the Hallel, verses 21–29 of Psalm 118 are customarily repeated, which only strengthens their audibility, as for example in the first two:³³

²⁶ Barukh ha-ba be-shem adonay; / berakhnuhem mi-bet adonay [*repeat*].

Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord; / we blessed you from the house of the Lord [*repeat*].

villanesca “Na volta mi gabbasti” by Giovanni Domenico da Nola (*Canzone villanesche ... a tre voci*, bk. 1 [Venice: Antonio Gardane, 1545], 3, third stanza), it is used in the reflexive construction “I well noticed” (“Io ben menne adonai”), from the (Neapolitan) verb *addunarse*; cf. Antonio Altamura, *Dizionario dialettale napoletano* (Naples: Fausto Fiorentino, 1956), 56 (where, for *addunarse*, one finds the Tuscan equivalents “accorgersi” and “avvedersi”).

³¹ “Barukh ha-ba [be-shem adonay]” (“Blessed be he who comes [in the name of the Lord]”).

³² Leon Modena, *Historia de' riti hebraici* (originally 1637; here after Venice: Benedetto Miloco, 1678, repr. 1979), esp. 13–14: “È da notare, che hanno obligo da' Rabini dir beneditione, e dar lodi particolari a Dio, non solo per ogni gratia, che ricevono, e nelle orationi; ma per ogni avvenimento straordinario, che gl'avvenga, per ogni attione, che fanno, ogni cibo che mangiano, e liquor che bevono, d'odori buoni, ogni precetto della Legge, o de Rabini, che osservano, per le cose nuove, per le stravaganze, che veggono, e ciascuna di esse, ha beneditione diversa, et appropriata a quella tal cosa,” etc. (from bk. 1, chap. 9 “Delle beneditioni”).

³³ On the unique repetition of verses in the Hallel, see variously in the Mishnah (Pesahim, 5:7, 9:3, 10:6–7; Sukkot, 3:3, 9–11, 4:1, 8; Rosh Hashanah, 4:7; Ta'anit, 4:4, 5; Megillah, 2:5; Sotah, 5:4), the Babylonian Talmud (Sotah, 30^v), the *Tur* (*Orah hayyim* [The way of life], par. 422), etc.

²⁷ El adonay va-ya'er lanu; / isru-ḥag ba-ʿavotim ʿad karnot ha-mizbeaḥ [repeat].

God is the Lord and He shone on us; / celebrate the feast with boughs up to the horns of the altar [repeat].

No less prominent than “Barukh ha-ba” as reiterated in Psalm 118:26 is its utterance alone, now as a welcoming formula, during the ritual of circumcision. Rabbi Modena tells us that

on the morning [of the ceremony], in the synagogue, or in one’s own home, should one prefer to perform the circumcision there, two chairs are set up, with cushions of silk. One of the two is for the godfather ...; the other is for him whom some call by the name of the prophet Elijah. ... Many people gather there ... and they sing one or another joyful melody until the arrival of the godmother who, followed by a group of women, holds the child in her arms. At the door of the synagogue she hands it over to the godfather, while all those present cry out “Barukh ha-ba,” meaning “Blessed be he who comes.”³⁴

The salutation marks the opening of the ceremony and, with its emphatically pronounced *barukh*, initiates various blessings proper (each, of course, with its own *barukh*), among them one in which the newborn child is introduced into the Jewish faith:

Barukh attah adonay elohenu melekh ha-ʿolam asher kiddeshanu be-mizvotav ve-zivvanu le-hakhniso bi-verito shel avraham avinu.

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who have sanctified us by Your commandments and have commanded us to make our sons enter into the covenant of Abraham our father.

³⁴ Ibid. (bk. 4, chap. 8 “Della Circoncisione”), esp. 103: “La mattina sono apparecchiate nella Scuola due Sedie con cuscini di setta, ovvero anco nella propria casa se vogliano circoncederlo là, una di quelle per il Compare, ... l’altra, alcuni dicono a nome di Elia Profetta. ... Et vi concorre molta gente, ... e si canta qualche *Hinno*, sin che viene la Commare con il fanciullo sopra le braccia, con connettiva di donne, et alla porta della Scuola lo dà al Compare, et all’ora tutti gl’assistenti gridando *Baruch Abà*, che vuol dir, Ben venuto.” The portion “qualche *Hinno*,” which I translated as “one or another joyful melody,” is naturally of interest for poetico-musical reasons. It can be completed by consulting the contemporary literature, for example, Samuel Castelnovo’s Italian translation (in Hebrew script) of Moses Rieti’s *Me’on ha-sho’alim* [The abode of petitioners; ca. 1412], which contains various *piyyutim*, or post-biblical religious poems, for recitation during circumcision (*Sefer me’on ha-sho’alim u-fitrono bi-leshon italyano* [The book known as “The abode of petitioners” and its Italian rendering]; Venice: Juan de Gara, 1609), esp. fols. 18^v–20^r. During Jezebel’s reign the practice of circumcision was abandoned, yet the prophet Elijah persuaded the Israelites to reinstate it, thereby becoming its patron of honor in later ceremonial; after 1 Kings 19:10 (“I am filled with jealous zeal for the Lord God of hosts, for the sons of Israel have

Said otherwise, the “entrance” of the newborn child, acclaimed with “Blessed be he who comes,” marks his “entrance” into the special covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendents and, in time, into Law [*torah*], marriage, and righteous conduct, as clear from the response to the blessing by those present:

Ke-shem she-nikhnas la-berit ken yikkanes le-torah u-le-ḥuppah u-le-
ma‘asim tovim.

*Even as he has entered into the covenant, so may he enter into the Law [torah], the
nuptial canopy, and good deeds.*

Travelers to Italy and other European countries made it a point to visit the ghettos and see for themselves the “weird” practices of the Jews, whom many had never encountered before, in their homes and synagogues.³⁵ The circumcision was a particular attraction for them. They described the details of its execution with often clinical exactitude³⁶ while alluding, usually with no little repugnance, to what appeared to be the uncivilized singing of the participants in the attendant ceremonial. Witnessing a circumcision in Rome (1659), Francis Mortoft remarked on the music, for example, that “all the while he [the circumciser] was in doing this all the Jewes continued in their singing and rejoycing, which seemed a kind of howling”³⁷ (about dogs’ howling, see above, with regard to *cai*). At another circumcision in Rome (1645), John Evelyne wrote, similarly, that “all the company fell a singing of an hebrew hymn, and in as barbarous a tone, waving themselves to and fro, a ceremony they observe in all their devotions,” and that while “the miserable babe cry’d extreamely, ... the rest continu’d their odd tone, rather like howling then singing” (again howling!). At the end of the ceremony “the Rabbin cryes out to me in the Italian tongue perceiving me to be a stranger: ‘Ecco Signior mio, Un Miracolo di dio’ [Look, Milord, a miracle of God!—D.H.]; because the child had immediately left crying.”³⁸ Before, during, and after all this “howling” (of the singers)

forsaken Your covenant,” etc.). For a depiction of the circumcision, during which Elijah is present, see below, fig. 2.

³⁵ See Benjamin Ravid, “Christian Travelers in the Ghetto of Venice: Some Preliminary Observations,” in *Between History and Literature: Studies in Honor of Isaac Barzilay*, ed. Stanley Nash (Benei Barak: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1997), 111–150.

³⁶ See under note to fig. 2 and in section 3.

³⁷ Francis Mortoft, *His Book; Being His Travels through France and Italy, 1658–1659*, ed. Malcolm Leeds (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1925), 117.

³⁸ *The Diary of John Evelyn* (originally 1645–1646), ed. Edmond Samuel De Beer, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 2:293–294.

and this “crying” (of the infant), the word *barukh* surely stood out in various prayers and poems, though nowhere as vociferously as in the greeting “barukh ha-ba.”

The impressions of the visitors were no different elsewhere. Reporting on a circumcision in Avignon (1598), Thomas Platter, for one, wrote that “as soon as the women brought the child up to the door, the whole congregation stood up, and the godfather went up to the door, took the child, and sat down with it on his chair. Then everyone cried out (in Hebrew: ‘Baruch habba,’ for in the synagogue they only speak Hebrew): ‘Blessed be he who comes.’”³⁹ Reporting on a circumcision in Prague (1617), Fynes Moryson, for another, said that “when the Chylde came neere to the Synagog, they [the Jews] rayed a clamour in the Hebrewe tounge; Blessed is he that commeth in the name of the lord.”⁴⁰

It is no wonder that *barucaba*, alias “barukh ha-ba,” made its way into the *ebraiche* as one of its characteristic Hebraicisms.⁴¹

To return to Ghirardo’s *ebraica*: it concluded with the rousing exhortation “*barucaba, barucaba, barucaba, barucaba, /* Let’s shout *barucaba* for his delight” (small *h* for “his,” for it is not clear whether it refers to *adonai* or someone else; see below). The iteration of *barucaba* along with its terminal placement catapults the word into a position of remarkable textual and musical prominence. *Barucaba* is underlined, in the music, by a change of meter from duple to triple. Earlier in the piece, after the singers had invoked *adonai*, the meter turned to triple for four statements of *caiadonai* (measures 32–39), a verbal distortion that the singers may have introduced out of derision or inebriation or both. By analogy, the meter change recurs at the end, initiated by the not easily translated words “che glie da noi signore” (about which, again, more below). Thereupon the singers intone *barucaba* in its own four statements, each of them set to the same rhythm as *caiadonai* (54–62). The meter returns

³⁹ “Als baldt brachten die weiber daß kindtlin biß zur thür, stundt die gantze gemeind auf, der gevatter gunge biß thür unndt empfunge daß kindt, satzte sich damit auf seinen stul. Unndt schruwe yederman (auf hebreyisch: Baruch habba, wie sie dann in dem tempel nur hebreyisch reden): Gebenedeyet seye, der da kompt”: Thomas Platter, *Beschreibung der Reisen durch Frankreich, Spanien, England und die Niederlande 1595–1600*, ed. Rut Keiser, 2 vols. (Basel: Schwabe & Co Verlag, 1968), 1:291.

⁴⁰ *Shakespeare’s Europe: A Survey of the Condition of Europe at the End of the Sixteenth Century* (unpubl. chapters of Fynes Moryson’s *Itinerary*, 1617), ed. Charles Hughes, 2nd ed. (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 495.

⁴¹ See Don Harrán, “‘Barucaba’ as an Emblem for Jewishness in Early Italian Art Music,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98 (2008): 328–354.

mm. 29-35
la con - tra - da: Cai - a - do - nai, cai - a - do - nai 48-62 va -

lo - re Che glie da noi si - gno - re: Ba - ru - ca - ba,

ba - ru - ca - ba, ba - ru - ca - ba, ba - ru - ca - ba

67-73
per suo di - let - to: Gri - dian Ba - ru - ca - ba

Example 1. Ghirardo da Panico *bolognese*, the *ebraica* “Adonai con voi,” from Filippo Azzaiolo, *Il terzo libro delle Villotte del fiore alla padoana* (1569; as said above, the soprano and alto are an editorial adjunct), 4 (selected measures; for original tenor, see fig. 1, and a full transcription of the tenor and bass, appendix)

to duple for the fourth statement (60–62), only to introduce the last verse “let’s shout *barucaba* for his delight” (63–70). “Let’s shout,” the imperative, surrounds *barucaba* with semantic and sonic “amplitude,” which the composer reinforces by repeating the verse (70–77). As might be expected, the change from duple to triple meter falls precisely on “let’s shout *barucaba*” (70–73).

Not “say,” mind you, but “shout,” which thereby relates the *barucaba* to clamor, exactly as Fynes Moryson had put it above (the Jews “rayseed a clamour in the Hebrew tongue; Blessed is he that commeth,” etc.). No more assertive treatment of *barucaba* could be imagined. For its fuller illustration I supplied not only the tenor and bass, but a hypothetical reconstruction of the two missing upper voices (ex. 1).

3. *Meanings, Insinuations*

“Assertive,” indeed. The only “problem” is: what is being asserted? “Adonai con voi” would seem to convey something quite different from what its otherwise sacred Hebrew words imply. Except for the addition of minimal punctuation in the first few lines, here is the full text of the *villotta* as it appears in the original music print (with one change, *gridian* corrected to *gridiam*):

Adonai con voi, lieta brigada;
 Ecco de lo Valam il gran dottore
 Che senza parachin se fatt’honore.
 E noi cantand’andiam per la contrada
 Caiadonai caiadonai caiadonai caiadonai
 Portar il gran Bezza d’alto valore
 Che glie da noi signore
 Barucaba Barucaba Barucaba Barucaba
 Gridiam Barucaba per suo diletto.

In making a preliminary translation one encounters a number of verbal obstacles, signaled here by italics and question marks:

“Adonai” [the Lord] be with you, happy company!
 Here is the great doctor of the *Valam* [?]:
 Without *parachin* [?] he has become renowned;
 And we go around the neighborhood singing:
 “*Caiadonai, caiadonai, caiadonai, caiadonai*” [?]
 [= “*Hay adonay*” (?) x 4],
 To bear the great, highly valuable *Bezza* [?],
 Which *glie da noi signore* [?].
 “*Barucaba, Barucaba, Barucaba, Barucaba*:
 Let’s shout *Barucaba* for *suo* [?] delight.”

The Hebrew words *Adonai* and *Barucaba* identify the poem as an *ebraica*, hence ostensibly about Jews. But which Jews? One could make a case for Jewish doctors, who, because of their skills, were much sought by Christians in the Early Modern Period,⁴² whereby perhaps the expression “the great doctor.” Yet *dottore* means more than “physician”: needless to say, it applies to a man of learning, and whether he was a physician or philosopher was of no more consequence than his being

⁴² Two examples: Abraham Portaleone (1542–1612), appointed ducal physician at the court of Mantua in 1573 and authorized by the pope, in 1591, to treat Christian patients; and Abraham Yagel (1555–1623), about whom see, at length, David B. Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

Jewish or Christian. The Christians had their doctors of the Church; and the Jews were *dottori* in the sense that their rabbis and sages were renowned for their biblical and talmudic erudition.⁴³ In the *commedia dell'arte*, the *dottori*, by contrast, were lampooned for their sham medical or legal knowledge (usually acquired in Bologna), their pompousness, and their tight-fisted spending habits (a typical example is Dottor Graziano).⁴⁴ In Ghirardo's piece the word could possibly be read as no mere "physician" however, but as one familiar with arcane therapeutic practices.⁴⁵ They endowed the designee with greater power: thus the *dottore* as both learned and "mighty."

But must *Adonai* be delimited to a sacred god? Remember the verses were written by a Christian and the general mood is frolicsome. The appellation could just as well refer to a profane deity, perhaps Bacchus.

How does one read *Valam*, or *parachin*, or *Bezza*? Italian, Hebrew, gibberish? *Valam* can be traced—or so it would seem—to the Italian *balano*, or sexual gland, otherwise described as the head of the penis⁴⁶ (for *v* and *b* as allophones, see below). It is of no import that the word, accented in the original Greek *bálanos* on the antepenultimate, is accented in the iambic hendecasyllabic verse above on the penultimate (*valám[o]*): for one thing, because such proprieties were not fiendishly observed in Italian poetry (even Dante frequently nods);⁴⁷ for another,

⁴³ The usual designation for them, in the Hebrew literature, is *ḥakhamim* (sing. *ḥakham*), the wise, or *melummadim* (sing. *melummad*), the learned, after Ecclesiastes 2:14 ("the *ḥakham* has his eyes in his head"), though it applied, as was recognized, to all peoples (Babylonian Talmud, Megillah, 16^r: "Everyone who speaks words of wisdom, even among the nations, is called a *ḥakham*").

⁴⁴ For Graziano, see Kenneth Richards and Laura Richards, *The Commedia dell'arte: A Documentary History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 116, 133, 194; and for his appearance in typical scenarios, as drawn up by the stage director Flaminio Scala, see Scala's *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative* (1611), ed. Ferruccio Marotti, 2 vols. (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1976)—of the first fifty scenarios (vol. 1), for example, Dottor Graziano is in all but fourteen.

⁴⁵ As typified by Yagel: see Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science*, esp. 25–58.

⁴⁶ See *Dizionario etimologico online* (www.etimo.it; based on Ottorino Pianigiani, *Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana*, 2nd ed., Genoa: Dioscuri, 1988), under *balano*, as "the extremity of the male penis"; also Battisti and Alessio, *Dizionario etimologico italiano*, 1:410: "*balano* ... from the Greek ... *bálanos*, or gland, related to the Latin *glans glandis*. In medical terms means 'gland'" (and under *glande*, in the same, 3:1826: "the extremity of the penis ... after the Greek *bálanos*"). For its definition in a current dictionary, see Nicolo Zingarelli, comp., *Il nuovo Zingarelli: vocabolario della lingua italiana*, 11th ed. (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1983), 829: "*balano*: the terminal part of the penis." On the *glande* as the prepuce, see below, in connection with fig. 2.

⁴⁷ *La divina commedia* (misplaced stresses in italics): Inferno 2.38–39 (E per novi pensier

because *balano* (listed in a modern dictionary as accented on the antepenultimate)⁴⁸ may, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, have been accented on either syllable (John Florio's dictionary has *baláno*).⁴⁹

Parachin, on the other hand, is, to all appearances, Hebrew, from *pera'on*, or a credit slip, as mentioned by the Jewish pawnbrokers in Orazio Vecchi's *ebraica* "Tich tach toch"⁵⁰ ("there's the *goi* who came with a pawn and wants a *parachem* [an IOU]").⁵¹

Bezza may have been Hebrew for *peza'*, or "wound" (on *b* as a substitute for *p*, see below). Yet in the pawnbroking context established by *pera'on* the similarly pronounced Hebrew word *beza'*,⁵² for "greed," i.e., "unjust gain," even "usury," was probably its primary meaning. Still another possibility is *beiza*, literally "egg," here testicle(s),⁵³ a reading that fits in with certain evidence below.

What of *che glie da noi signore*? The construction is awkward: it can be rendered as "ch'egli è da noi signore," i.e., "for it [*ché egli*] is, with us (or for us), the lord" (small *l*). Another reading will be suggested below (in section 4), but, because it changes the perspective, I shall stick, for the time being, with the one at hand.

Here, then, is an "improved" translation that takes into account the various semantic options:

Adonai [the Lord, in one or another sense of the Lord Almighty or Bacchus] be with you, happy company!
 Here is the great [= mighty] doctor of the penis:
 Without [requiring] an IOU, he has become renowned [for his powers];
 And we go around the neighborhood singing:
 "Long live *adonai*! Long live *adonai*! Long live *adonai*! Long live *adonai*!"
 [or alternatively, with *cai* as an imprecation: "Yap, *adonai*!" x 4],

cangia proposta, / Sì che dal cominciar tutto si tolle), 6o (E durerà quanto il mondo lontana), 91 (Io son fatta da Dio, sua mercé, tale), etc.

⁴⁸ For example, *Il nuovo Zingarelli*, mentioned above.

⁴⁹ *Vocabolario italiano & inglese: A Dictionary, Italian & English* (originally 1611), rev. ed. (London: R. Holt and W. Horton, 1688), fol. [H 3]r. See also Guglielmo Comelati and John Davenport, *A New Dictionary of the Italian and English Languages* (1854; online <http://echo.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/content/dictionaries/dictionaries>).

⁵⁰ From Vecchi, *L'amfiparnaso comedia harmonica* (Venice: Angelo Gardano, 1597; 3-3), 33; ed. Cecil Adkins (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 74-79.

⁵¹ "... che l'è lo Goi / Ch'è venut con lo moscogn / Che vuol lo parachem."

⁵² Except for the guttural sound *ayin* (here represented by the sign ʿ) at the end.

⁵³ Even-Shoshan says of *beiza* that it stands for "*eshekh*, the male seminal gland": *Ha-millon he-ḥadash*, 1:219. For the same in Judeo-Italian, see Fortis and Zolli, *La parlata giudeo-veneziana*, 160.

While bearing what is of highest value: great revenue [or a deep wound?
a big scrotum?],
Which, for us, is the “lord”:
“*Barucaba* [Blessed be he who comes (and joins us in our revelry)],
Barucaba, Barucaba, Barucaba,
Let’s shout *Barucaba* for his [the so-called lord’s? the newcomer’s?]
delight.”

The verses, thus read, are a cross between praises of a Jewish doctor and, by implication, those of a *balano*, with its own “doctoring” powers; or on another level, between praises of the Lord Almighty (or the surrogate lord Bacchus) and those of a moneymaking “lord” (Mammon). To sustain the reading of *bezza* as the Hebrew *peza*’, “wound,” or *beiza*, “testicles,” one might suggest that the “lord,” as intimated above, is the organ of copulation, which, because of the delights of penetration (whereby inflicting a “great wound” via “great testicles” on virgins and being of “highest value” to whoever inflicts it), is the only “lord” to which the seemingly dissolute company swears allegiance (“Blessed be he who comes [in ‘his’ name]”)—a reading to which the “doctor poems” below add further credibility. While, normally, “oh my god!” would suffice for verbalizing the rapture of the greedy in counting coins or of the lustful in achieving consummation, here the *brigada* (otherwise spelled *brigata*) voices something halfway between a sacred oath (*hay adonay*, “May *adonai* live!”) and a bestial yelp (“yap, *adonai!*”), which, if not sacrilegious enough, is even more so with the invocation of the Holy of Holies (whose ineffable name is reserved in Hebrew for prayer alone). While, further, the ordinary doctor demands a fee for his services, the would-be new one, be he the doctor himself or “Signor” Valam alias Balano, dispenses them for free (“without an IOU”).

That is one reading, but it acquires further semantic overtones if one construes *Valam* as a reference to Balaam, the “magician,” who, in the book of Numbers, was among those held accountable for the immorality of the Israelites and their idolatry. In blaming the Midianite women for seducing them from their faith, Moses said: “Behold, they caused the children of Israel, *by the counsel of Balaam*, to act treacherously against the Lord,” etc. (31:16). The Hebrew for Balaam is Bil’am, spelled Bileàm in David Samuel Luzzatto’s Italian translation—for Jewish readers—of the Pentateuch.⁵⁴ But in most other Italian

⁵⁴ David Samuel Luzzatto, trans., *Hamisha humshei torah ‘im haftarot ‘im targum italki* [The Pentateuch with readings of the Prophets, as translated into Italian] (originally

translations, Bil'am (Bileàm) appears as Balaam.⁵⁵ Can one presume a correspondence between *Valam* and Balaam? The initial consonant *b* of Balaam has *v* as its allophone, and the transfer from one to the other is not improbable; in Hebrew, in fact, it is quite normal (since *b*, or *bet*, and *v*, or *vet*, are represented by a single character). In this case, it could be that the “doctor” (physician or penis) is to be conceived (and commended?) as a “magician”—I already spoke of his “arcane therapeutic practices”—or, more bluntly, that the heathen Balaam, an instigator of promiscuity, is to be conceived (and condemned?) as a force of evil.

Still other puns are reasonable. One fits in with the aforementioned reading of *bezza* (Hebrew *beza'*) as pecuniary, in the sense of the Venetian or Bolognese coin *bezzo* (plural *bezzi*).⁵⁶ Toward the end of Adriano Banchieri's madrigal comedy *La barca di Venetia per Padova* (1605), the passengers, before disembarking, are requested to “pay up” (“man à bezzi”),⁵⁷ which would corroborate what we rendered, in verse 3 of the *villotta*, as an IOU. Another pun could be *bezza*, for *pezza*, defined in a temporal sense: “da gran *pezza*,” or “for a long time,” as in Orazio Vecchi's *Veglie di Siena* (1604), from the *seconda veglia* (“second watch”). There the guests participate in the game of mouthing a tongue-twister (or *bisticcio*): “Al pozzo di messer Pazzin de' Pazzi v'era una pazza, che per gran *pezza* mangiava pizza, lavando pezze” (“At the ‘pozzo’ [well] of Mr. ‘Pazzin[o]’ [Crazyman], of the ‘Pazzis’ [the Crazy Family, or Crazies], there stood a ‘pazza’ [a crazy woman], who, for a long ‘pezza’ [time], ate a ‘pizza,’ washing ‘pezze’ [pieces of cloth]”), etc.⁵⁸ The consonantal distortion whereby an unvoiced labial plosive (*p*) becomes a voiced one (*b*)⁵⁹ may seem farfetched, but phonetically

1858), 2 vols. (Trieste: Yona Cohen, 1980), 2:79 (“Sono pur desse che hanno indotti i figli d'Israel, per consiglio di Bileàm, a commettere infedeltà contro il Signore”).

⁵⁵ For example, *La Sacra Bibbia ossia L'Antico e il Nuovo Testamento* (Rome: Società Biblica Britannica e Forestiera, 1965): Numbers 31:16 (“Ecco, sono esse che a suggestione di Balaam, trascinaron i figliuoli d'Israele alla infedeltà verso l'Eterno”).

⁵⁶ See Battista and Alessio, *Dizionario etimologico italiano*, 1:504; Boerio, *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano*, 78; and Berti, *Vocabolario bolognese italiano*, 175.

⁵⁷ Adriano Banchieri, *La barca di Venezia per Padova*, ed. Filomena A. De Luca (Bologna: Ut Orpheus Edizioni, 1998), 61.

⁵⁸ See Vecchi, *Le veglie di Siena*, ed. Donald Beecher (Ottawa [Ontario]: The Institute of Mediaeval Music, 2004), 105–114 (esp. 106–107 for the portion quoted; and for the text alone, though in a different translation, xli [Italian], xlix [English]).

⁵⁹ Or vice versa, as above in the Hebrew *peza'* becoming the Italian *bezza*, if it did in fact become it.

they form a pair and in everyday Italian (and Hebrew) speech are often indistinguishable.⁶⁰

I construed *parachin* as an Italian transcription of the Hebrew *pera'on*, with the guttural *ayin* between *a* and *o* now *ch*. Yet it could be the plural of (the Hebrew, and equally guttural-sounding) *parah*, or “gridiron.” *Parahim* (alias *parahin*), or in Italian “irons” (*ferri*), figure among various tools mentioned in the Bible and the Mishnah;⁶¹ they seem to correlate with the “medical” references in the *villotta* under scrutiny (note that the expression “essere *or* rimanere sotto i ferri,” in current Italian, means “to be on the operating table”). In pursuing a “medical” mode of explanation, one can establish a topical precedent for “Adonai con voi” in the madrigal “Madonna, io son un medico perfetto” by Hubert Naich, published around 1540:

Milady, I'm a consummate physician,
 For with no use of irons or fire
 I cure all mighty ills in little time.
 I've come to you because I've been told
 You have a mighty wound;
 And if you want it cured,
 I'll use a mighty rod which, I guarantee,
 Will bring about your cure.
 I place it in the wound and it contains
 A liquid that can sweetly heal all pains.⁶²

While the effect of the doctor's treatment in this last poem was secured by plying not “irons,” but “a mighty rod” (*asta*, here penis), so in Ghirardo's piece, if our reading of *parachin* can be sustained, it is the same “rod,” or at least its extremity (*valam*), that does the job. Naich's

⁶⁰ For examples with *p* voiced as *b* in Leghorn dialect (*bensar*, *bianger*, *bagato*, *berché*, *barola*, etc., which, in normative Italian, would be spelled with an initial *p*), see Guido Bedarida, “Un intermezzo di canzoni antiche,” *La rassegna mensile di Israel* 3 (1928): 271–302, *passim*.

⁶¹ Leviticus 6:20ff., 11:32ff.; Numbers 19:14ff., 31:20ff.; Mishnah, *Kelim* (“Tools”), 12:3.

⁶² “Madonna, io son un medico perfetto, / Ché senz'adoperar ferro né fuoco / Guarisco ogni gran male in tempo poco, / Et a voi vengo perché mi fu detto / Che una gran piagh'avete, / E se guarir volete, / Una gran tasta [*recte* una grand'asta?] adopro e vi so dir[e] / Che vi farà guarire; / Ne la piagha la pongo et ha un liquore / Che sana con dolcezza ogni dolore”: Hubert Naich, *Exercitium seraficum. Madrigali ... a quattro et a cinque voci, ... libro primo* (Rome: Antonio Blado, [ca. 1540]), no. 19. See Naich, *Opera omnia*, ed. Don Harrán (Neuhausen: Hänssler-Verlag for the American Institute of Musicology, 1983), xli–xlii (for commentary), 76–79 (for music).

madrigal was so popular that other composers tried their hand at setting its poetry: Costanzo Festa, in a work printed in 1547, with five later editions until 1568, and Heliseo Ghibel, in a work printed in 1551, with a second edition in 1552.⁶³ The dates lead directly up to the publication of Ghirardo's *ebraica*, which, textually, was almost certainly modeled on "Madonna, io son un medico perfetto."

"Doctor poems" formed a topos in the literature, with earlier examples in the late fifteenth-century *canti carnascialeschi*. In one *canto*, widows ask doctors, as "masters," to engage "fervently in repairing [their] mood," to which the doctors reply: "You're in great danger, / As is clear to everyone; / We'll put our contraption / Completely into you ... / And go about your good repair / For our own honor."⁶⁴ In another, the doctors declare: "By the grace of heaven and for immortal love / We are doctors of such great wits and arts / As to confer, at every time and in every place, / Health on every sick heart."⁶⁵ The *canti* left their mark, and later composers, not to speak of later poets (among them Antonfrancesco Grazzini),⁶⁶ followed suit: to the carnival-like song by Hubert Naich (see above), one might add another by Giovanni Domenico da Nola for a collection of his *Canzone villanesche* (1541).⁶⁷ Its lyric refers again to "doctors" in the plural, in this case three, as corresponds to the number of singing voices:⁶⁸

⁶³ Costanzo Festa, *Il vero libro di madrigali a tre voci* (Venice: n.p., 1547, and later editions), 1; Heliseo Ghibel, *Il primo libro di madrigali a tre voci a note negre* (Venice: Geronimo Scotto, 1551, and later edition), 13.

⁶⁴ "Deh, maestri, con fervore, / Riparate al nostro omore! ... *rispondono i medici*: Un pericolo grande è 'l vostro, / È di questo ognun n'è chiaro: / Metterèn lo 'ngegno ["wits," a pun for congegno, "contraption"] nostro / Tutto 'n voi ... / Driet'a voi col buon riparo / No' andréno pel nostro onore"; see *Canti carnascialeschi del rinascimento*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Bari: Gius. Laterza & figli, 1936), 79–80 (from the *Canzona delle vedove e de' medici*, no. 60).

⁶⁵ "Dal ciel per grazia e immortale amore / Medici sián di tant'ingegno e arte / Che in ogni tempo e parte / Porgián salute ad ogni infermo core"; *ibid.*, 167–168 (from the *Canzona de' medici*, no. 124). Here again *ingegno* can be read as "contraption" (or to accord with the translation above, "contraptions").

⁶⁶ See his *Canto di medici cerusini*, beginning "Doctors we are, masters in surgery, / To show our art / We've come today to your city," etc. (with reference to *ferri*, "irons," for *forar*, "piercing," and *tagliar*, "cutting," and to the various pleasures that come from their application); *Canti carnascialeschi*, ed. Singleton, 424–426.

⁶⁷ *Canzone villanesche ... a tre voci*, bk. 1, as reprinted in 1545 (see above), 20.

⁶⁸ Still other pieces, for three interlocutors, in the same collection: "Cingari simo, venit'a giocare" (*ibid.*, 15), "Noi tre, madonna, siamo al pendino" (15), "Vendim', o donne belle, st'insalata" (18), and "Madonna, nui sapimo ben iocare" (20).

Doctors we are, oh beautiful ladies,
 We heal wounds with roots;
 Hurry, hurry, hurry, come on now, hurry up, hurry up, maidens:
 If you have time now, don't waste it.
 For big wounds and small tight ones
 You'll have large and small roots;
 Hurry, hurry, hurry, come on now, *etc.*
 The counsel and opinion of old crones
 Should not be heeded, for you'll be sorry for doing so;
 Hurry, hurry, hurry, come on now, *etc.*
 Give it a try, ladies, don't resist,
 This won't be your first experience;
 Hurry, hurry, hurry, come on now, *etc.*⁶⁹

The same text caught on, appearing in a setting by Perissone Cambio, now for four voices, in 1545.⁷⁰

Perhaps Ghirardo's piece is about the powers of Jewish doctors, or about the powers of the penis, or about both, or about neither: the verses, it must be acknowledged, are non-committal. But signs point to the rite of circumcision: given the Christian fascination with this singular Jewish custom, it would seem only natural for the circumciser—the *mohel*—to be perceived as a “doctor” (see fig. 2, where, crouching, he is clearly seen plying a knife to the prepuce).⁷¹ All the more so would he

⁶⁹ *Stanza 1* “Medici nui siamo, o donne belle; / Con radiche sanamo le ferite. / Su su su hor su su su, citelle; / S’havit’el tempo mo, non lo perdite.” *Stanza 2* “Per le ferite larghe et strettolelle / Radiche grosse et piccole haverite; / Su su,” etc. *Stanza 3* “Lo consiglio et parer de vechiarelle, / Se lo ascoltate, venne pentirete; / Su su,” etc. *Stanza 4* “Provate donne senza risistentia, / Non è questa la prima experientia; / Su su,” etc. See Giovanni Domenico da Nola, *L’opera completa*, ed. Lionello Cammarota (Polifonia napoletana del Rinascimento, 1–2), 2 vols. (Rome: de Santis, 1973; after 1545 edition), 1:63 (text), 121 (music).

⁷⁰ Cambio, *Canzone villanesche alla napolitana a quatro voci* (Venice: Antonio Gardane, 1545), 17.

⁷¹ The connection between *balano* and circumcision is transparent in the definition of *glante* in the *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, ed. Salvatore Battaglia and Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, 21 vols. (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1960–2000), 6:920: “*glante*: the forward extremity of the penis. Peculiar to it is a swelling surrounded by a fold of skin called the prepuce that runs over the hollow body of the urethra.” Not only does Leon Modena describe the cutting of the prepuce (*Historia de’ riti hebraici*, esp. 103–104), but so do foreign visitors to the ghetto, among them Michel de Montaigne, Rome, 1581 (*Journal de voyage*, ed. François Rigolot [Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1992], 101–103) and Edward Wright, Venice, 1721 (*Some Observations Made in Travelling through France, Italy, &c. in the Years MDCCXX, MDCCXXI, and MDCCXXII*, 2nd ed. [London: A. Millar, 1764], 68–69).



Figure 2. Circumcision, by an anonymous engraver in the *Sefer minhagim* [Book of customs] (Venice: Giovanni di Gara, 1600), fol. 90^v. The godfather is seated on one chair, holding the child (with the circumciser crouched before him); Elijah the prophet is symbolically portrayed as sitting on the second, elaborately carved chair to his right (the circumciser traditionally says: “This is the chair of Elijah”);⁷² and the godmother looks on at the door. Standing next to Elijah is the father, who directs his attention to the child by pointing his finger at him. Courtesy, Oxford, Bodleian Library, there with the shelf mark Opp. 4^o 1004.

be so perceived because of the emphasis in the poem on *barucaba*, the salutation with which the rite of circumcision gets under way.

We still haven’t identified the members of the “happy company” who “go around the neighborhood singing.” Are they Christians who parade about, ridiculing the Jewish rite of circumcision? Or are they Jews who boisterously celebrate it? At this stage either interpretation can be substantiated.

Nor have we addressed the question whether there is anything “musically” Jewish about this “Adonai con voi.” One way to simulate “Jewishness” is to implant sounds of whining and whimpering in the poetry: such sounds would have been nasalized in performance. Banchieri understood this well when, in his *ebraica* “Latrai nai nai,”⁷³

⁷² See above (section 2), under the quotation from Leon Modena’s *Historia de’ riti hebraici*, 103.

⁷³ *La barca di Venetia per Padova* (Venice: Ricciardo Amadino, 1605), 18.

he had the Jews sing through their noses in “*Latrai nai nai nai nai nai nai nai nai nai na.*” Ghirardo mimicked the procedure in writing music to “*caiaidonai caiaidonai caiaidonai caiaidonai.*”

A more substantial mode of simulation is the use of Jewish music material. Azzaiolo is known to have quoted different folk tunes in his villottas,⁷⁴ and one wonders whether Ghirardo, after his example, drew on a Jewish melody for the portion *barucaba* and its repeats. If there were such a melody, it would have appeared either in the tenor (reproduced in fig. 1 above) or in the top voice, which, as already noted, is no longer extant. Both the tenor and my own “reconstructed” soprano (of which a portion appears in ex. 1) are so restricted in their intervallic contour that—who knows?—with a little luck (and sleight of hand) they might be matched to a Hebrew liturgical tune, if one can call a motive of four notes (for the four syllables of *barucaba*) a “tune.” With one caveat, however: unless the resemblance is reasonably exact in its pitches and sustained by the same word (*barucaba*) and some sort of cultural and historical continuity, it is useless. I did make a certain match for three of the four statements of *barucaba* in the tenor, but the corresponding tune is so vague in its melic similarities and so textually, geographically, and chronologically divergent as to be irrelevant.⁷⁵

4. *More Questions, More Interpretations*

Since I have gone so far in reading extra meanings into the vocabulary, I will take the argument one step further and propose an almost heterodox explanation for the climactic word *barucaba*. Beyond its implications of Jewishness (or Jewish “alterity”), could *barucaba* have

⁷⁴ See Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal* (as above), 2:750, with reference to folk material that Azzaiolo imported, for his three collections, from Bergamo, Padua, Venice, and Naples.

⁷⁵ For the pitch contour of a rising fourth (b-flat to e-flat), falling second (to d), falling third (to b-flat), and rising second (to c), as sung to “*barucaba* (b-flat x 4), *barucaba* (e-flat x 4), *barucaba* (d d b-flat c)” (“Adonai con voi,” tenor, in fig. 1, stave 4, second to thirteenth notes, or in ex. 1, measures 54–59), one can find a nebulous equivalent in the opening notes of a tune for Psalm 92 (*Mizmor shir le-yom ha-shabbat*, “Song to be sung on the Sabbath”) inscribed, without words, in a German cantor’s manual from around 1809 (MS Cincinnati, Birnbaum Collection, Mus. 46a); see Israel Adler, comp., *Hebrew Notated Manuscript Sources up to Circa 1840: A Descriptive and Thematic Catalogue with a Checklist of Printed Sources*, 2 vols. (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 1989), 1:216 (same shape, though one semitone lower: a d [x 4] c-sharp a [x 3] b).

resounded, to Italian ears, as a cognate for *barocchio*, said to be a “kind of usury, disguised in the form of the sale of something, by the usurer, at an excessively high price”?⁷⁶ Such an explanation can be supported, from within the *villotta*, by its faint allusions to usury and, within other works having *barucaba*, by still stronger ones to Jewish monetary customs: an example is Vecchi’s *ebraica* “Tich tach toch” (see above), with *moscogn*, from the Hebrew *mashkon* for “pawn.”⁷⁷ It might be noted that for *barocchio*, Venetian has the term *baroch*, meaning “a kind of usury and illicit gain.”⁷⁸ The relationship opens up an entirely new line of thought: *barukh* = *baroch*, itself a signifier for usury. It could be, then, that with *baroch* we have cracked another meaning of *barukh* as perceived through sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian sensibilities: Jewish moneylending. Just the mention of *baroch* or *barukh* or *barucaba* might have evoked the image of the Jews and their pawnshops, with all the other disagreeable associations this activity awakened in the public conscience.⁷⁹ Jewish moneylenders, by the way, were particularly disliked in Bologna, the site of “Adonai con voi”: that they squeezed the Christians dry appears to have been one of the reasons for their expulsion. One report characterizes them as “ever ready to lend money for pledges and await [the payments of] their creditors, provided they exercise usury. It was because of this perhaps that the judges of this city drove them out and for a long time have had no wish to put up with them.”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Zingarelli, *Il nuovo Zingarelli*, 188: “Barocchio: tipo di usura, mascherata sotto forma di vendita da parte dell’usuraio di q.c. a prezzo altissimo”; and for similar definitions, Battisti and Alessio, *Dizionario etimologico italiano*, 1:443, and *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, ed. Battaglia and Squarotti, 2:77.

⁷⁷ Boerio, *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano*, 429, where one finds the expression *far un moscon* in the sense of “far un pegno, impegnar della roba” (“leave a pawn, pledge belongings”).

⁷⁸ Boerio, *Dizionario*, 153: “*Baroch*. Sorta d’usura e di guadagno illecito, che si pratica col dare trista mercanzia a credenza, e ripigliarla per pochissimo”; plus the phrase *viver d’stoch e baroch*, explained as “living from usury, or traffic [in goods].”

⁷⁹ The more so since *barocchio* may be derivative from *baro*, “a cheat at cards, a swindler” (as noted in Battisti and Alessio, *Dizionario etimologico italiano*, 1:443). Another word, perhaps related, is *barucca* (or *baruca*). It is used for a certain sweet pumpkin eaten after having been roasted, namely *zucca barucca*. The lexicographers are uncertain about its etymology, which may have been “as a cross between two words, of which one is the same *zucca*” (*Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, ed. Battaglia and Squarotti, 2:82).

⁸⁰ “... à la ville di Bologne, ... Juifs, toujours si disposés à prêter sur des gages, & à attendre leurs créanciers, pourvu qu’ils y trouvent de l’usure. Mais peut-être est-ce par cette raison, que les Magistrats de cette ville les en ont chassés & n’en veulent point souffrir depuis longtemps”: Casimir Freschot, *État ancien et moderne des duchés de Florence*,

New questions come to the fore when we consider the handwritten changes in the printed copy of the music (see fig. 1). Who made them: the composer? the poet? a singer? an editor for the publishing house? Before responding, one will need to look closer at the changes themselves, which are, to repeat, *avonai* (it would seem) for *Adonai* and *aiadonai* for *Caiadonai*.

Avonai means nothing in Italian, but in Hebrew it is a garbled version of *avonotay*, meaning “my iniquities.”⁸¹ *Aiadonai*, on the other hand, is similar in both languages, as clear from its components: *ai adonai*, “oh, Lord!” While the first alteration seems blasphemous—how dare one exchange the Holy Name for “iniquities”!⁸²—the second one is just the opposite: it removes any taint of blasphemy from the invocation of His name when preceded by what non-Jews might have perceived as an expletive (*cai*; see above). So far we have mixed messages, if in fact the reading of *avonai* as “my iniquities” (and *cai* as an expletive) can be upheld.

Yet the person who cropped *caiadonai* to *aiadonai* may have done so for practical reasons. Knowing that *cai* derived from the Hebrew *hay* and that, with its initial guttural consonant, the latter would have been unpronounceable for the Italian speaker, he helped him out by simplifying it to *ai*. The result of course is that the verb “lives” becomes the interjection “alas” or, in alliance with *adonai*, as already said, “oh, Lord!” Furthermore, *ai adonai* more pointedly suggests the whining Jew (*ay* or *oi*, usually uttered in vexation).

Exit howling dogs, enter—perhaps—teasing humans. Following up “my iniquities” with “alas,” the reviser might have been saying, in jest, “oh dear! I sinned.” One wonders whether he was a Jew, and not any Jew, but one versed in the Hebrew sources. He could have had in mind

Modene, Mantoue, & Parme ... on y a ajouté une semblable relation de la ville & légation de Bologne (Utrecht: Guillaume van Poolsum, 1711), 621–622.

⁸¹ See Even-Shoshan, *Ha-millon he-hadash*, 5:1885, for *avon* (“iniquity”), singular, or in the plural, *avonot* (less frequently *avonim*). Adding the suffix *ay* for “my,” one gets, for “my sins,” *avonotay* (and theoretically, if not practically, *avonay*). Several Jewish dialects have, as a related expression, *ba'avonod*, “unfortunately,” about which one reads that “it is always used with a tone of resignation, in accepting the negative result of an event as the necessary consequence of a previously committed error; in this sense it reveals the fatalistic tone that characterizes the ‘Jewish’ mentality of the speakers” (Fortis and Zolli, *La parlata giudeo-veneziana*, 143–144).

⁸² After the ordinance that one “should not take the name of the Lord in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

any number of biblical passages relative to “sins” confessed before God. Moses asked the High Priest Aaron to atone for the “iniquities [*‘avonot*] of the children of Israel and all their transgressions” (Leviticus 7:21); David said: “I will declare my iniquity [*‘avoni*] and worry over my sin” (Psalms 38:19); and Job, whose errors weighed upon him, pleaded: “Why don’t You pardon my transgression and remove my iniquity [*‘avoni*]?” (Job 7:21). The combination of *adonay*, *hay*, and *‘avon* occurs in a passage about the woman seer from Endor, whom Saul had inveigled to foretell the future: against her better judgment, she revealed that he and his sons would die in battle. No sooner did she speak than she feared for her life, yet Saul reassured her: “As the Lord liveth [*adonay hay*],” no punishment “will befall you for the iniquity [*‘avon*] of these words” (1 Samuel 28:10).

The evidence for the Jewish identity of the reviser is plainly circumstantial, not to say wildly conjectural. But only a Jew would have recognized what *‘avonay* was about. Should the evidence be validated, we still do not know in what capacity the reviser acted. One may rule out his having been the composer, by name and lineage a Christian. But he could have been the poet, who, if he were in fact Jewish or an apostate from Judaism, might have been commissioned by the composer or publisher to write an entertaining anti-Jewish piece; or a singer who performed or rehearsed the piece; or an editor who worked for the music publisher Gardano. Familiar with Hebrew because of immediate or distant Jewish origins, any of the three might have marked up one or more, if not all copies with the changes (it is unfortunate that only a single set of two partbooks remains). All this is admittedly speculative, but it has a modicum of probability.

The mysterious reviser was not a censor in the sense of one who obliterates all signs of religious unorthodoxy. For Christians, true, the Jews were infidels, but the reviser did not take it upon himself to “dehebraicize” the text, otherwise he would have struck out the two “*adonays*,” the five “*barucabas*,” and such other “barbarisms” as *parachin* and *bezza*. Jewish apostates were employed by the presses to rid Hebrew publications of their putative anti-Christian content; and they did so with particular relish to demonstrate to the skeptics the strength of their Christian commitment.⁸³

⁸³ For details, see William Popper, *The Censorship of Hebrew Books*, introduction by Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1969, 1st ed., 1889);

Pursuing the Jewish interpretation even further, I will turn the argument upside down by suggesting still another possibility, namely that the composer via the poet was not hurling abuse at the Jews, but painted a portrait of the Jews playfully hurling it at themselves. The *giudiate* have already been mentioned. Of the various plots for farces, Tommaso Garzoni recommended, as particularly enjoyable, one featuring a Jewish convert to Christianity. “He goes about shouting and whining to the audience in a loud voice, mumbling ‘*alle goi alle goi*’ and ‘*badanai badanai*’ ..., then on the subject of his conversion makes a sermon, from which one may conclude that instead of having become a Christian he obviously became an expert charlatan.”⁸⁴ Mantua had its own Jewish theater often performing during Carnival.⁸⁵ The Jews put on plays in the ghettos, especially for Purim, when they reenacted the story of Esther.⁸⁶ It was a feast they celebrated with particular indulgence, indeed the ancient sages ordered that “man imbibe on Purim to the extent of not being able to distinguish the wicked Haman [who persecuted the Jews] from the blessed Mordecai [who saved them]”⁸⁷ (see caption to fig. 3 below). Some of this wining and dining and singing and revelry might have spilled out into the open, and one can imagine a carnival-like, topsy-turvy situation where young and older Jewish men walked the streets, distorting the name of the Maker in their inebriation and shouting obscenities in their merry-making. Purim songs are preserved in early prints, with mention of food and

Isaiah Sonne, “The Expurgation of Hebrew Books,” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 46 (1942): 975–1015, repr. in *Hebrew Printing and Bibliography*, ed. Charles Berlin (New York: New York Public Library and Ktav Publishing House, 1976), 199–241; and Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *Ha-zenzor, ha-‘orekh ve-ha-tekst: ha-zenzura ha-katolit ve-ha-defus ha-‘ivri ba-me‘a ha-shesh-‘esreh* [*The censor, the editor, and the text: the Catholic censor and Hebrew printing in the sixteenth century*] (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2005).

⁸⁴ Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo, e nobili et ignobili* (Venice: Gio. Battista Somascho, 1585), 763: “E il Giudeo fatto christiano grida fra tanto, e deplora l’audienza ad alta voce, borbottando alle goi alle goi, badanai badanai ... e poi fa la predica della sua conversione, nella qual si conchiude che in luogo d’esser diventato christiano, è fatto evidentemente un finissimo ceretano.”

⁸⁵ See, for example, Claudia Burattelli, *Spettacoli di corte a Mantova tra Cinque e Seicento* (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1999), 141–180 (“Gli ebrei di Mantova e il teatro di corte”).

⁸⁶ For a recent monograph, see Ahuva Belkin, *Ha-purim shepil: ‘yynim ba-te’atron ha-yehudi ha-‘amami* [*The Purimspiel: studies on the popular Jewish theater*] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2003).

⁸⁷ Babylonian Talmud, Megillah, 7^v.

drink;⁸⁸ Purim is likened, in one *canzonetta*, to a carnival⁸⁹ and was so depicted (see fig. 3); Purim celebrations are described, in one writing, as Jewish “bacchanals”;⁹⁰ Purim manuals were written with explicit instructions on how to “live it up.”⁹¹ Pleasure and inebriation were the order of the day: “I tell you other *bahurim* [fellows] / Who seek every delight: / Don’t have any qualms / About being considered *shikhorim* [drunk].”⁹²

But Purim was not the only time for Jewish revelry. The Jews were no less boisterous in celebrating a circumcision, to go back to where we started. Leon Modena says that it was preceded by a night-long vigil, during which friends visited the child’s father and mother, making merry and enjoying refreshments.⁹³ Johannes Buxtorf’s account is less

⁸⁸ For example, the poem in Italian, though written in Hebrew characters, “Fate onore al bel Purim” (in fifteen stanzas); printed under the title *Shir na’eh be-hidurim le-hit’aneg bo ha-ne’arim le-zammer le-simhat purim* [A song pleasant in its ornaments for young men to enjoy in singing while rejoicing on Purim] (Mantua: n.p., 1654).

⁸⁹ For example, the Italian poem, in Hebrew letters, with the *capoverso* “Carnoval non ten andare,” printed as a *Canzonetta in italiano* in the otherwise Spanish volume *Sefer shalmei simha* [Book of offerings for rejoicing], *o sea, la alegría complida para alabar a Dios en la festividad de Purim* (Leghorn: Jacob Nunis Weiss, [1772]), fols. 33^r–36^r.

⁹⁰ See Wilhelm Schikart, *Purim sive bacchanalia judaeorum* (Tübingen: Theodor Werlin, 1634), where, on page 9, he writes that “the bacchanals of the Jews are called by their rabbis *Purim* or according to its Aramaic ending in the Talmud, *Purayya*” (“Bacchanalia Judaeorum, apud Rabbinos *Purim* [Hebrew script], et in Talmud Chaldaica terminatione *Purayya* [again Hebrew script]”). On the breakdown of orderly conduct on Purim, see Elliott Horowitz, “The Rite to be Reckless: On the Perpetuation and Interpretation of Purim Violence,” *Poetics Today* 15 (1994): 9–54.

⁹¹ For example, “*Orah ve-simhah*,” *hu kuntres ketan ha-kamut ve-rav ha-to’elet el na’arei benei yisra’el ve-yaldei sha’ashu’im ... le-’avodat yemei ha-purim* [“Light and gladness” (*Esther 8:16*), namely, a pamphlet small in quantity and great in usefulness for young Jewish men and sybarites ... for celebrating the feastsdays of Purim] (Leghorn: Castello, 1786). One of its (Hebrew) poems begins with the quotation “Come then, I will fetch wine and we’ll fill ourselves with strong drink” (*Isaiah 56:12*), continuing: “Let’s eat the flesh of bulls [after *Psalms 50:13*] and so be it tomorrow: put a goblet in my right hand,” etc. (from first stanza of four; fol. 46^{r-v}). For a general survey of the jocular and burlesque in Purim festivities, as recorded in writings from the twelfth to the late eighteenth century, see Israel Davidson, “The History of Purim Parody in Jewish Literature,” in *The Purim Anthology*, ed. Philip Goodman (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1949), 330–356.

⁹² “Dico a voi altri *bahurim* / Che cercate ogni diletto / Non abbiate alcun sospetto / Di esser tenuti *shikhorim*”: from “Fate onore al bel Purim” (as above; stanza 1, verses 3–6).

⁹³ “La notte precedente al giorno della Circoncisione, si chiama della Vegghia, perche quelli di casa vigilano tutta la notte a far guardia alla creatura nata, et vanno la sera gl’amici a visitar il padre, e si fa allegrezze quella sera, e ricevimenti”: Modena, *Historia de’ riti hebraici*, 102. On the seventh-night *veglia*, and its gradual transformation,



Figure 3. Men rejoicing on Purim (of the two that are masked, one makes obscene gestures with a broom;⁹⁴ the laurel wreath on the head of the two musicians is after the one traditionally worn by the arch-musician Apollo, yet it also connotes victory, here that of the Jews over the enemy Haman in the story of Esther), by an anonymous engraver in the *Sefer minhagim* [Book of customs] (Venice: Giovanni di Gara, 1600), fol. 87^r. Courtesy, Oxford, Bodleian Library, there with the shelf mark Opp. 4° 1004.

laconic. “On the seventh night [after the birth],” we are informed, “some of the guests who had been invited [to partake of the festive meal following the circumcision, on the eighth day], as well as others, come to be with the woman who delivered. They have a good meal together, keep watch with her the whole night, do many amusing things, play cards, throw dice, sing, and tell stories. The men drink until they are stone drunk. Thus they console and entertain the woman who delivered in order for her not to fret too much over the child’s [forthcoming] circumcision.”⁹⁵

toward the end of the seventeenth century, from a popular to a pious observance, see, at length, Elliott Horowitz, “The Eve of the Circumcision: A Chapter in the History of Jewish Nightlife,” *Journal of Social History* 23 (1989): 45–69.

⁹⁴ On an incident with the broom so used in carnival, see Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4, 10.

⁹⁵ Johannes Buxtorf, *Synagoga judaica* (1603 and later editions, some in German, others in Latin; I consulted one [in German] from 1643, which has a depiction of a

In short, are the dramatis personae in Ghirardo's "Adonai con voi" Jews? Are the handwritten changes of the possible Jewish redactor an impish rebuke of their behavior, as if he wagged a finger at them, saying "shame on you!" Behind "Adonai con voi" lies a story still to be told.

Let us reconstruct part of the story by engineering another carnival-like inversion *à la Bakhtin*, now from a totally Jewish perspective with no signs of mockery or villainy. Seen thus the *villotta* reads as a charming vignette, true to life, about circumcision. Here is a new translation, where all the uncertainties about vocabulary have been resolved: *Adonai* is God Almighty; the *brigada* is the happy company of friends—Jews—gathered to celebrate the event; the doctor of the penis (or its extremity, *valam*) is the circumciser; his profession is not collecting IOU's (*parachin*), rather it is for his skills at cutting the prepuce that he is known; the guests rejoice, on the eve of the circumcision, singing "*hay adonay*" ("the Lord liveth!"); what the males bear, as Jews, is a "highly valuable" *pezza* (Hebrew *peza*⁹⁶), or wound (cut), whereby the circumciser introduced them into a special covenant with the Lord, or *Signore*, who, from then on, became theirs; they shout *barucaba*, or "Blessed be he who comes," in anticipation of the opening salutation at the ceremony to be performed on the morrow. "Haba," in Hebrew, has the numerological value of eight (the first letter *he* stands for 5; the second, *bet*, for 2; the third, *alef*, for 1), since it is on the eighth day after the birth of the male that he is circumcised.⁹⁶

The *dottore* (circumciser) begins, the *brigada* (crowd) answers:

circumcision, moreover, on the lower half of its frontispiece), chap. 2 "Von der Geburt unnd Beschneidung der Juden," 97–146, esp. 109: "An der sibenden Nacht kommen etliche der geladenen Gäste / auch wol andere / zur Kindbetterin / halten ein gut Maal mit einander / wachen die gantze Nacht / bey ihr / treiben viel kurtzweilige sachen / spielen mit Karten / Würfeln / Singen / sagen Märlin / die Mannen sauffen sich blind Voll / die Kindbetterin damit zu trösten und zu ergetzen / daß sie sich wegen der Beschneidung des Kindlins nicht zu sehr bekümmere," etc. On Modena's *Riti*, by the way, as an apologetic reaction to Buxtorf's *Synagoga*, see Mark A. Cohen, "Leone da Modena's *Riti*: A Seventeenth-Century Plea for Social Toleration of Jews," *Jewish Social Studies* 34 (1972): 287–321.

⁹⁶ See, for example, David ben Joseph Abudarham (fl. 1340), *Perush ha-berakhot ve-ha-tefillot* [Commentary on the blessings and the prayers], ed. by Solomon Aaron Wertheimer (Jerusalem: Defus Tehiyah, 1959), 352. The same three letters, it might be noted, form the numerically equivalent acronym for "here comes Elijah" (*he* for *hinne*, *bet* for *ba*, *alef* for *elijahu*).

DOTTORE: *Adonai* [God Almighty] be with you, happy company!

BRIGADA: Here is the great doctor of the prepuce:

Without an IOU he has become renowned;

And we go around the neighborhood singing:

“*Hay adonay* [the Lord liveth], *hay adonay*, *hay adonay*, *hay adonay*,”

And bear the great, highly valuable cut,

Whereby He, for us, is the Lord.

“*Barucaba* [Blessed be he who comes], *Barucaba*, *Barucaba*,
Barucaba:

Let’s shout *Barucaba* for his [the new born child’s] delight.”

Parody is removed, “*Adonai con voi*” has been “sacralized”—as it were—in line with Jewish customs. If its text was so Jewish though, why would a Jewish (or former Jewish) reviser want to make changes? The answer may be teased from the changes themselves: one of them (*cai*, formerly *hay*, to *ai*) was perhaps, as already suggested, to eliminate any semblance of vulgarity; the other (*adonay* to ‘*avonay*) might have been meant as a practical joke (which the Jews would catch, but nobody else).

That is one reading of the verses, and a sensible one too. But a second, no less sensible, and completely unexpected reading can be squeezed from them by construing *signore* of verse 7 as “ladies”⁹⁷ and the orthographically contorted portion that precedes it—*che glie da noi*—as “which is his from us” (*che gli è da noi*), or better “which we give him.” A new plot unfolds, whereby women, possibly those who carry the baby to the synagogue, come upon a “happy company,” including the *mohel* who is renowned not for lending money, but for practicing his craft. It is the women who declaim the full text. Moving through the streets, they sing “The Lord liveth!” and carry coins as “lucre” (*beza*)—much more “valuable” than the earnings a moneylender receives—to pay the *mohel* for his services. “To his delight” they salute him with “*Barukh ha-ba*.”

LADIES (*signore*) ADDRESSING THE CROWD (*brigada*):

Adonai [God Almighty] be with you, happy company!

Here we see the great doctor of the prepuce:

Without an IOU he has become renowned;

And we [ladies] go around the neighborhood singing:

“*Hay adonay* [the Lord liveth], *hay adonay*, *hay adonay*, *hay adonay*,”

And carry the great, highly valuable lucre

Which we ladies give him, [only to say]:

⁹⁷ I am indebted, for this second reading, to Dr. Ariel Rathaus.

“*Barucaba* [Blessed be he (the *mohel*) who comes], *Barucaba*, *Barucaba*,
Barucaba:

Let’s shout *Barucaba* for his delight.”

But, as a rub, nothing like the first or second readings would ever have entered the minds of the Christians who sang or heard the piece. Nor would the dedicatee, Count Isolani, have made heads or tails of them. Paradoxically, then, the most meaningful readings are the least applicable to the situation at hand. Or was the situation entirely different? Could the piece have been commissioned *by Jews for Jews*? Then afterwards inserted as a unicum in Azzaiolo’s collection at their request, or the composer Ghirardo da Panico’s, or the publisher Gardano’s, to what would have been Count Isolani’s delectation and, at the same time, bewilderment?

The questions have the effect of another carnivalesque upheaval. I shall not pursue their implications except to say that were “Adonai con voi” ever to be heard (after recovering or reconstructing its missing voices) in a “concert hall” today, one might, in the light of this “new” situation, envision two antithetic possibilities for its performance and reception. One of them is as a genuine expression of joy over a major Jewish life event; another is as a song poking fun at the Jews.⁹⁸ In short, the piece is so wide open referentially as almost to become unruly.

5. *From Multiples to Unintelligibles*

After having covered all this lexical territory, one might ask: where are we now? The answer is: in a state of confusion. *Barucaba* has itself, in more than one dictionary, been defined as “confusion.”⁹⁹ Jewish singing is no less “confused”: Vecchi, in “Tich tach toch,” likened the sound of Jews intoning their prayers to “a babble of voices and frightful sounds

⁹⁸ Which is exactly what happens in “Samuel, Samuel” that Adriano Banchieri published as a *mascherata* on circumcision in his *Canzonette a tre voci* (Venice: Ricciardo Amadino, 1597), 20. Its first stanza translates: “Samuel, Samuel, / You who have the knife [to be handed over to the *mohel*, or circumciser; see, in fig. 2 above, the boy who carries a tray with various “tools”—D.H.]; / The *badanai* [a jocular reference to the *mohel* as a “lord,” after the example of “Adonai con voi”—D.H.] has come; / Mordochi, mordochai” (two stanzas follow), and all this to the most delightful, sprightly music. I shall be writing about this piece elsewhere.

⁹⁹ Battisti and Alessio, *Dizionario etimologico italiano*, 1:446 (“confusione”); *The Cambridge Italian Dictionary*, ed. Barbara Reynolds, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 1:85 (“confusion, hullabaloo, brouhaha”). Indeed, the English (and

of speech.”¹⁰⁰ Is there any way one can diminish the incertitude? Or turning the question on its head, must the incertitude be diminished?

Let us be frank: when all is said and done, “Adonai con voi” is a small, frivolous text. Yet it confronts us with big, serious interpretive problems, at root no different from those in the “great works,” where the nagging question is ever: what is being said? To conclude, I shall build on “Adonai con voi” as a test case, and no more, for drawing some brief conclusions about the search for meaning.

The result of multiplicity is necessarily ambiguity. Moving on different semantic planes, texts are obviously processed by readers through their “mental experience,” which endows words with a nearly unlimited potential for metaphorical signification.¹⁰¹

In the *villotta* under discussion, unsuspected shades of meaning resulted from the popularistic origins of the verses and, in particular, their parody of the Jews, as it would have been perceived by a non-Jewish audience. But the nature of the parody is never specified: does the speaker relate to the Jews jocosely, scornfully, vindictively? Complication increases with the addition of Hebrew words that can be variously construed, depending on whether they are used nonchalantly as nonsensical, or purposely as having literal Hebrew meanings, or evocatively as suggesting Italian equivalents. Further uncertainty surrounds the subject (is the piece about circumcision? about the wonders of Jewish medicine? about fornication? about moneylending?), the speakers (are Christians describing Jews or Jews describing themselves?), and the circumstances (Christian rowdies wandering the streets? Jews buoyantly celebrating what seems to be a circumcision?).

In the end, of course, the verses, beyond being read for their content, would have been appraised for their effectiveness as entertainment: Azzaiolo’s collection with its *ebraica* by Ghirardo was directed to a noble patron, and the intention was, as Horace defined the art of poetry, “to please.” So considered, the *villotta*, as a coarser form of amusement,

French) *brouhaha* are derivative from the Hebrew *baruccabà* (though, strangely, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 20 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989], fails to note the connection; see entry for *brouhaha*, 2:59).

¹⁰⁰ Vecchi, “Tich tach toch”: “una Babella s’ode di voci, e horribili favelle” (from *argomento*).

¹⁰¹ The literature is enormous, but one recent item might be cited as representative: Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

falls within the confines of the Renaissance derisive tradition.¹⁰² But Horace also said that pleasure, whatever its source, should be united with utility; in other words, that the patron, and all readers of poetry at large, should look beyond the hedonistic qualities of the verses to draw some sort of conclusion, or if you wish, “lesson” from their content (*utile dulci*).¹⁰³

In this respect, “Adonai con voi” would seem to be commensurate with a single *scena*, or “scene,” from a theatrical comedy, about which Nicolò Barbieri wrote, in 1634, that, in mirroring life, it is meant to be instructive. “The intention of art is to be useful and to delight, and the comedians are bound by the nature of the art to proceed to [a perception of] usefulness, not being able to delight without imparting benefits, inasmuch as the one generates the other.”¹⁰⁴ What kind of lesson, one might ask, would “Adonai con voi” have imparted to Christians? That Jews are evil, so beware of them? Or, on the contrary, that Jews can be entertaining, so laugh and enjoy the fun while it lasts (or more grotesquely, while “they” last)?

Yes, it is a challenge perhaps to penetrate the “obscurity” and reach a “clearer” understanding of intent and content. Still, interpretation has its limits.¹⁰⁵ In “our” intersubjective engagement with the text the uncertainties of the “mental experiences” on both sides of the equation, the author’s, the reader’s, were compounded, which only expanded the field of commentary and encumbered its exploration. Ambiguity was everywhere. But is it in the disservice of the original? Must we seek total comprehensibility?

Wittgenstein summed up the dilemma, with uncanny eloquence, in remarking that we “understand a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another that says the same; but also in the sense in

¹⁰² See, on this, the recent collection of essays entitled *De qui, de quoi se moque-t-on? Rire et dérision à la Renaissance*, ed. Anna Fontes Baratto (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2005).

¹⁰³ Horace, *Ars poetica*, line 343.

¹⁰⁴ Nicolò Barbieri, *La supplica, discorso familiare a quelli che trattano de’ comici* [Venice: Marco Ginammi, 1634], ed. Ferdinando Taviani (Milan: Edizioni Il Polifilo, 1971), 35: “L’intenzione dell’arte è di giovare e dilettere, ove che i recitanti rimangono astretti per la natura dell’arte d’avanzarsi al giovamento, non potendo dilettere senza giovare, essendo che l’uno genera l’altro.”

¹⁰⁵ About which we know at length in Umberto Eco’s *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and his *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

which it cannot be replaced by any other.”¹⁰⁶ There are times, then, when texts are no more intelligible than as formulated in the original.

For all that, semantic obscurity is bothersome: the human psyche craves elucidation. Assuming that even night has its lights, readers draw on the plentitude of their “mental experience” to glimpse them, often as merely transient, flickering insights into meaning and purpose. “*Adonai* be with us” in penetrating the shadows!

¹⁰⁶ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 143–144.

Appendix

Ghirardo da Panico, "Adonai con voi" (1569), *ebraica*

Of the original four voices, only two (the tenor and bass) remain

Tenor

Bass

8 A - do - na - i con vo - i, _____ lie - ta bri - ga - da!

8 A - do - na - i con vo - i, _____ lie - ta bri - ga - da!

9

8 Ec - co de lo Va - lam, ec - co de lo Va - lam _____ il gran dot -

8 Ec - co de lo Va - lam, ec - co de lo Va - lam _____ il gran dot -

15

8 to - - - re Che sen - za pa - ra - chin _____ se

8 to - - - re Che sen - za pa - ra - chin _____ se

23

8 fat - t'ho - no - re, E noi can - tan - d'an - diam per la con -

8 fat - t'ho - no - re, E noi can - tan - d'an - diam per la con -

30

8 tra - - - da: Cai - a - do - nai, cai - a - do - nai, cai - a - do -

8 tra - - - da: Cai - a - do - nai. cai - a - do - nai. cai - a - do -

37

nai, cai - a - do - nai, Por - tar il gran Bez - za, il

nai, cai - a - do - nai, Por - tar il gran Bez - za, il

45

gran Bez - za d'al - to va - lo - re Che glie da noi si - gno -

gran Bez - za d'al - to va - lo - re Che glie da noi si - gno -

53

re. Ba - ru - ca - ba, Ba - ru - ca - ba, Ba - ru - ca - ba, Ba -

re. Ba - ru - ca - ba, Ba - ru - ca - ba, Ba - ru - ca - ba, Ba -

61

ru - ca - ba. Gri - diam Ba - ru - ca - ba per suo di - let -

ru - ca - ba. Gri - diam Ba - ru - ca - ba per suo di - let -

70

to, Gri - diam Ba - ru - ca - ba per suo di - let - to.

to, Gri - diam Ba - ru - ca - ba per suo di - let - to.

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