Emotions and the Hidden Transcript: The Jewish Gospel Toledot Yeshu *in Early Modern Italy* [*]

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A Tour of the Ghetto

In 1611, the English tourist Thomas Coryat (1577–1617) published his *Crudities*, describing his journey across France, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands. The son of a Protestant minister, Coryat left Oxford without a degree, then became a favoured jester of the English court before setting out on his European expedition between May and October 1608. Among the many exploits and adventures he recounted with much humour and irony in the *Crudities*, Coryat included his 'dangerous encounter with cruell Jewes' while visiting the Jewish ghetto in Venice.[1] A trip to the ghetto could indeed provide plenty of excitement for a seventeenth-century Englishman, whose knowledge of Jews might well have been limited to quasi-mythical accounts, such as Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale* or Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*.[2] The ghetto was, after all, an 'exotic microcosm within the Christian city.'[3] In his autobiography, the Venetian rabbi Leone Modena often recalls how Christian travellers visited the synagogue to marvel at the Jewish

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[1] Here I am using Thomas Coryat, *Coryat's Crudities* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1905), citation at 75. See MIRJAM YARDENI, 'Descriptions of Voyages and a Change in Attitude Toward the Jew: The Case of Thomas Coryate,' in MIRJAM YARDENI, *Anti-Jewish Mentalities in Early Modern Europe* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), 71–91; ELLIOTT HOROWITZ, 'A "Dangerous Encounter": Thomas Coryate and the Swaggering Jews of Venice,' *Journal of Jewish Studies* 52, no. 2 (2001): 341–53; CRISTIANA FACCHINI, 'Il Gesù di Leone Modena. Per una storia materiale e urbana del *Magen we-herev* di Leone Modena,' *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 35, no. 1 (2018): 161–85. In general, see BENJAMIN RAVID, 'Christian Travelers in the Ghetto of Venice: Some Preliminary Observations,' in BENJAMIN RAVID, *Studies on the Jews of Venice, 1382–1797* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2003), 111–50.

[2] On English knowledge about Jews ca. 1600, see JAMES SHAPIRO, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). See also EVA HOLMBERG, *Jews in the Early Modern English Imagination: A Scattered Nation* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011).

[3] ALBERTO CASTALDINI, *Il ghetto di Verona nel Seicento* (Verona: Archivio Storico Curia Diocesana, 1997), 27.

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rituals and hear the rabbis sing and preach.[4] While Modena does not mention him by name, Coryat was among them. He observed the synagogue rituals with curiosity and interest, noting that Jewish prayers were in fact more akin to shouting than to singing.[5] He also deplored the Jewish custom of entering the synagogue without uncovering their heads or kneeling. The experience was evidently alienating, but also somewhat ambivalent. While Coryat admired the beauty of Jewish women and the elegance of Jewish men, he could not avoid feeling sad for these Jews and their antiquated religion. 'Truly,' he noted, 'it is a most lamentable case for a Christian to consider the damnable estate of these miserable Jewes, in that they reject the true Messias and Saviour of their soules.'[6]

The question obviously tormented him, to the point that he decided to try out his own missionary skills and engage in a 'discourse with the Jewes about their religion.' Thus he embarked upon a discussion with a 'learned Rabbin that spake good Latin,' asking him 'his opinion of Christ, and why he did not receive him for his Messias.'[7] The rabbi apparently replied that, while he was willing to accept that Jesus was a prophet, he could not acknowledge his divinity or recognise him as the Messiah. Coryat replied by citing Jesus's miracles and the biblical prophecies referring to his coming. He insisted that the rabbi 'renounce his Jewish religion and undertake the Christian faith, without the which he should be eternally damned.' His interlocutor, however, was not convinced. For him, it seemed Christians only interpret Scripture according to their will, adding that, for his part, he was 'confidently resolved to live and die in his Jewish faith.'[8] By this time, Coryat noted, the rabbi was also 'somewhat exasperated.' Coryat could only conclude that the Jews were indeed a stubborn people, who could not be converted as most of them only view Jesus as a 'silly poor wretch' unworthy of being the Messiah. The discussion had taken an uncomfortable turn, and Coryat reports that '[a]fter there had passed many vehement speeches to and fro betwixt us, it happened that some forty or fifty Jewes more flocked about me, and some of them beganne very insolently to swagger with me, because I durst reprehend their religion.'[9] He eventually had to escape the ghetto, 'least they would have offered me some violence.' Fortunately, he encountered the English ambassador who quickly conveyed him to safe grounds, away from his 'unchristian' attackers.

Coryat's account of his Jewish encounter was doubtless meant to provoke the reader's amusement. The panegyric poems written by his friends and published along with the *Crudities* wittily noted that the author nearly escaped circumcision and had to

[4] LEONE MODENA, *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi. Leon Modena's* Life of Judah, ed. MARK R. COHEN (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).
[5] CORYAT, *Crudities*, 370–76.
[6] CORYAT, *Crudities*, 373.
[7] CORYAT, *Crudities*, 374.
[8] CORYAT, *Crudities*, 375.
[9] CORYAT, *Crudities*, 376.

flee from the Jews as he had fled from the 'stewes'—the brothels—where he likewise claims to have engaged in an uncanny theological discussion.[10]

Figure 1. Thomas Coryat, *Coryat's Crudities* (London, 1611), title page. Wikimedia Commons.

There has been some speculation as to the identity of the 'learned Rabbin' with whom Coryat claimed to have conversed. Some have suggested that the latter might in fact

[10] The two scenes are in fact represented on either side of the frontispiece of *Crudities* (fig. 1). See HOROWITZ, 'A Dangerous Encounter,' 350–51.

have been Leone Modena (1571–1648), or perhaps his younger colleague, Simone Luzzatto (1583–1663).[11] At the time of Coryat's visit in 1608, Leone Modena would have just recently been fully ordained a rabbi, but his reputation as a scholar was already well established, among both Jews and Christians. His sermons attracted crowds and he was also pursued by Christian scholars interested in Jewish laws and customs.[12] Just a few years after Coryat's visit, Modena undertook to write what is today perhaps his best-known work, the *Historia de' Riti Hebraici*, a description of Judaism intended for a Christian audience and aimed at changing negative perceptions of Jews.[13] The *Riti* was well received in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was eventually included in the first volume of Jean-Frédéric Bernard's *Cérémonies et coutumes de tous les peuples du monde* (Amsterdam, 1723).[14] Modena in fact claimed to have composed the work at the request of an English lord. According to Cecil Roth, the latter may have been none other than the poet Henry Wotton, who resumed his position as ambassador to Venice for James I in 1616 and who had delivered Coryat from his Jewish 'aggressors' some years earlier.[15] Modena was in all likelihood well acquainted with Latin,[16] and Coryat's claim that his Jewish interlocutor had admitted that Jesus may well have been an 'esteemed' prophet among Jews but certainly not a god seems to conform to Modena's relatively favourable opinion of Jesus. Indeed, in a later work, Modena described Jesus as a one-time Pharisee who wished to be regarded as 'more than a prophet'—hence his claim to be the 'Son of God'—albeit never professing himself to be God, contrary

[11] CECIL ROTH, 'Leone da Modena and England,' *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 11 (1924–27), 206–27 (222, 222n20); RAVID, 'Christian Travelers,' 142n71; and the discussion in CRISTIANA FACCHINI, 'Il Gesù di Leone Modena'; CRISTIANA FACCHINI, 'The City, the Ghetto and Two Books. Venice and Jewish Early Modernity,' *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History* 2 (2011): 11–44, https://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=266.

[12] CECIL ROTH, 'Leone da Modena and his English Correspondents,' *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 17 (1951–52): 39–43; CECIL ROTH, 'Leone da Modena and the Christian Hebraists of his Age,' *Jewish Studies in Memory of Israel Abrahams* (New York: Press of the Jewish Institute of Religion, 1927). On Modena and his life, see HOWARD E. ADELMAN, 'Leon Modena: The Autobiography and the Man,' in MODENA, *Autobiography*, 19–49. On both Modena and Luzzatto see also MARINA CAFFIERO, *Storia degli ebrei nell'Italia moderna, dal Rinascimento alla Restaurazione* (Rome: Carocci, 2014), 139–48. On intellectual relations between Jews and Christians in the Venice ghetto, see also GIUSEPPE VELTRI and EVELIEN CHAYES, *Oltre le mura del ghetto. Accademie, scetticismo e tolleranza nella Venezia barocca* (Palermo: New Digital Frontiers, 2016).

[13] The *Riti* was first printed in Paris in 1637, but as Modena himself indicates, the work had been written some twenty years earlier; cf. MODENA, *Autobiography*, 146. Moreover, the work circulated in manuscript form well before 1637, and had already been cited by John Selden in his *De successionibus in Bona Defuncti, seu Iure Haereditario, Ad Leges Ebraeorum*, published in 1631; see ibid., 170–1, ROTH, 'Leone da Modena and England,' 215; and JASON P. ROSENBLATT, *Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi: John Selden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 48–49.

[14] Cf. JACQUES LE BRUN and GUY G. STROUMSA, eds, *Les Juifs présentés aux chrétiens. Textes de Léon de Modène et de Richard Simon* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1998).

[15] ROTH, 'Leone da Modena and England,' 207.

[16] ROTH, 'Leone da Modena and England,' 221n16; MODENA, *Autobiography*, 86.

to what Christians say.[17] Modena himself in fact admitted to have engaged often in theological discussions with Christians, even noting in a letter to R. Gershon Cohen that much of what he discussed with Christian scholars could not be committed to writing—in all likelihood out of fear of the Inquisition.[18]

Simone Luzzatto, Modena's younger colleague, was even more deeply immersed in the intellectual debates of his time and infused with renewed seventeenth-century passion for 'science.'[19] His late work, *Socrate overo Dell'humano sapere* (1651), considered an example of radical seventeenth-century scepticism in disguise, displays Luzzatto's thorough acquaintance with ancient philosophy and classical literature, as well as with the natural sciences. Luzzatto is more often remembered, however, for his *Discorso circa il stato degl'Hebrei*, published in 1638, an apologetic work divided into eighteen 'considerations' and advocating for the political rights of Jews. This work would later be used by the Irish freethinker John Toland in his *Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews* (1714).[20] The *Discorso* included a long commentary on Tacitus's Jewish excursus, in which Luzzatto criticised the Roman historian for asserting, among other things, that Jews feel only 'hate and enmity' *(hostile odium)* towards other nations.[21] It is likely that

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[17] LEONE MODENA, *Magen va-Herev. Hibbur neged ha-Nazrut*, ed. SHLOMO SIMONSOHN (Jerusalem: Mekitze Nirdamim, 1960), 43 (III.10). Here I am using ALLEN H. PODET, ed., *A Translation of* Magen wa-Hereb *by Leon Modena 1571-1648* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 97–102. Giulio Morosini, who had been a student of Modena's prior to his conversion to Christianity, notes that his former teacher spoke of Jesus in favourable terms; see GIULIO MOROSINI, *Via della fede mostrata a'gli ebrei*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Rome: Nella Stamparia della Sacra Cong. de Prop. Fide, 1683), 105, cited by ROTH, 'Leone da Modena and England,' 222 and TALYA FISHMAN, 'Changing Jewish Discourse About Christianity: The Efforts of Rabbi Leone Modena,' in *The Lion Shall Roar: Leone Modena and His World*, ed. DAVID MALKIEL (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2002), 159–94 (173). That Jesus was a Pharisee is also repeated in a letter Modena wrote in 1640 to a Christian Hebraist; cf. ROTH, 'Leone da Modena and the Christian Hebraists,' 391. On Leone Modena and Jesus, see also FACCHINI, 'Il Gesù di Leone Modena,' and CRISTIANA FACCHINI, 'Jesus the Pharisee: Leon Modena, the Historical Jesus, and Renaissance Venice,' *Journal for the Study of the historical Jesus* 17, no. 1–2 (2019): 81–101.

[18] YOSEF H. YERUSHALMI, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto. Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 353–54.

[19] See DAVID B. RUDERMAN, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 153–84; ARIEL VITERBO, 'Socrate nel ghetto: lo scetticismo mascherato di Simone Luzzatto,' *Studi Veneziani* n.s. 38 (1999): 79–128; and the studies collected in GIUSEPPE VELTRI, ed., *Scritti politici e filosofici di un Ebreo scettico nella Venezia del Seicento* (Milan: Bompiani, 2013). On Luzzatto's life and work, see also LISA SARACCO, 'Luzzatto, Simone (Simchah Ben Itzaq),' in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 100 vols., vol. 66 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2006), 747–49.

[20] See SIMONE LUZZATTO, *Discourse on the State of the Jews. Bilingual Edition,* eds GIUSEPPE VELTRI and ANNA LISSA (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019). On the *Discourse* and its contexts, see also GIUSEPPE VELTRI, 'The City and the Ghetto: Simone Luzzatto and the Development of Jewish Political Thought,' in GIUSEPPE VELTRI, *Renaissance Philosophy in Jewish Garb. Foundations and Challenges in Judaism on the Eve of Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 195–225; BENJAMIN RAVID, 'The Venetian Context of the Discourse,' in LUZZATTO*, Discourse on the State of the Jews*, eds VELTRI and LISSA, 243–74. On Luzzatto's influence, see ISAAC BARZILAY, 'John Toland's Borrowings from Simone Luzzatto,' *Jewish Social Studies* 31, no. 2 (1969): 75–81; GIOVANNI TARANTINO, *Lo scrittoio di Anthony Collins (1676-1729): i libri e i tempi di un libero pensatore* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007), 102.

[21] LUZZATTO, *Discourse*, 151–189, on Tacitus, *Histories* 5.5.1. See MENAHEM STERN, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities,

this was also a way for Luzzatto to criticise contemporary Christian authors levelling similar accusations.[22]

Indeed, even though the early modern age also saw the rise of a different discourse, more inclined to toleration and dismissive of such slanders (albeit often born of a missionary agenda), age-old accusations of Jewish perfidy and hatred of Christians still very much pervaded contemporary discussions on Jews and Judaism. The notion that the 'blind' and 'obstinate' Jews engaged in all sorts of hostile activities aiming to harm the Christian social body guided much of the anti-Jewish policies of the sixteenth century, including their expulsion from the Papal States and, of course, the establishment of ghettos throughout the peninsula. The Talmud, which was said to contain blasphemies Christians 'could not hear without feeling nauseous,' had been convicted and burned in Rome in 1553 and subsequently in a number of Italian cities, and Jewish books in general were subject to the strict scrutiny of the Holy Office.[23] Modena himself feared the reaction of the Inquisition following the publication of the *Riti Hebraici*, which had first been published without his permission, and which could seem to contain 'matters contrary to [the Christian] religion and beliefs.'[24] By addressing anti-Jewish slanders by way of a discussion of Tacitus, Luzzatto perhaps sought to escape such dangers. Both Modena and Luzzatto certainly had reasons to be anxious, as Jews, whether in Venice or any other Italian city, were always at risk of being expelled if suspected of unlawful activity. It was precisely the threat of such an expulsion which had prompted Luzzatto to write his discourse defending Jews and stressing their usefulness to the Venetian Republic.[25]

Jewish–Christian Polemics in Early Modern Italy

In evoking the figures of Modena and Luzzatto my aim is not to establish with absolute certainty the identity of the 'learned Rabbin' upon whom Thomas Coryat imposed his

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1980), 17–63 (19); RENÉ S. BLOCH, *Antike Vorstellungen vom Judentum. Der Judenexckursus des Tacitus im Rahmen der griechisch-römischen Ethnographie* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2002), 199–201.

[22] See BENJAMIN RAVID, '"Contra Judaeos" in Seventeenth-Century Italy: Two Responses to the "Discorso" of Simone Luzzatto by Melchiore Palontrotti and Giulio Morosini,' *AJS Review* 7–8 (1982–1983): 301–53.

[23] On the condemnation and ensuing censorship of Jewish books in early modern Italy, see FAUSTO PARENTE, 'L'Église et le Talmud,' in FAUSTO PARENTE, *Les Juifs et l'Église romaine à l'époque moderne (XV^e-XVIII^e siècle)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007), 233–394 (311–372); see also AMNON RAZ-KRAKOTZKIN, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text. The Catholic Church and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon in the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); PIET VAN BOXEL, *Jewish Books in Christian Hands: Theology, Exegesis and Conversion under Gregory XIII (1572–1585)* (Vatican City: Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, 2016). Many thanks to Theodor Dunkelgrün for this last reference.

[24] MODENA, *Autobiography*, 147. See CECIL ROTH, 'Léon de Modène, ses *Riti ebraici* et le Saint-Office à Venise,' *Revue des études juives* 87, no. 173 (1929): 83–88, and in general BRIAN PULLAN, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice, 1550–1670* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983). Modena's orphaned grandson had in fact been imprisoned for a short time in 1634 for working at a press and contributing to the publication of rabbinic works.

[25] VELTRI, 'The City and the Ghetto,' 215–16; RAVID, 'The Venetian Context of the Discourse,' 250–55.

theological jousting. Rather, I wish to sketch a few outlines of the Jewish–Christian conversation in early modern Italy—a conversation of which Coryat provides a distant and distorted echo. The itineraries of Modena and Luzzatto also underline some of the ambiguities of the age of the ghetto, as an age of both social segregation and cultural interaction. They illuminate the permeability of Jewish and Christian cultures in that context, as well as their deep entrenchments. Both fully took part in the literary and scientific episteme of their time, but were also very much concerned with polemics and apologetics. Of course, segregation did not mean isolation, and Jews fully participated in the social, economic, and cultural fabric of the early modern Italian Peninsula. Despite the ghetto—an institution designed to enforce the strict separation of Jews and Christians—interactions were constant and inevitable.[26] However, they were also strictly regulated, as well as being informed by mutual mistrust and stereotyped ideas.

The border separating the two communities, which authorities on both sides would supervise with extreme scrutiny, was not only tangible (and sensatory), it was also emotional.[27] From a Christian perspective, contact with Jews always threatened to contaminate the Christian social body with heresy and blasphemy.[28] The case of Giorgio Moretti is perhaps emblematic.[29] A Christian, Moretti was born and raised just outside the ghetto in Venice. It seems he was a regular visitor to the ghetto, working as a sort of go-between or smuggler between the two communities *(facendo qualche sansaria)*. In 1589, he was denounced for his overfamiliarity with Jews. Moretti allegedly attended Jewish weddings, ate meat during Lent, and often stayed in the ghetto so late that the guards would not let him out. Worse than anything else was his relationship with a Jewish girl named Rachel, whom he claimed to want to marry, after bringing her to the Christian faith—a plan which was naturally greeted with much hostility from Rachel's family, too. Moretti was initially prohibited from returning to the ghetto, however, having failed to comply, he was eventually condemned to the galleys. As noted by Brian Pullan, '[i]n all probability (Moretti) was no serious Judaizer, but rather

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[26] See MARINA CAFFIERO, *Legami pericolosi. Ebrei e cristiani tra eresia, libri proibiti e stregoneria* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012). That the ghetto boosted the autonomy of Jewish communities and enabled Jewish culture to flourish in early modern Italy is suggested by JONATHAN I. ISRAEL, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 60.

[27] See DANA E. KATZ, *The Jewish Ghetto and the Visual Imagination of Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), esp. 84–111. Many thanks to Cristiana Facchini for this kind reference.

[28] CAFFIERO, *Legami pericolosi*; PULLAN, *The Jews of Europe*, 145–67. Even clerics could be 'infected' by Judaism and start spreading calumnies against the Church; see the case of the Franciscan friar Pietro de Nixia (1553) in PIER CESARE IOLY ZORATTINI, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia contro ebrei e giudaizzanti*, 14 vols., vol. 1, *1548–1560* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1980), 101–43. On the sexual anxieties of Christian authorities, see KATZ, *The Jewish Ghetto*, 100–10. See also SALO W. BARON, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 18 vols., vol. 14, *Late Middle Ages and era of European expansion, 1200-1650. Catholic restoration and wars of religion*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 121–22.

[29] IOLY ZORATTINI, *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia contro ebrei e giudaizzanti*, 14 vols., vol. 8, *1587–1598* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1990) 81–97.

a person so familiar with the Ghetto and so alive to its possibilities for entertainment that he could not bring himself to respect the social distances created by the state and the Church alike for the protection of the Catholic faith and the proper observance of its dietary laws.'[30]

For Jews, facing relentless pressure to convert to Christianity and encouraged to do so should they wish to climb the social ladder, interactions with Christians could also be perceived as a threat, as the reaction of Rachel's family towards Moretti would suggest. Jewish authorities were thus similarly engaged in an effort to prevent Jews from succumbing to the charms of Christian society and converting to 'idolatry,' or, indeed, they worked to convince Jews who had converted to Christianity to revert to their ancestral faith.[31] Jewish culture in early modern Italy thus witnessed an intense revival of polemical activity, be it in the form of new polemical compositions dealing with the New Testament and Christian doctrines—both in Hebrew and in the vernacular—or through the copying, translation, and circulation of influential polemical works from the late Middle Ages. William Horbury notes that 'Italy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries rivals Holland as the setting in which Jewish polemical literature probably reached its climax.'[32] This flourishing of Jewish polemical literature in Italy, as in Holland, perhaps resulted from the influx of Jews of Iberian descent, who imported the strong Spanish tradition of engaging in fierce scriptural polemics with Christianity.[33] The revival of polemical activity was perhaps also a by-product of the effort to re-educate former conversos who had fled to Italy in order to practise their ancestral faith openly. Despite the restrictive anti-Jewish policies

[30] PULLAN, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice*, 164–66.

[31] YERUSHALMI, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 56–60. Indeed, inquisitorial sources also point to the existence of well-organised networks designed to bring Marranos back to the Jewish faith and transport them to safe ground on the eastern side of the Mediterranean. See, for example, the case of Francesco Colonna below.

[32] WILLIAM HORBURY, 'Judah Briel and Seventeenth-Century Jewish Anti-Christian Polemic in Italy,' *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1993–1994): 171–92; reprinted in *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), here at 41. See also, DANIEL J. LASKER, 'Anti-Christian Polemics in Seventeenth Century Italy,' in *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, 9 vols., Division B, vol. 1, *The History of the Jewish People. Second Temple Period to Modern Times* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1993), 185–92 (in Hebrew). Jewish-Christian polemics in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italy are currently the subject of a research project led by Karoly Daniel Dobos and Gerhard Langer at the University of Budapest; see the resources available online at http://www.jcrpolemicsinitaly.at. There is certainly an even greater number of Christian anti-Jewish writings composed in the same context; see FAUSTO PARENTE, 'La confrontation idéologique entre le judaïsme et l'Église en Italie (Esquisse d'une histoire de la littérature judéophobe en Italie aux XVI^{e}-XVIII^{e} siècles),' in PARENTE, *Les Juifs et l'Église romaine*, 93–176.

[33] That philosophical polemics against Christianity (with a few notable exceptions) essentially belong to the world of Sephardic Jews has already been noted by DANIEL J. LASKER, 'Jewish Philosophical Polemics in Ashkenaz,' *Contra Iudaeos. Ancient and Medieval Polemics Between Christians and Jews*, eds ORA LIMOR and GUY G. STROUMSA (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 195–213. On Jewish polemics in Holland and their influence, see RICHARD H. POPKIN, 'Jewish Anti-Christian Arguments as a Source of Irreligion from the Seventeenth to the Early Nineteenth Century,' in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, eds MICHAEL HUNTER and DAVID WOOTTON (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 159–82.

promoted by the Church, Italy—like the Netherlands—soon came to be seen as a safe haven for Iberian Jews who had been forcibly converted to Christianity in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and now sought to convert back to Judaism (possibly because of its political fragmentation).[34] It is within that framework that we ought also to consider the circulation and transmission of the Jewish narratives on the life of Jesus in early modern Italy.

Hidden Transcript(s): The Jewish Gospel *Toledot Yeshu*

While Coryat's 'learned Rabbin' might have been inclined to accept the notion that Jesus was a prophet, the English tourist also noted that the rest of the Jews were of a different opinion and had little regard for the Christian saviour. Theological discussions with Christians were obviously a risky game and implied a certain tongue-in-cheek attitude.[35] As noted by Yosef H. Yerushalmi, while apologetic works defending Judaism or explaining Jewish laws and rituals—such as Modena's *Riti Hebraici* or Luzzatto's *Discourse*—could be printed, active polemics only circulated in manuscript form.[36] Among these, the Jewish story of the life of Jesus commonly known as *Toledot Yeshu*—a highly popular work among late medieval and early modern Jews—undeniably informed the way Jews perceived Jesus, and reacted to Christian missionary attempts. The story has come down to us in a number of different versions (and in many different languages), but the essential plot is rather straightforward: Jesus was not the Son of God born of a virgin, whose death and resurrection atoned for the sins of mankind. Rather, he was a spurious child, conceived in adultery (and what is worse, while his mother was menstruating), who resorted to magic and sorcery to seduce his people into idolatry and to worship him as a god.[37] According to the texts already circulating in Europe in the Middle Ages, Jesus had in fact stolen the Ineffable Name of God in the Jerusalem Temple, using its magical powers to work his miracles and impress the crowds, until he was eventually captured by the rabbis and rightfully sentenced to hang.

I have described elsewhere the Jewish story of Jesus *(Toledot Yeshu)* as a 'hidden transcript,' the visible fragments of a subversive discourse secretly shared among the

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[34] See YERUSHALMI, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 194–206. The economic opportunities offered by these Jewish immigrants and the quasi-global commercial networks they had developed doubtless incited a number of Italian principalities to simply ignore the anti-Jewish policies promoted by the papacy and turn a blind eye to their 'apostasy.'

[35] On Leone Modena's 'double personality,' see CAFFIERO, *Storia degli Ebrei*, 139–43.

[36] YERUSHALMI, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 355.

[37] See MICHAEL MEERSON and PETER SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). Other seminal studies include SAMUEL KRAUSS, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary & Co., 1902); RICCARDO DI SEGNI, *Il vangelo del Ghetto. Le "storie di Gesù": leggende e documenti della tradizione medievale ebraica* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1985). See also the essays in PETER SCHÄFER, MICHAEL MEERSON, and YAACOV DEUTSCH, eds, *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited: A Princeton Conference* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) and DANIEL BARBU and YAACOV DEUTSCH, eds, *Toledot Yeshu in Context: The Jewish 'Life of Jesus' in Ancient, Medieval and Modern History* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020).

members of a minority culture and taking aim at the dominant narrative or 'correcting' the dominant view. This 'infrapolitical' critique of power most often escapes both the attention and the understanding of the powerholders, yet deeply informs the attitude and self-consciousness of the minority culture.[38] Hidden transcripts are an expression of a culture's willingness to withstand hegemonic pressure, but they also provide subordinate cultures with a way to cope with their subaltern and often despised status and to give voice to their alternative perspective. It is certainly true that, while they are meant to remain concealed, such hidden transcripts frequently end up escaping the secrecy to which they are theoretically confined, and also come to the attention of the dominant culture, often to the great shock and horror of its members. In the late Middle Ages and early modern period, many Christians were certainly aware of the existence of *Toledot Yeshu*, which they described as an outrageous work 'written by the devil' and sometimes used it to reinforce the image of Jews as a blasphemous people.[39] Jews, by contrast, often denied that the work even existed, or claimed it was a thing of the past which no one knew or read.

In situations like the one described by Coryat, for instance, Jews would obviously have to be hard-pressed to reveal their true opinion. But hard-pressed they often were. Venice was perhaps a dangerous place in which to voice the story in public. In safer places, however, Jews were sometimes more willing to speak out their truth when 'exasperated' by Christian travellers and missionaries, and the few echoes of their voices that have come down to us reflect how much their views were informed by the themes and motifs we find in *Toledot Yeshu*.

Thus, the English divine William Biddulph also recounted his unsuccessful 'conferences' with Jews whilst travelling in the Ottoman Empire. Jews, Biddulph claimed, are 'blasphemous wretches who, when they are pressed with an argument which they cannot answer, break out into opprobrious speeches.' According to them, Jesus was a false prophet who was 'deservedly' crucified by their ancestors, even adding that 'if he were now living, they would use him worse than ever their forefathers did.'[40] John Sanderson, another English traveller who engaged in a similar exercise, noted that the 'better sort' of Jews had refused to talk with him about Jesus 'for [fear of] offending or being unpleasant unto me; for whithout scoffinge they never talk of Him or his followers.' One day, however, he did have an argument with Jews of the 'meaner

[38] DANIEL BARBU, 'Feeling Jewish. Emotions, Identity, and the Jews' Inverted Christmas,' in *Feeling Exclusion. Religious Conflict, Exile and Emotions in Early Modern Europe*, eds GIOVANNI TARANTINO and CHARLES ZIKA (London: Routledge, 2019); see JAMES C. SCOTT, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). Scott, it must be noted, insisted that dominant groups also have a hidden transcript, namely these 'activities, gestures, remarks, and dress that [are] unseemly to [their] public role' and which they can afford only when secluded from public scrutiny.
[39] DANIEL BARBU, 'Some Remarks on *Toledot Yeshu* (*The Jewish Life of Jesus*) in Early Modern Europe,' *Journal for Religion, Film and Media* 5, no. 1 (2019): 29–45 (31–35).
[40] WILLIAM BIDDULPH, *The Travels of certaine Englishmen into Africa, Asia, Troy, Bithynia, Thracia, and to the Black Sea*… (London: T. Haviland for W. Aspley, 1609), 74–75.

sort,' who told him their version of the gospel story 'in a scornefull opprobiouse manner.' Jesus, they claimed, had entered the Jerusalem temple and stolen God's holy name in order to work magical feats (such as flying or giving life to birds made of clay) and be worshipped as a god. He was told by an oracle, however, that he would not be worshipped in life but only after his death. Sanderson also cites the Hebrew words referring to Jesus as a bastard *(mamzer)* and the son of a menstruating woman (*bemidatah*, in all likelihood *ben ha-niddah*), without understanding their meaning, however, as he merely repeats the claim of his Jewish interlocutors that these words simply mean 'let the people serve me.'[41] Another version of the narrative is again reported by George Sandys in his *Relation of a Journey begun A.D. 1610*, recounting his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In the middle of his description of Jewish beliefs, Sandys cited a 'fable' which Jews tell about Jesus. Jews confess, wrote Sandys, that, wishing to be worshipped like a God, Jesus stole the names of God from the Jerusalem temple and 'sew them in his thigh. By virtue whereof he went invisible, rid on the Sunne beames, raised the dead to life, and effected like wonders.' Yet again his divine ambitions would not be granted him until his death. He thus surrendered himself to the Jewish authorities, who killed him and buried him in a dunghill, 'lest his body should have been found, and worshipped by his followers.' Sandys concluded: 'Such, and more horrible blasphemies invent they; which I fear to utter. But they be generally notorious liars.'[42] It is of course difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction in such accounts, and whether their authors had indeed, as they claim, acquired familiarity with *Toledot Yeshu* through their discussions with Jews. Yet, while some might be more sceptical, I would argue that the idiosyncrasies of the versions provided by these travellers (as well as their approximate use of Hebrew phrases) provide as many subtle yet discernible 'cracks' in their dialogical rhetoric, as Carlo Ginzburg would say, suggesting that they may indeed have heard (and not merely read) the Jewish story of Jesus. I am thus inclined to think that these travel accounts do allow us to hear the

[41] *The Travels of John Sanderson in the Levant 1548-1602*, ed. WILLIAM FOSTER (London: Hakluyt Society, 1931), 119: 'They said that there was a stone in the Lord's house at Jerusalem, the middest of the wourld, caller Evenasediya [i.e. *even ha-shetyyah*], upon which was written the name of God, and that whosoever could gett in thether and retorne with it written might have what he required and doe what he would; which they said Jesus, Josipth the carpenters sonne, by extraordinary means gott unto and writt it, cuttinge his owne thigh, so hid it and escaped out of the temple; said: *Yea afdoni anni* ("let my people serve me"), but was presentlie answered: *Mamzer bemidatah*; which interpreted, as the Jewes tell me, is: ("Saith Christ) lett the people serve me." The oracle answeared: "After death, not in life." Then, say they, first he began, first he bagan to flie and make of earth birds, with many more sutch like wourks, as these Jewes to me confessed in a scornefull opprobiouse manner.'

[42] GEORGE SANDYS, *A Relation of a Journey begun An. Dom. 1610* (London: W. Barrett, 1621), 147. See the parallels to Sandy's version in WILLIAM HORBURY, 'A Critical Examination of the Toledoth Jeshu' (PhD diss., Clare College, Cambridge, 1970), 66–73, all pointing to the Spanish origins of this particular version.

voice, however muted and distorted, of actual Jews expressing their sentiments with regard to the Christian saviour.[43]

Toledot Yeshu among Early Modern Jews and Crypto-Jews

The Jews whom Biddulph and others like him met on their oriental travels were mainly of Iberian descent and had settled in the Ottoman Empire after their expulsion from Spain in 1492.[44] The Jewish story of Jesus had long been popular among Iberian Jews and was evidently part of the texts and traditions they had brought with them following the expulsion.[45] That it continued to be told among those who had remained and converted to Christianity can be seen from inquisitorial records, suggesting that the 'hidden transcript' was still very much active among crypto-Jews long after their conversion. To quote but one example, in 1526 Alvaro Gonzales, aged seventy-two, was found guilty of heresy and apostasy and burned at the stake in Las Palmas, Gran Canaria. After a long trial in front of the recently established Inquisition of the Canary Islands, it was concluded that Alvaro had 'reverted to the deadly creed of the Jews after having received the privilege of baptism.' Worse, he had in fact sought to '[spread] the Jewish faith among others.'[46] The trial revealed that, some twenty years earlier, after fleeing Portugal (where Jews who had fled Spain in 1492 were converted by force in 1497) and settling in the Azores, Alvaro had already been convicted for various acts of impiety, including throwing down and spitting on a crucifix.[47] He was thus a relapsed Judaiser and, as such, was inevitably subject to the death penalty. It seems Alvaro had in fact spent much of his life trying to flee the Inquisition after his conversion, seeking a place where his family and relatives could continue to practise their faith relatively

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[43] See CARLO GINZBURG, 'Alien Voices: The Dialogic Element in Early Modern Jesuit Historiography,' in *History, Rhetoric and Proof* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 71–91. That the Jewish story of Jesus might, however, have been known to English literary circles can be inferred from the trial of Christopher Marlowe, who, among other things, was accused of saying that 'Christ was a bastard and his mother dishonest'; see PAUL. H. KOCHER, *Christopher Marlowe: A Study of his Thought, Learning and Character* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946), 28. Whether Marlowe's words reflect the influence of his alleged converso acquaintances remains, however, a matter of speculation.

[44] Sandys in fact indicates that, apart from the Bible, the Jews read their books 'in the Spanish tongue.' I warmly thank Ignacio Javier Chuecas Saldias for this observation. See also his contribution to this thematic section

[45] On *Toledot Yeshu* in medieval Spain, see DANIEL BARBU and YANN DAHHAOUI, 'Un manuscrit français des *Toledot Yeshu*: le ms. lat. 12722 et l'enquête de 1429 sur les juifs de Trévoux,' *Henoch. Historical and Textual Studies in Ancient and Medieval Judaism and Christianity* 40 no. 2 (2018): 223–88, esp. 259–60 and the references cited there. See also ELEAZAR GUTWIRTH, 'Gender, History, and the Judeo-Christian Polemic,' in *Contra Iudaeos,* eds LIMOR and STROUMSA, 257–78; RAM BEN-SHALOM, 'The Converso as Subversive: Jewish Traditions or Christian Libel,' *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50 no. 2 (1999): 259–83.

[46] LUCIEN WOLF, ed., *Jews in the Canary Islands*, repr. (London: Jewish Historical Society, 1926; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 71.

[47] See the depositions in WOLF, ed., *Jews in the Canary Islands*, 14, 24, 43. Alvaro's eldest son, Silvestre, was also burned at the stake in February 1526. Alvaro's wife, Mencia Vaez, was executed in March 1526. Their two other sons were reconciled with the Church the same year after deposing against their parents. The youngest, Duarte, would be convicted again eight years later but managed to escape. Their daughter, Ana, was reconciled in 1530 after she publicly abjured her parents' faith and spent another three years under house arrest.

discreetly. He had even established a clandestine synagogue in his house on Gran Canaria, often visited by other crypto-Jews. In 1524, a new wave of denunciations put an end to their activities. One of the accusations recorded against Alvaro Gonzales was particularly detailed. On July 3, 1524, a certain Juan Fernandez deposed to having had a chat with Alvaro some seven years earlier. Apparently thinking he was speaking with a fellow converso, Alvaro pointed to a crucifix. He said that this was 'a land of dogs' who claim the crucified as their god, commenting that:

> [While Jesus was] playing ball one day in the synagogue, [he] read a writing which he saw there, and which taught him all those things which he professed to know, and that because of what he said, their [the Jews'] God had commanded them to hang him on a tree. Upon which deponent exclaimed: 'What are you saying, Alvaro Gonzales? What you say is very wrong,' but Gonzales nudged him with his elbow, saying 'You could understand me if you wished,' and walked away.[48]

We can presume that what the witness was describing here was an attempt by Alvaro Gonzales to enter into conversation with a newcomer whom he thought might be a crypto-Jew like himself. He was thus, apparently, sending out a form of 'dog whistle' that only another crypto-Jew was meant to understand, thereby testing his interlocutor—perhaps with a view to inviting him to join his small community and practice his faith with fellow crypto-Jews. What is noteworthy, however, is that, here, his speech took the form of a short allusion to the 'true' story of Jesus as it was known to Jews—and obviously also to many crypto-Jews who could still use it as a sort of rallying cry—as there can be little doubt that the source of the narrative behind Alvaro's words (if indeed he expressed them) was *Toledot Yeshu*.[49]

It is possible that copies of *Toledot Yeshu* were among the polemical books Spanish and Portuguese émigrés brought with them to the Italian Peninsula, although nothing prevents us from conjecturing that the narrative would already have circulated in Italy at an earlier date.[50] At any rate, there is little doubt that it had become quite

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[48] WOLF, ed., *Jews in the Canary Islands*, 33.

[49] See HORBURY, *Critical Examination*, 265–68.

[50] Parallels between *Toledot Yeshu* and *Sefer Yosippon* (the Hebrew version of Josephus) suggest that early versions of the work circulated in the Italian peninsula in the tenth century, although these parallels could reflect later interpolations; see SASKIA DÖNITZ, *Überlieferung und Rezeption des* Sefer Yosippon (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 50–61. That *Toledot Yeshu* circulated in northern Italy among Jews of German descent in the late Middle Ages is suggested by the records of the 1475 ritual murder trial in Trent. These make a clear reference to the narrative, as noted in RICCARDO DI SEGNI, 'Due nuovi fonti sulle *Toledoth Jeshu*,' *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 55, no.1 (1989), 127–32; see also ANNA ANTONIAZZI VILLA, *Un processo contro gli ebrei nella Milano del 1488* (Milan: Cappelli, 1986), 132–35. It is difficult, however, to determine whether the story was in effect formulated by the accused Jews or whether it was put into their mouths by their Christian accusers. The accusation is also reported by the Christian convert from Judaism turned anti-Jewish polemicist Giulio Morosini in his *Via della fede mostrata a'gli Ebrei*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Rome: Nella Stamparia della Sacra Cong. de Prop. Fide, 1683), 1396–97. On young Simon of Trent and his alleged ritual murder, see RONNIE PO-CHIA HSIA, *Trent 1475. Stories of a Ritual Murder* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). We can also note that similar accusations—that the Jewish story

popular by the end of the sixteenth century. In the 1560s, the young Joseph Scaliger noted after his visit to Italy and discussion with Jewish rabbis in Rome (in biblical Hebrew!) that Jews were both erudite and subtle, but contemptuous of Christians, and can only be convinced if the Talmud is used, as the New Testament 'makes them laugh.'[51] We can assume, in fact, that they knew another version of the story. Leone Modena himself, in his unfinished polemic against Christianity, *Magen va-Herev* ('The Shield and the Sword'), lamented the disgraceful 'lies' and 'mockeries' spread among Jews about the life of Jesus.[52] In doing so he also bore witness to the wide circulation of *Toledot Yeshu* among his contemporaries.[53]

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of Jesus was part of the Jews' 'bloody Passover' rituals—appear in other contemporary ritual murder trials; see FIDEL FITA, 'La verdad sobre el martirio del santo Niño de la Guardia, ó sea el proceso y quema (16 Noviemre, 1491) del judío Jucé Franco en Ávila,' *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 9 (1887), 88, with HORBURY, *Critical Examination*, 69–74. I have also found a reference to what may have been a Yiddish manuscript of *Toledot Yeshu* (entitled 'Signs and allusions concerning the fate of that man') in a list of Jewish books attested to in Mantua in 1595 and cited in SHIFRA BARUCHSON ARBIB, *La culture livresque des Juifs d'Italie à la fin de la Renaissance* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2002), 161.

[51] *Scaligerana, ou bons mots, rencontres agréables et remarques judicieuses & Sçavantes de J. Scaliger* (Cologne: Chez ***, 1695), 219–20. On *Scaligerana*, which should be read with some caution, see THEODOR DUNKELGRÜN, 'The Humanist discovery of Hebrew Epistolography,' in *Jewish Books and their Readers. Aspects of the Intellectual Life of Christians and Jews in Early Modern Europe*, eds SCOTT MANDELBROTE and JOANNA WEINBERG (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 211–259(235n82).

[52] MODENA, *Magen va-Herev. Hibbur neged ha-Naẓrut*, 43 (III.9): כי ספור דברים, אשר ראיתי סובב הולך ביד איזה אחד מבני שמנו, על חטאת נעוריו ופשעו בחיו, ואיך היה פועל הנסים, ועד מיתתו, ברור לי כי הכל שקר וכזב, חובר מאיזה איש שהיה נגדו לכתחילה לכלימה ובוז. וכלימה היא לכל בן ישראל שיאמינוהו לכמה סבות. Here I am using PODET, *A Translation of* Magen wa-Hereb *by Leon Modena 1571-1648*, 94–5. TALYA FISHMAN, 'Changing Jewish Discourse About Christianity: The Efforts of Rabbi Leone Modena,' in *The Lion Shall Roar: Leone Modena and His World*, ed. DAVID MALKIEL (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2002), 159–94, suggests that Modena's *Magen va-Herev* was written as a manual aimed at re-educating New Christians into the Jewish faith. Modena's conciliatory approach to Jesus was thus to reach out to conversos without hurting their dual allegiance. Fishman also suggests situating *Magen va-Herev* within a broader trend aimed at minimising the theological gap between Christians and Jews and thus mitigating the guilt of forced converts by claiming that they had not taken part in 'idolatry.' See also DANIEL J. LASKER, 'Jewish Anti-Christian Polemics in the Early Modern Period: Change or Continuity?,' in *Tradition, Heterodoxy and Religious Culture: Judaism and Christianity in the Early Modern Period*, eds CHANITA GOODBLATT and HOWARD KREISEL (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev, 2006), 469–88; CRISTIANA FACCHINI, 'Historicizing Jesus: Leon Modena (1571–1648) and the *Magen va-herev*,' in *Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Meeting on Christian Origins*, eds ADRIANA DESTRO and MAURO PESCE (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

[53] It may be argued, however, that Modena's knowledge of *Toledot Yeshu* in fact depended on Christian sources, in particular Petrus Galatinus's *De arcanis catholicae veritatis* (1518), which was a favourite target of Modena's polemic, as noted by Facchini, 'Historicizing Jesus.' Galatinus—who himself relied on medieval sources—mentioned 'a small booklet filled with lies and blasphemies, composed at the Devil's advice' in which Jews attribute Jesus's miracle to his use of the Ineffable Name; see WILLIAM HORBURY, 'Petrus Galatinus and Jean Thenaud on the Talmud and the *Toledot Yeshu*,' in *Jewish Books and their Readers,* eds MANDELBROTE and WEINBERG, 123–50. Miriam Benfatto kindly informed me (in private correspondence) that 'evidence of the *clandestine* circulation of *Toledot Yeshu* in the eighteenth [century] can be found in Giovanni Antonio Costanzi's unpublished *Norme per la revisione de libri composti dagli Ebrei*, preserved in the archives of the Holy Office and of which the most recent version dates from 1782. The *Norme* are accompanied by two substantial indexes. These include, respectively, a list of 188 unacceptable Jewish books, entitled *Indice de' libri Ebraici di cui non può permettersi agli Ebrei né la lettura, né*

That fact is confirmed by the inquisitorial archives from the Holy Office in Venice (published by Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini), where we encounter a number of references to *Toledot Yeshu* or *Toledot Yeshu*-related motifs among the accusations brought against Jews or suspected crypto-Jews. Thus, for instance, in 1553 a convert from Judaism named Francesco Colonna was admonished by a Levantine Jew, who told him: 'Wretched one, your mother is a Jew and you want to live in this way [i.e., as a Christian]?' The man continued saying 'many vile and blasphemous things against Christ and the Virgin Mary, his mother, that it was known that the Jews had hanged Jesus and that he was a bastard and a seducer' who had stolen the Name of God in the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem temple to perform would-be miracles.[54] Francesco agreed to return to Judaism and flee to Istanbul, where he could openly live as a Jew. Before he could do so, however, he was recognised by a friar, confessed his attempted apostasy, and betrayed the man and the network that had sought to exfiltrate him. Echoes of the narrative surfaced in other denunciations of Jews or crypto-Jews in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1571, Abraham Righetto was accused of proclaiming 'that our Savior was but a wicked man who was killed as a wicked man deserves.'[55] In 1578, Odoaro Dies was said to have asserted that Jesus was a bastard.[56] In 1648, a New Christian, Salvatore Caglione refused the sacrament on his deathbed saying 'that he did not wish to receive a hanged man.'[57] The same year, an anonymous Jew reportedly commented on Deuteronomy 13 ('If a prophet or a diviner appears among you […] and says "Let us worship other gods" […] that prophet or diviner must be put to death'), saying: 'Go and see in this chapter who is Christ whom you adore as a god!'[58] In 1563, two poor Jews who had immigrated from Poland joined the house of catechumens, probably with the hope of improving their situation, or at least of finding shelter. But they 'soon proved unable to suffer the institution' and planned to escape. However, they were arrested on blasphemy charges before they could do so.[59] One of them was accused by another catechumen of having proclaimed that all Christians go to hell, and that 'the Lord God was a bastard and the son of a whore, [conceived] at a time when the Madonna had her periods or menstruation, and what is worse calling him *mamzer barhanid* [*mamzer ben ha-niddah*], which [in Hebrew] means what I just said' (*Domenedio era un bastardo fio de una putana al tempo che la Madona haveva la fior over menstruo, per più despresio dicendo mamzer barhanid, che vuol dir quell che ve ho ditto*

la ritenzione ("Index of Jewish books which Jews shall not be allowed to read or possess"), and a list of 415 books deemed tolerable after revision, entitled *Indice de' libri ebraici, di cui si può tolerar la lettura, la ritenzione agli Ebrei previa la necessaria correzione* ("Index of Jewish Books whose reading and possession by Jews may be tolerated, pending on the necessary corrections"). The first index mentions *Toledot Yeshu* (i.e. N° 188).'

[54] IOLY ZORATTINI, *Processi del S. Uffizio*, 14 vols., vol. 1, *1548–1560*, 97.
[55] IOLY ZORATTINI, *Processi del S. Uffizio*, vol. 3, *1570–1572*, 51.
[56] IOLY ZORATTINI, *Processi del S. Uffizio*, vol. 4, *1571–1580*, 89.
[57] IOLY ZORATTINI, *Processi del S. Uffizio*, vol. 11, *1641–1681*, 60.
[58] IOLY ZORATTINI, *Processi del S. Uffizio*, vol. 11, *1641–1681*, 64.
[59] IOLY ZORATTINI, *Processi del S. Uffizio*, vol. 2, *1561–1570*, 18.

supra).[60] In 1578, a dubious Portuguese monk, Antonio Saldanha, accused a group of fellow countrymen of having secretly returned to Judaism and celebrating Jewish holidays. Also, while in their house, and following a religious disputation over the prophecies referring to Christ in the book of Daniel, one of them, not knowing how to answer, allegedly exclaimed:

> Why would you want me to believe in one who was hanged on a cross? Speaking of our lord Jesus Christ, whom he also called by this name of Manzel [*mamzer*], which means son of an adulteress, and of whom he said was rightly condemned [to death], for what he did he did by way of magic.[61]

The story of Elena de' Freschi, a New Christian, is quite remarkable. In 1555, at the age of seventy, she was accused of uttering blasphemies during Mass.[62] Some twenty years earlier, hearing that her sons had decided to convert, she begged them 'not to do this evil and bring shame on the Jews,' but they would not listen. Being a widow and not wishing to leave her sons, she had acquiesced in baptism as well. At first, she took on all the new habits and observances that were expected of a pious Christian widow, diligently absorbing the rites and doctrines of her new religion. Yet she apparently found it much more difficult to adapt to her new culinary habits and started fasting and engaging in all sorts of suspicious crypto-Jewish practices. One of her maids also revealed that she would sometimes return to the ghetto and weep. One Sunday, it seems she could not take it anymore, and as the priest raised the host and proclaimed *incarnatus est de spiritu sancto ex Maria virgine*, she shouted: 'You lie in your teeth! You are a bastard, born from a whore!' Her son, a respected doctor and theologian, who had worked as a censor responsible for finding and suppressing blasphemies in Jewish books, pleaded madness. Seeking to mitigate the accusation, he also claimed that his mother's words should not be taken as a sign of Judaising, saying that 'the Jews who at present live among the Christians neither use such words themselves nor teach anyone else to use them, on account of their fear of Christians.' And yet the sources suggest otherwise.

The influence of the Jewish story of Jesus even spread beyond Jewish or crypto-Jewish circles. In 1588, Giovanni Battista Capponi was accused of heresy, having disputed the authority of the New Testament and Jesus's messiahship, after engaging in conversations with Jews—or at least, he attributed the most violent of his statements to such conversations. These statements included

> saying that Christ was not the true Messiah, that his miracles had all been accomplished with the aid of the kabbalah, that all who believed in Christ were lost and damaged, that

[60] IOLY ZORATTINI, *Processi del S. Uffizio*, vol. 2, *1561–1570*, 32–33 and 46.
[61] IOLY ZORATTINI, *Processi del S. Uffizio*, vol. 4, *1571–1580*, 139.
[62] IOLY ZORATTINI, *Processi del S. Uffizio*, vol. 1, *1548–1560*, 151–224.

the Gospel was untrue, and that the Virgin and saints were incapable of interceding for humankind.[63]

The Italian Manuscripts of *Toledot Yeshu*

There is in fact an important corpus of *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts of Italian provenance, all dating from the early modern period. Of the 102 Hebrew manuscripts listed in the recent Meerson and Schäfer edition of *Toledot Yeshu*, 29—that is, close to a third!—are attributed to an Italian hand.[64] The bulk of the production of these manuscripts is divided equally between the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Just one manuscript can be dated earlier, to the sixteenth century, and a few were produced later in the early nineteenth century. Apart from one fragmentary manuscript testifying to the continuing circulation of the standard medieval version of the narrative (i.e., the so-called Strasbourg version) and a handful of manuscripts that provide a text either very close or identical to the one published in 1681 by the German Hebraist Johann Christoph Wagenseil, the Italian manuscripts mainly attest to a recension not observed in other contexts.[65] In other words, they present us with a version of the narrative which, although expanding on the standard medieval version, is distinctively Italian. The most distinctive feature of these Italian texts is the inversion of the names of Mary's husband and her rapist in the account of Jesus's conception. Whereas in most versions of the narrative Mary's husband is called Yohanan and her rapist Pandera, here, Pandera is her husband and Yohanan her rapist. As has long been noted, moreover, the Italian texts also preserve a number of Italianisms, such as the names Pietro for Peter and Iscariota for Judas Iscariot. We are thus dealing with a version of the narrative which was probably crafted on the Italian Peninsula sometime in the sixteenth century and circulated mainly in Italy throughout the early modern period.

These Italian manuscripts, it should be noted, do not provide a stable text. They nonetheless all manifest the same broad recension. The latter can be further divided into two branches, which, for the sake of convenience, can be called the long Italian

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[63] PULLAN, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice*, 61.

[64] See the catalogue of manuscripts in MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 2, 2–48. Further verifications might however be needed. I have excluded from the list Ms. Amsterdam, Hs. Ros. 414, which Meerson and Schäfer wrongly ascribe to an Italian hand (vol. 2, 2; and information corrected at vol. 2, 96); see LAJB FUKS and RENA FUKS-MANSFELD, *Hebrew and Judaic Manuscripts in Amsterdam Public Collections*, 2 vols., vol. 1, *Catalogue of the manuscripts of the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, University Library of Amsterdam* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 135 (no. 290). Note that Ms. New York, JTS 2236.2, albeit a fragmentary witness to the short Italian version, is in fact written in Ashkenazic script. The number of Italian manuscripts is only surpassed by the number of manuscripts of mixed eastern European provenance (31).

[65] Ms. Budapest, Kaufmann 229 (dated after 1617) provides a fragmentary witness to the Strasbourg text. Mss. Leipzig, BH 17 (2) (dated 1707), Oxford, Opp. Add. 20 (seventeenth or eighteenth century), Paris, AIU, H 31 (seventeenth century), St. Petersburg, Inst. Or. St. 12 (nineteenth century), and Wolfenbüttel, Extrav. 157.1 (seventeenth century) provide a proto-Wagenseil text, while Mss. Paris, BnF, Heb. 1384 (seventeenth century) and Warsaw, Zydowsky Inst. 6 (eighteenth century) were likely copied after the Wagenseil printed edition; see MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 2, 212.

and the short Italian types.[66] Manuscripts of the short Italian type do not predate the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, when the text was likely created as an abridged and straight-to-the-point version of the story.[67] Apart from the conception narrative, which is preserved in its entirety, and the account of Jesus's execution and burial, most of the episodes in the story are either drastically summarised or altogether omitted (thus, for instance, the famous account of Jesus's theft of the Ineffable Name of God is missing). Perhaps some of these episodes were considered too extravagant, although other, presumably no less extravagant, episodes are in fact preserved, albeit in abridged form (for instance, the account of Jesus's aerial combat with Judas Iscariot). Remarkably, all the short Italian texts were copied together with other, either late medieval or contemporary polemical works, which suggests that the work was part of a learned tradition of critiquing Christianity and the New Testament. In that context, a work like *Toledot Yeshu* could serve to illuminate, from a Jewish perspective, the historical background of the Christian narrative.[68]

While the short Italian texts offer a rather dry version of the narrative, the long Italian manuscripts provide one of the longest extant versions of *Toledot Yeshu*. In fact, the long Italian texts add a number of details to the narrative, including an account of the discovery of the Holy Cross in the days of Constantine, centuries after the death of Jesus.[69] More interestingly, however, this amplified and somewhat baroque version of the story gives much more space to emotions, and in particular, to the emotions of the individual characters in the narrative—a topic which deserves closer attention.[70]

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[66] Corresponding to Italian A and Italian B respectively in the classification offered by MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 1, 32–33.

[67] See the discussion and text in HORBURY, *Critical Examination*, 152-202; see also MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 1, 273–85 (English) and 192–210 (Hebrew).

[68] HORBURY, *Critical Examination*, 166. In the two earliest manuscripts (Mss. Parma, Biblioteca Palatina 2300 and Jerusalem, JNUL Heb. 8º2667), the short Italian text of *Toledot Yeshu* was appended to *Kelimat ha-Goyim* ('Shame of the Gentiles'), a work pointing to the contradictions in the gospels composed at the end of the fourteenth century by the Spanish-born scholar Profiat Duran. In four later manuscripts, the short Italian text was appended to a similar critique of the New Testament composed in the early eighteenth century by the Modena rabbi Judah Briel (1643–1722), *Hassagot al sippure ha-sheluchim (Criticisms of the Writings of the Apostles)*, copied and expanded by one of Briel's pupils, Joshua (Salvador) Segre of Scandiano as a sequel to his own polemical work *Asham Talui (The Crucified's Trespass-Offering)* ca. 1770. It remains a matter of debate whether the short *Toledot* text was already appended to Briel's work when it came to Segre's knowledge (after ca. 1730, when the first part of *Asham Talui* was published) or whether it was added by Segre at a later date; see MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 2, 193–94. In all events, it is clear that Segre approved the joining of *Toledot Yeshu* to the second part of *Asham Talui*, along with a number of satirical anti-Christian poems he had penned. He may also have added the few historical footnotes that are preserved in these particular manuscripts. On Segre and his polemical writings, see SAMUEL KRAUSS, 'Josua Segre und sein polemisches Werk,' *Zeitschrift für Hebräische Bibliographie* 8, no. 1 (1904): 20–27; DAVID MALKIEL, 'The Jewish-Christian Debate on the Eve of Modernity. Joshua Segre of Scandiano and his *Asham Talui*,' *Revue des études juives* 164 no. 1–2 (2005): 157–86.

[69] For the text, see MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 1, 233–72 (English) and 139–191 (Hebrew).

[70] I address the question of emotions and *Toledot Yeshu* in BARBU, 'Feeling Jewish.'

Two identical copies of the long Italian text (bearing the title *Ma'aseh Yeshu we-Heleni ha-malkah we-otam she-qorim Apostolim*, i.e., 'The story of Jesus and Helena the queen and those who are called Apostles'), now preserved in Leipzig in one case and Rostock in the other, were produced at the end of the seventeenth century by the Verona rabbi Saul Merari.[71] Merari was rather actively involved in copying polemical works, such as Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut's *Eben Bohan* or *Toledot Yeshu*, but he also composed polemics of his own.[72] His collections of polemical works seem to have been designed as handbooks to Christianity for Jewish readers, bearing an ornate title page (fig. 2) showing the Messiah entering the gates of Jerusalem preceded by Elijah and describing the contents as an argument against Christians *(vikuah neged ha-notzrim)* and a way to know how to respond to heretics *(apikores)*. Indeed, the recent troubles caused by the Sabbatean movement in Verona and other Italian cities may well have encouraged Merari to compile such works not only in order to confront Christianity, but also to illuminate, through Christianity, the enduring consequences of false messiahship, communal dissension, and heresy.[73]

One of the particular features of the Merari text is precisely its attention to emotions and its extensive use of biblical quotations as a way to express the feelings of the protagonists. (This is a feature we find in many other medieval and early modern Jewish texts, but within the corpus of *Toledot Yeshu* manuscripts, it is by and large in this text that it is most prominent). Another striking characteristic is the extent to

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[71] For a description of Ms. Leipzig, B.H. 17 (dated 1695/96), previously in the library of the Protestant theologian Daniel Ernst Jablonski, see JOHANN CHRISTOPH WOLF, *Bibliotheca Hebraea*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Hamburgi: apud Theodor. Christoph. Felginer, 1721), 484–85 and 1445–47 for Jablonski's description of the *Toledot* text; see also H. O. FLEISCHER and F. DELITZSCH, *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum, qui in bibliotheca senatoria civitatis Lipsiensis asservantur* (Grimae: Genhardt, 1838), 300–301 (no. 38). The manuscript also includes a copy of the Wagenseil version of *Toledot Yeshu*, added at a later date. On Ms. Rostock, Orient. 38 (dated 1696), see HANS STRIEDL, LOTHAR TETZNER and ERNST RÓTH, eds, *Hebraïsche Handschriften. Teil 2* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1965), 358–60 (N° 575).

[72] LASKER, 'Anti-Christian Polemics in Eighteenth-Century Italy' and DANIEL J. LASKER, '*Sefer Herev Pifiyyot* of Saul ben Joseph Merari (?). An Italian Jewish Anti-Christian Polemic of the Eighteenth Century,' *Italia* 12 (1996): 7–35 (in Hebrew); ASHER SALAH, *La République des lettres. Rabbins, écrivains et médecins juifs en Italie au XVIII^e siecle* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 419. On Merari, very limited information can be found in MORDECHAI S. GHIRONDI, *Toledot Gedole Israel u-Geone Italia* (Trieste: 1853), 325 and MARCO MORTARA, *Mazkeret Hakhme Italia/Indice alfabetico dei rabbini e scrittori israeliti di cose giudaiche in Italia* (Padua: F. Sacchetto, 1886), 39.

[73] See YERUSHALMI, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, citing Merari's 1665 letter to Samuel Aboab of Venice on this topic; cf. also ALBERTO CASTALDINI, *La segregazione apparente. Gli Ebrei a Verona nell'età del ghetto (secoli XVI-XVIII)* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2008), 145–50. This was also what led the Dutch rabbi Leib ben Oyzer to compose a Yiddish translation of *Toledot Yeshu* along with a biography of Sabbatai Tzvi and the story of the infamous Kabbalist Yosef della Reina; see EVI MICHELS, 'Yiddish *Toledot Yeshu* Manuscripts from the Netherlands,' in *Toledot Yeshu in Context*, eds BARBU and DEUTSCH, 231–62; JEAN BAUMGARTEN, *La légende de Yosef della Reina, activiste messianique* (Paris: Éditions de l'éclat, 2018). MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 2, 137, suggest that Merari could also have produced collections of Jewish anti-Christian works for commercial purposes, in response to the Christian demand for Hebrew polemical manuscripts. Ms. Leipzig, B.H. 17 was indeed sold by Merari to the Huguenot polymath Louis Bourguet in 1701, who later offered it to Jablonski, as can be seen from the dedication on the title page. I have been unable to verify Meerson and Schäfer's claim that Ms. Rostock, Orient. 38 also formerly belonged to D. E. Jablonski.

which this text dwells on the emotions of Jesus himself, who is, after all, the chief villain in the plot. This is especially clear in the account of the Flagellation, which is interlaced with a series of long biblical citations, mainly from the Psalms. Hence the following passage:

> The elders and people came with sticks in their hands and hit him [Jesus] with many blows, and the women also hit him with their shoes. Then So-and-So [Jesus] raised his eyes heavenward and said, 'My Father in heaven, *I shall not die but live* (Ps. 118:17), and *who will give me a wing like a dove, so that I could fly away and be at rest?* (Ps. 55:7) *God, hear my prayer, let my cry come before you. Do not hide your face from me in my time of trouble; turn your ear to me. When I call, answer me speedily. For my days have vanished like smoke, and my bones are charred like a hearth. My heart is stricken and withered like grass, because I have forgotten the taste of bread. On account of my loud groaning, my bones cling to my flesh. I am like a great owl in the wilderness, a little owl among the ruins. I lie awake, and I am like a lone bird upon a roof. All day long my enemies revile me; those who deride me use my name to curse. For I have eaten ashes like bread and mixed my drink with tears, because of your wrath and jury, for you have lifted me up and cast me far away. My days are like an evening shadow, and I wither away like grass. But you, God, are enthroned forever* (Ps. 102:2-13), and *your throne endures for all generations*' (Lam. 5:19). He finished the Psalm until *He drained my strength in mid-course; he shortened my days. I say, My God, do not take me away in the midst of my days* (Ps. 102:24-25). *When (my power) is weakened, (do not leave me)*, etc. (Ps. 71:9). *Do not leave me, Lord, my God; do not distance Yourself from me* (Ps. 38:22); *Save my soul from the sword, my only one from the power of the dog* (Ps. 22:21). (He said,) 'And if you leave me in the power of these dogs, *my soul would have dwelled soon in the land of silence* (Ps. 94: 17); *who will rise for me against the wicked? Who will stand up for me against the wrongdoers?* (Ps. 94:16). For regarding them the prophet prophesized, *They have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to turn back*' (Jer. 5:3). And when the villains who believed in him heard his words, they screamed great screams and cried a great cry and tore out the hair from their heads and beards.[74]

The despair of Jesus and his followers is met with the collective joy the of Jews, when Jesus is sentenced to be killed 'like an insignificant and despised person, like a sorcerer, a bastard, a wicked man and the son of a menstruating woman […] the sorrow of Israel was turned to joy and from mourning to a holiday'—echoing the book of Esther, where another enemy of the Jews (the wicked Haman) is similarly defeated (Est. 9:22).

There is nothing unique in the fact that Jesus would start reciting psalms as he is tried and scourged. Obviously, the narrative, here as in other versions, essentially pastiches the New Testament gospels. The Merari text of *Toledot Yeshu* is distinct on two accounts: it gives a lot more space to Jesus's recitation of the psalms; most of the verses he recites do not appear in any other version of the narrative. These are certainly relatively minor scribal interventions, the copyist (Merari or his source) expanding on some aspects he thought would better describe the scene. Yet these interventions also

[74] MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 1, 249–50 (English) and 165–66 (Hebrew).

reveal the extent to which the scribe and the text he is producing are both witnesses and actors of their very own time.

Figure 2. Ms. Leipzig, B.H. 17, copied by Saul Merari, Verona, 1695, title page. Courtesy of the Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig.

A Psalm for the Afflicted: Emotions and *Toledot Yeshu*

At the risk of stating the obvious, the citation of a specific psalm or verse from the Bible in such a polemical text is not random. But to what degree can we shed light on the particular images or notions this citation is meant to evoke in the mind of the audience? What connotations are associated, for instance, with Jesus's recitation of Psalm 102, the 'prayer of the afflicted'—'God, hear my prayer, let my cry come before you,' etc.—which Jesus is described here as reciting in its entirety? In the New

Testament gospels, *testimonia* from the psalms generally serve to underline Jesus's status as the suffering servant prophesied in Isaiah 53 and interpreted as the Messiah.[75] The different versions of *Toledot Yeshu* explicitly refute such Christological readings, most often through the voices of Jesus's opponents.[76] To the best of my knowledge, however, Psalm 102, is not cited in the gospels and does not belong to the standard repertoire of Christological proof texts; nor is it cited in any other version of *Toledot Yeshu*. There might, however, be other explanations for the choice of this particular psalm.

Psalm 102 is considered by both Jews and Christians to be a song of repentance, the psalmist expressing sorrow for his sins. In the Middle Ages, Rashi and other Jewish commentators had already suggested that the 'afflicted' *('ani)* asking God for mercy is in fact Israel, 'who is an afflicted people' (*'am 'ani*).[77] Obviously, Jesus is not presented here as a Jew repenting the sins of Israel, although he may be portrayed as atoning for his own sins (Psalm 102 is indeed sometimes included in the Sephardic Yom Kippur liturgy). Yet I wish to suggest another possible interpretation, namely that the narrative might be subverting the Christian use of this psalm, as a way to further 'Christianise' Jesus, by associating him with Christian rituals and—from a Jewish viewpoint—their mistaken use of Scripture. In a Christian context, Psalm 102 is indeed one of seven so-called psalms of confession—the most famous of which is the *Miserere*, Psalm 50—associated with penitential devotion and rituals of penance.[78] As such, it was included in the book of hours, a common Christian devotional handbook in the late Middle Ages, and often set to music in subsequent centuries. It would also have been regularly recited during Christian holidays, especially Lent and the ceremonies culminating with Easter. The penitential psalms would moreover have been recited as part of the Passion plays, the liturgical dramas staging the trial, suffering, and execution of Christ. Clearly, such public displays of religious devotion would also have been familiar to Jewish spectators—all the more so in the wake of the Counter-Reformation. Thus, my tentative hypothesis is that the long Italian text and its elaborate rendering of the Flagellation scene engages in a form of 'polemical ethnography,' with the scribe responsible for this version picturing—and, we may presume, mocking—Christian

[75] MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 1, 94–95; see also PETER STUHLMACHER, 'Isaiah 53 in the Gospel and Acts,' in *The Suffering Servant. Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian* Sources, eds BERND JANOWSKI and PETER STUHLMACHER (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 147–62. For Jewish interpretations of Isaiah's prophecies, see the classic study by SAMUEL R. DRIVER and ADOLF NEUBAUER, *The Fifty-third chapter of Isaiah according to the Jewish interpreters*, 2 vols. (Oxford: J. Parker, 1876).
[76] MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 1, 93–94 provide a list of the biblical *testimonia* cited by Jesus in the different versions of the narrative.
[77] Cf. Rashi, ad loc.
[78] In general, see SUSAN GILLINGHAM, *Psalms Throughout the Centuries*, 3 vols, vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 113–14.

rituals.[79] The very drama meant to foster collective Christian piety (and hatred of Jews) is thus subverted to foster the Jews' feelings of disdain for Christian rituals and Christianity.

There is also another form of public ritual which the text may be parodying: executions.[80] Here the scribe may have been inspired by his own concrete expertise of such death rituals—which were, after all, not entirely uncommon—or by narrative accounts of executions, which frequently included detailed descriptions of the convict's final confession. In all events, in a context in which Jews themselves could not inflict the death penalty, their imagination of an execution would understandably have been informed by that of the surrounding culture. It is worth noting that hanging—the death suffered by Jesus according to *Toledot Yeshu*—was also the most common form of execution in early modern Italy, especially when it came to executing commoners.[81] The much-publicised narrative of the final hours of Pietro Paolo Boscoli and Agostino Capponi, who were executed for plotting against the Medici in 1513, talks of a friar assisting the two convicts in their final hours and encouraging them to repeat, among other things, verses from the Psalms.[82] Such accounts were widely circulated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and often emphasised the emotions of both the convict and his or her comforters. The latter were often members of confraternities dedicated to helping convicted criminals and offering spiritual consolation, their members escorting convicts to their place of execution, all the while reciting litanies, orations, prayers, and the penitential psalms.[83] Of course, the display

[79] I have borrowed the notion of 'polemical ethnography' from YAACOV DEUTSCH, *Judaism in Christian Eyes: Ethnographic Descriptions of Jews and Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[80] In general, see NICHOLAS TERPSTRA, ed., *The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008), and in particular KATHLEEN FALVEY, 'Scaffold and Stage. Comforting Rituals and Dramatic Traditions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy,' 13–30, discussing the parallels between Passion plays and execution rituals, and PAMELA GRAVESTOCK, 'Comforting with Song Using Laude to Assist Condemned Prisoners,' 31–51, on the use of devotional songs to comfort the executed in his final hours. See also ADRIANO PROPSERI, *Delitto e perdono. La pena di morte nell'orizzonte mentale dell'Europa cristiana. XIV-XVIII secolo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2013), 212–62 (on the spiritual comforting of convicts) and 280–325 (on the public spectacle of executions).

[81] See the figures offered for Bologna by NICHOLAS TERPSTRA, 'Theory into Practice Executions, Comforting, and Comforters in Renaissance Italy,' in *The Art of Executing Well*, 118–58 (127).

[82] RICHARD C. TREXLER, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 197–211. Many thanks to Jean Wirth for this reference. See also ALISON KNOWLES FRAZIER, 'Luca della Robbia's Narrative on the Execution of Pietro Paolo Boscoli and Agostino Capponi,' in *The Art of Executing Well*, ed. TERPSTRA, 293–326, with a translation of the narrative; ELENA TADDIA, 'Les mots et les actes. Consoler le condamné à mort en Italie à la Renaissance : la *Recitazione* de Luca Della Robbia (1513),' *Exercices de rhétorique* 9 (2017), online: http://journals.openedition.org/rhetorique/523.

[83] See CHRISTOPHER F. BLACK, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century*, repr. (1989; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003;), 217–23. It is also worth noting that Psalm 50 was known in eighteenth-century England as the 'hanging song,' as it was sung at executions by the convict and the crowd alike; cf. PETER LINEBAUGH, 'The Tyburn Riot Against the Surgeons,' in *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, eds DOUGLAS HAY et al., , rev. ed. (1975; London: Verso, 2011), 65–117 (116), quoted in UNA MCILVENNA, 'The Power of Music: The Significance of Contrafactum In Execution Ballads,' *Past and Present* 229, no. 1 (2015): 47–89 (58).

of emotions both at actual executions and in narrative accounts of executions also aimed to move the audience and encourage it not so much to empathise with the executed as to reflect on their own sins. That public executions themselves aimed to edify the crowds was already observed by Montaigne who, after witnessing the hanging of a convict in Rome, noted that, immediately after his death and the quartering of his body, 'several Jesuits or whatever they were, mounted upon tressels at different points, and began exhorting the people to take warning by the example they had just witnessed.'[84] That the audience—both inside and outside the text—participates in the drama is in fact clearly emphasised in *Toledot Yeshu*, which describes how Christians cry and Jews rejoice as Jesus is being scourged for his crimes. The scribe's effort to imbue the scene with a certain impression of realism might also explain the note we find in the long Italian texts describing how, as Jesus was being hanged, 'the young men and the women threw refuse and excrement and arrows and stones at him.'[85] The inverted Passion scene of *Toledot Yeshu* depicts Jesus as a common criminal reciting his confession, thus underlining with poignant realism that this pivotal moment of Christian theology—the death and Resurrection of Christ—which Christians celebrate with an extraordinary display of religious emotion, was in fact nothing more than the abject execution of a lowly human being, who is rightly despised by Jews, and in no way the son of God whose death redeemed the sins of mankind.

It is perhaps possible to go further still with regard to the social performative effects of the narrative. Much insight can indeed be drawn from the work of Una McIlvenna on execution ballads in the early modern period.[86] Evoking the final moments of executed criminals and describing in graphic details their crimes and final moments, such songs were widely disseminated in early modern Europe, most often in the form of cheap broadsides or small pamphlets. Regional variations notwithstanding, execution ballads constituted, McIlvenna observes, a 'pan-European-tradition' and an important 'vehicle for broadcasting news' in early modern Europe.[87] Sung on the streets by itinerant vendors seeking to market them, such songs easily reached beyond literate audiences. They often involved the convict repenting his or her crimes and asking God for mercy in order to impress on the audience a moral discourse on sin and crime. The lyrics, moreover, would typically be set to familiar melodies 'allowing anyone to sing the new words instantly.'[88] This strategy, which

[84] *The Works of Montaigne*, ed. WILLIAM HAZLITT (London: Templeman, 1842), 571. See PROSPERI, *Delitto e perdono*, 326–35.
[85] MEERSON and SCHÄFER, eds, *Toledot Yeshu*, vol. 1, 256 (English) and 174 (Hebrew).
[86] MCILVENNA, 'Power of Music' and MCILVENNA, 'Singing Songs of Execution in Early Modern Italy,' in *Voice and Writing in Early Modern Italian Politics, Religion, and Society*, eds STEFANO DALL'AGLIO, MASSIMO ROSPOCHER, and BRIAN RICHARDSON (London: Routledge, 2017), 52–68; see also HANS-JÜRGEN LÜSEBRINK, 'La letteratura del patibolo. Continuità e trasformazioni tra '600 e '800,' *Quaderni storici* 17, no. 49 (1982): 285–301. I am much indebted to Erika von Kaschke for this suggestion.
[87] MCILVENNA, 'Power of Music,' 48.
[88] MCILVENNA, 'Power of Music,' 49.

McIlvenna terms 'contrafactum,' obviously made these songs easy to remember and further enabled their dissemination and effect. McIlvenna herself is interested in the 'affective potency' of these songs, and is less concerned with their textual content than their melodies, as well as the 'emotional response' these melodies were meant to provoke. Interestingly, she notes that execution songs could sometimes be set to the tunes of psalms, though mainly in Protestant contexts, where they would thus celebrate the death of Protestant martyrs.[89] Others, particularly songs in the *barzelletta* ('jest') form, specific to the Italian context, were meant to be more cheerful and entertaining, using repeated refrains as a way to encourage the listeners' participation.[90] Frequently involving humour and incongruity, such songs derided the convicts—who were often commoners, foreigners, enemies, or generic outsiders, such as Jews and Moors—and turned their final moments into an occasion for collective amusement. The listeners'

> sharing and participation helped to forge communal bonds, echoed in the communal and performative means by which each member of society was expected to participate in the punishment of criminals. As they laughed at the satirical use of tunes that mocked despised traitors and murderers […] the listener-singers of execution ballads participated in an exchange of cultural references that perpetuated beliefs around punishment and repentance.[91]

There is no reason to believe that Jews would not have been familiar with this cultural practice. On the contrary! I am not, however, suggesting a direct link between execution ballads and early modern versions of *Toledot Yeshu*. That Jesus sings penitential psalms does not make the narrative an execution ballad—even though the narrative often circulated under the title 'Story of the hanged man' (*Ma'ase Talui)*.[92] Yet it may be suggested that, through this deliberate intervention, the scribe responsible for the long Italian text did more than just deploy his creativity and polemical wit. He also sought to increase the emotional effect of the narrative, to cause Jews to 'feel' specific emotions as they heard the story of Jesus, including his singing of biblical psalms; to be outraged at the account of his crimes and heresies; to laugh at the account of his punishment and death; and to lament the enduring consequences of his shameful career. In other words, the story of Jesus served, among Jews no less than among Christians, as a powerful medium for collective emotions and communal bonds, also playing an important part in solidifying Jewish communities, although, in the Jewish case, by offering a figure that could be communally derided and ridiculed rather than revered and worshipped. Furthermore, although our evidence is limited, the collective recitation or performance of the story among Jewish communities—protected from view by the ghetto walls—might perhaps also have been an occasion of communal joy,

[89] MCILVENNA, 'Power of Music,' 68.
[90] MCILVENNA, 'Power of Music,' 81–83.
[91] MCILVENNA, 'Power of Music,' 89.
[92] In fact, a number of Italian manuscripts bear this title.

a way to vent some of the tensions and uncertainties born out of their constant interaction with the Christian world.[93]

The Dialectics of Hidden and Public Transcript

The account of Coryat's encounter with the Jews of Venice illustrates the ambiguities in the Christian imagination of Jews and Judaism. Learned rabbis or wretched Jews (in Sanderson's words, the 'better' and 'meaner' sorts of Jews) constitute the two poles defining the Christian perception and understanding of Jews as both an ancient and exotic font of wisdom, and a blasphemous and hostile people whose denial of the true religion is indeed a threat for Christians. Such tropes merely reflect a broader and all-pervasive discourse and ideology asserting the superiority and domination of Christianity and the demise and subordination of Jews. This discourse and ideology, embodied in countless texts, images, and institutions, outlines what James C. Scott called by contrast the 'public transcript,' and inevitably informed all forms of interactions between Christians and Jews. Little is gained by simply calling such a discourse and ideology 'anti-Jewish'—a term which fails to provide an analytical framework to address the politics of religious domination and the opposite strategies of resistance they generate in a larger, transcultural perspective. As Scott noted, hidden transcripts contesting the public transcript while voicing the perception, emotions, and hopes of subordinate groups, logically stand in dialectical relation to the public transcript, with the hegemonic practices and discourse with which subordinates are confronted. What is more, hidden transcripts, very much like the public transcripts from which they derive (and against which they react), become deeply embedded within a group's culture, in this case within the deep structures of the subordinates' distinct, albeit usually concealed, *sub*-culture.

I do not seek to reduce the culture of Italian Jews in the early modern period to their opposition to Christianity, though the importance of apologetics and polemics in that particular context suggests that this was a nonnegligible aspect. However polemical and distorted by the public transcript, I believe accounts of Christian travellers, inquisitorial sources, and other descriptions of Jews and Judaism do offer a glimpse into a widespread Jewish subculture, and on the way Jewish perceptions of Christianity and interactions with Christians were informed by a hidden transcript. Coryat's 'conversation' may have touched a sore spot by insistently imposing his theological jousting on a growing crowd of exasperated Jews. The latter had their own version of the gospel story, their own impression of the Christian saviour; yet only seldom, if ever, could they make such an impression public. Only in the background—

[93] On possible performances of *Toledot Yeshu*, see SARIT KATTAN GRIBETZ, 'Hanged and Crucified: the Book of Esther and *Toledot Yeshu*,' in *Toledot Yeshu … Revisited*, eds SCHÄFER, MEERSON, and DEUTSCH, 159–80 (176–79); see also the discussion in BARBU, 'Some Remarks on *Toledot Yeshu*,' 37–38 and BARBU, 'Feeling Jewish.' A similar conclusion is reached by Evi Michels in her contribution to this thematic section.

in the 'cracks' in the Christian discourse[94]—can we see the shadow and influence of a powerful Jewish counter-story to the Christian narrative.

Scholarship on the *Toledot Yeshu* has often focused on questions of philology and textual history rather than the cultural contexts to which the texts belong. By looking at emotions in and around the narrative, however, we can see how the various versions of the work reflect the cultural worlds to which they belong, the time-bound worries and preoccupations of those by whom and for whom the story was told and the texts copied. Here, I have sought to consider the long Italian text of *Toledot Yeshu* as a historical, rather than merely textual, witness, as an *actor* within a given historical context, a narrative effectively acting upon the perceptions, attitudes, and reactions of early modern Italian Jews.

Although segregated and divided by social, theological, and emotional borders, Jews and Christians did not inhabit separate realities. The Italian text of *Toledot Yeshu* shows how Jews absorbed the elements of the surrounding culture, appropriated contemporary ideas and practices in the service of a critique of the dominant culture, and invested the Jewish story of Jesus with greater emotional poignancy. By focusing on emotions in the narrative, we can see how much the texts and manuscripts of *Toledot Yeshu* are indeed products of their time and reflect their contemporary culture. But we also need to take into account how the texts conversely influenced that culture and impacted the lives and emotions of those who knew, heard or read the story. We need to consider how the Jews' hidden transcript nourished a subculture capable of triggering spontaneous—and sometimes hearty—responses and reactions among Jews confronted with Christian sermons, rites, and practices, or more dramatically, endangered by inquisitorial authorities.

The Structure of Christian Domination and the Hidden Transcript of Jews

According to Scott, '[b]y definition, the hidden transcript represents discourse—gesture, speeches, practices—that is ordinarily excluded from the public transcript of subordinates by the exercise of power.'[95] Works like *Toledot Yeshu* and other polemical writings (medieval or modern) attacking the tenets of Christianity were in principle not meant for everyone to see and were intended primarily for a Jewish audience. When confronted with such texts or vilified on their account by Christian polemicists, Jews strongly denied their very existence or dismissed their importance. Scribes often warned their readers not to read such works in public or in front of children, women, or the simple-minded, for fear of Christian retaliation.[96] It is indeed important to bear in mind that the conflict between Church and Synagogue in the late Middle Ages and

[94] See note 43 above.
[95] SCOTT, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 27.
[96] See BARBU and DAHHAOUI, 'Un manuscrit français des *Toledot Yeshu*,' 230n24; BARBU, 'Some Remarks on *Toledot Yeshu*,' 34–35.

early modern period was not merely theological, but also, and most perceptibly, institutional. In Italy, the walls of the ghetto served as a constant reminder of the fact that Jews were confined to a delineated and limited space in the Christian polity, and their activities strictly supervised.[97] The social and religious hierarchies defining Jewish-Christian relations were obvious to all, and spoliations, expulsions, and other forms of sporadic violence against Jews were always possible—and not uncommon. The structure of Christian domination essentially relied on discourse rather than force. As Bruce Lincoln has argued, 'discourse supplements force in several important ways, among the most important of which is ideological persuasion. […D]iscourse of all forms—not only verbal, but also the symbolic discourses of spectacle, gesture, costume, edifice, icon, musical performance, and the like,' enables rulers to obviate 'the need for the direct coercive use of force and transform simple power into "legitimate" authority.'[98] And indeed, that hegemonic discourse and practices asserting the victory of the Church over the blind Synagogue—the Christian public transcript—were everywhere and constantly imposed themselves on the eyes and ears of all in the early modern world, with demonstrations of power ranging from the burning of Jewish books—when not the burning of Jews themselves—to the lavish ritual reconstitutions of the Passion staged every year at Easter, and in which the roles of true and false believers, Christians and Jews, were clearly assigned. Crowds could see the blindfolded Synagogue with her broken staff facing the triumphant Church, adorning the gates of the Paris and Strasbourg cathedrals, to cite the most prominent examples. In Vienna and elsewhere, engraved into the city walls themselves were stories of Christian converts from Judaism who had been tortured and burned at the stake after failing to adapt to their new faith and having purportedly profaned the name and image of Christ.[99] Sermons recalled the miracles of the Virgin, saving Christian children from their Jewish aggressors, when these children were not themselves turned into holy

[97] KATZ, *The Jewish Ghetto*, passim.

[98] BRUCE LINCOLN, *Discourse and the Construction of Society. Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4–5, with the further observation that 'discourse can also serve members of subordinate classes (as Antonio Gramsci above all recognized) in their attempts to demystify, delegitimate, and deconstruct the established norms, institutions, and discourses that play a role in constructing their subordination,' thus describing what here I have called, following Scott, the hidden transcript.

[99] One famous case is that of Ferdinand Francis Engelsberger, executed in Vienna in 1642, and to whom later Christian authors also attribute an edition of *Toledot Yeshu*. For a summary of the case and a reproduction of the Viennese inscription, see JOHANN CHRISTOPH WAGENSEIL, *Tela Ignea Satanae*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Altdorf: Joh. Henricus Schönnerstaedt, 1681), 188–93; among other authors who report the events, see GIULIO BARTOLOCCI, *Bibliotheca magna rabbinica*, 4 vols., vol. 4 (Rome: Ex Typographia Sacrae Congreg. de Propag. Fide 1693), 348–51; JOHANN CHRISTOPH WOLF, *Bibliotheca Hebraea*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Hamburgi: Christiani Liebezeit, 1715), 982. See Yaacov Deutsch's contribution to this thematic section.

figures and objects of worship, and their suffering at the hands of the Jews lamented in widely disseminated narratives.[100]

From a Christian vantage point, Jews were of course themselves responsible for their own subordination because of their enduring rejection of Christ and hostility towards Christians. In late antiquity, Saint Augustine had laid the groundwork for toleration of Jews in a Christian society: Jews had to be preserved, albeit dispersed and subjugated, as bearers of the sacred writings upon which Christianity relied and as witnesses to the truth of biblical prophecy (which they themselves, however, failed to understand).[101] That model started to crumble in the later Middle Ages, when Jews were increasingly demonised and classified among the irreducible foes of Christianity.[102] The theoretical distinction between the ancient Hebrews and contemporary Jews *(iudaei moderni)* served to counter the Augustinian doctrine: contemporary Jews had in fact deviated from the Judaism of the Bible known to the fathers of the Church; they had been corrupted by the Talmud and teachings of rabbis and their Judaism was essentially a religion driven by their anti-Christian animus and rage. Contemporary Judaism was a 'heresy' as compared with Judaism as it ought to be, and on that basis the Augustinian doctrine could be regarded as void.[103] Contemporary Jews were in fact a threat to Christian society, not only because of the extravagant acts of hostility described by that anti-Jewish discourse, such as the daily iteration of anti-Christian curses or the savage murder of Christian children. Contemporary Jews were also considered a threat because of their alleged corrupting effect on Christian society, ranging from economic exploitation to the promotion of heretical ideas and blasphemous texts.

These arguments found an important echo in late medieval Spain. In the mid-fifteenth century, the influential anti-Jewish polemicist Alonso de Espina, one of the most ardent promoters of the expulsion of Jews from the Spanish realms, summarised

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[100] RONNIE PO-CHIA HSIA, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) and HSIA, *Trent 1475*; MIRI RUBIN, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

[101] Augustine. *De Civitate Dei* 18.46, with JEREMY COHEN, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 19–71; see also PAULA FREDRIKSEN, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews anf Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

[102] JOSHUA TRACHTENBERG, *The Devil and the Jews. The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943); and see the studies in JEREMY COHEN, ed., *From witness to witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian thought* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996).

[103] COHEN, *Living Letters*, 313–89. On changes in attitude towards Jews in the later Middle Ages, see also AMOS FUNKENSTEIN, 'Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Later Middle Ages,' *Viator* 2 (1972): 373–82; JEREMY COHEN, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 51–76; ROBERT CHAZAN, *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); ALEXANDER PATSCHOVSKY, 'Der "Talmudjude". Vom Mittelalterlichen Ursprung Eines Neuzeitlichen Themas,' in *Juden in Der Christlichen Umwelt während des späten Mittelalters*, eds ALFRED HAVERKAMP and FRANZ-JOSEF ZIWES (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1992), 13–27; and SARA LIPTON, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014) for the iconography.

in the third book of his *Fortalitium fidei* (the 'Fortress of faith') the various ways in which Jews wage their 'war' against Christians, including countless narratives of host profanation and ritual murder.[104] The work also included a lengthy citation (from Ramon Marti) of the purported lies and blasphemies on the life and miracles of Christ contrived by Jews under the influence of the devil and written down in a mendacious booklet, the *Toledot Yeshu*.[105] The *Fortalitium fidei*, it should be noted, was a bestseller in late medieval anti-Jewish literature, and after it was first printed in Strasbourg in 1471, it was reissued no fewer than seven times between 1475 and 1525.[106] That discourse encountered an important echo in the Reformation era and the early modern age, and was often reiterated in the vernacular by later polemicists, who, remarkably, were often themselves converts from Judaism and claimed to know the secret anti-Christian doings of Jews from personal experience.[107]

In Italy, for instance, Giulio Morosini, a former pupil of Leone Modena, converted to Christianity in Venice in 1649 (perhaps as a result of his family's bankruptcy) and became a zealous promoter of the mission to the Jews. He devoted a chapter of his hefty anti-Jewish opus, the *Via della fede* (the 'Way of the faith'), published in 1683, to the Jews' hatred of Christians. In it he recapitulated the litany of ostensible Jewish crimes, and cited the papal bulls calling for the destruction of the Talmud and other blasphemous Jewish books, whose only aim—so he claimed—was to 'instil hatred.'[108] Morosini refuted Luzzatto's argument that Jews were an asset in

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[104] See the discussion in YERUSHALMI, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 455–67. For a description and summary of the work, see STEPHEN J. MCMICHAEL, *Was Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah? Alphonso de Espina's Argument Against the Jews in the* Fortalitium Fidei *(c. 1464)* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994); ALISA MEYUHAS-GINIO, *La forteresse de la foi. La vision du monde d'Alonso de Espina, moine espagnol (?-1466)* (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 1998).

[105] ALONSO DE ESPINA, *Fortalitium Fidei* III.4 (in the edition Lyon: Stephano Gueynard, 1511, fol. 111c–113c); see YAACOV DEUTSCH, 'The Second Life of the Life of Jesus: Christian Reception of *Toledot Yeshu*,' in *Toledot Yeshu … Revisited*, eds SCHÄFER, MEERSON, and DEUTSCH, 283–295 (289). Another version of the narrative would have been known to Alonso (see f. 76b [II, 6]), as noted by ERNST BAMMEL, 'Der Tod Jesu in Einer 'Toledoth Jeschu'-Uberlieferung,' *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 6 (1968): 124–31 (192n14), closely resembling the version reported by George Sandys (see note 42 above).

[106] ELISHEVA CARLEBACH, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500-1750* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 49–50.

[107] CARLEBACH, *Divided Souls*, 170–99; DEUTSCH, *Judaism in Christian Eyes*; see also the studies in JONATHAN ADAMS and CORDELIA HEß, eds, *Revealing the Secrets of the Jews. Johannes Pfefferkorn and Christian Writings about Jewish Life and Literature in Early Modern Europe* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017). For references to *Toledot Yeshu* in that context, see BARBU, 'Feeling Jewish.'

[108] GIULIO MOROSINI, *Via della fede mostrata a'gli Ebrei*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Rome: Nella Stamparia della Sacra Cong. de Prop. Fide, 1683), 1383ff. (III.12: 'Del odio, che portano gli Ebrei alli Christiani, e delle maledicenze, & altri effetti di quest'odio'), with RAVID, '"Contra Judaeos" in Seventeenth-Century Italy,' 339–48. See MICHELA ANDREATTA, 'Raccontare per persuadere: Conversione e narrazione in *Via della fede* di Giulio Morosini,' in *Non solo verso oriente: Studi sull'ebraismo in onore di Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini*, eds MADDALENA DEL BIANCO and MARCELLO MASSENZIO (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2014), 85–118; English translation in *Bastards and Believers: Jewish Converts and Conversion from the Bible to the Present*, eds THEODOR DUNKELGRÜN and PAWEL MACIEJKO (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2020), 156–181.

the Christian world, insisting that, on the contrary, they posed a constant threat to Christians so long as they refused to embrace the Christian faith. He recalled how, in 1475, the Jews of Trent were said to have once again sought to re-enact the Passion, murdering a Christian child in the process.[109] He further recounted how Christian merchants in Venice would sometimes entrust the keys of their palazzos to Jews, and how he himself, prior to his 'illumination,' as he remembers 'with extreme pain,' would, along with other Jews, profane the image of Christ in every way possible—even spitting on it—when no Christians were around.

What deserves notice here is not so much the lasting influence of medieval anti-Jewish tropes—which is alas obvious enough—but the fact that the public transcript about Jews itself emphasised that the latter have a hidden transcript assailing the holy figures of Christianity and refuting the Christian narrative in various ways, be it through blasphemous gestures and speeches or polemical texts. Christian scholars of Jewish literature who eagerly sought to uncover the 'secret and dreadful books of the Jews against the Christian Religion' reflected the contemporary fascination for the hidden 'anti-Christian library' of the Jew, including *Toledot Yeshu*. One can think, for instance, of the subtitle of Wagenseil's *Tela Ignea Satanae* (1681), namely: *Hoc est arcani, et horribiles Judaeorum adversus Christum Deum, et Christianam religionem libri anekdotoi*, or Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi's *Bibliotheca Judaica Antichristiana* (Parma, 1800).[110] The notion that Jews secretly conspired against Christians and blasphemed against the holy figures of Christianity also justified many of these institutions through which Christian domination over Jews was made most tangible. The censorship of Jewish books, for instance, almost explicitly aimed to control—or silence—Jews' hidden transcript and its alleged influence on Christian society.[111] In other words, Jews were expected to blaspheme against Christians, mock and slander Jesus, and erupt into all sorts of anti-Christian speeches, whenever given an opportunity. Thus, to some extent, even when voicing their hidden transcript, Jews also followed the playbook of a Christian hegemonic discourse.

Scott's model therefore needs to be revised in part to include public transcripts in which the subordinates are in fact *expected* to have a hidden transcript, and where the

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[109] MOROSINI, *Via della fede*, 1396–97. See also note 49 above.

[110] THEODOR DUNKELGRÜN, 'The Christian Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe,' in *The Cambridge History of Judaism,* 8 vols., vol. 7, *The Early Modern World, 1500–1815*, ed. JONATHAN KARP and ADAM SUTCLIFFE (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 316–48, notes that these Christian Hebraists 'studied, translated, and anthologized [Jewish polemical and anti-Christian works] with a blend of hostility and fascination'; see also STEPHEN G. BURNETT, '"Spokesmen for Judaism": Medieval Jewish Polemicists and their Christian Readers in the Reformation Era,' in *Reuchlin und seine Erben: Forscher, Denker, Ideologen und Spinner*, eds PETER SCHÄFER and IRENE WANDREY (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2005), 41–51. On the early modern fascination with Jewish secrecy, see ELISHEVA CARLEBACH, 'Attribution of Secrecy and Perceptions of Jewry,' *Jewish Social Studies* 2, no. 3 (1996): 115–136. DANIEL JUTTE, *The Age of Secrecy: Jews, Christians, and the Economy of Secrets, 1400-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), shows how Jews could also use their reputation for secrecy to their advantage.

[111] RAZ-KRAKOTZKIN, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text*, passim.

fight over that transcript largely structures the relations between the dominant and the dominated. The exasperation of Coryat's 'learned Rabbin' and the surrounding crowd of menacing Jews, the frustration and spontaneous anger of unwilling converts, such as Elena de' Freschi, who eventually erupted into a blasphemous speech during Mass, somehow reflect more than just public intrusion of the hidden transcript: they are themselves also a reflection of the public discourse and the unconscious submission of Jews to that discourse.

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Certainly, the tension between public and hidden transcripts was real, and the hidden transcript also allowed Jews who shared it to create an emotional community, bound by a shared discourse and perspective that gave shape to their communal emotions and—ideally—supported their unremitting rejection of the Christian myth. Rupture, however, was always possible and could take many forms, from conversion to sudden outbursts of anger or violence. A straightforward, poignant, and nonetheless humorous narrative like *Toledot Yeshu* was perhaps a way to negotiate the border between Jews and Christians and relieve some of that tension, and was hence a tool, not only for polemics, but also, indeed, for mediation.