

# *Causes, Methods, and Manifestations of the Destruction of Hebrew Manuscripts*

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This study attempts to explain the multiple reasons for the destruction of Hebrew manuscripts. The reuse of medieval Hebrew, Christian, or non-religious manuscripts is part of an epochal phenomenon caused by the spread of the printing press. While the phenomenon is general, however, in the case of Hebrew manuscripts it reached a tremendous Jewish-only conjuncture, namely the persecution and burning of Jewish books by the Inquisition and the burning of the Talmud ordered by Pope Julius III in 1553, followed by the Church's policy change towards Jews under Pope Paul IV's ruthless rule.<sup>1</sup>

## **1. Aspects of the Reuse of Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts**

The dismemberment and reuse of medieval Hebrew manuscripts represents an epochal phenomenon, a consequence of the ever-increasing spread of the printing press (figs. 1–2). Moreover, Hebrew books faced a particularly tragic conjunction: the intentional destruction and burning of sacred texts, including the Talmud, under Pope Julius III in 1553. This occurred alongside economic and religious restrictions as well as the degradation of personal freedom for Jews under Pope Paul IV; formerly known as the fiercely ruthless cardinal of the Inquisition, Gian Pietro Carafa was elected pope from 1555 to 1559. These measures led rabbis to cease teaching their disciples due to a complete lack of copies of the Talmud.

*Megillat Vientz*, a text describing a pogrom against the Jews of Frankfurt launched in 1614, informs us of the seizures and looting of Jewish books that occurred on that occasion. It is reported that those handling the books on their way to destruction were in the habit of separating the paper books, destined to be burnt,

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<sup>1</sup> For a general overview of the topic see MAURO PERANI, 'Censura, sequestri e roghi di libri ebraici,' in *Dizionario storico dell'Inquisizione*, eds ADRIANO PROSPERI, VINCENZO LAVENIA, and JOHN TEDESCHI, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2010), 319–323. For an updated bibliography regarding the Italian and European Genizah, please refer to MAURO PERANI and EMMA ABATE, 'Bibliography on the "Italian Genizah" and "European Genizah" 1915–2021,' in *Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts Reused as Book-bindings in Italy*, ed. MAURO PERANI with the cooperation of EMMA ABATE (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 282–305.

from those in parchment, as selling parchment to bookbinders proved to be a lucrative affair.<sup>2</sup>

It should also be noted that, while the Church was responsible for destroying a vast number of Hebrew books, at the same time Christian intellectuals and ecclesiastics saved numerous Hebrew manuscripts from destruction by acquiring them for their libraries. Notable among these guardians of the Hebrew written heritage are Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi, whose library was acquired by the Palatina Library of Parma after his death; Cardinal Domenico Grimani, who acquired the Pico della Mirandola Library; Cardinal Casanate; Cardinal Federico Borromeo; and several others.<sup>3</sup>

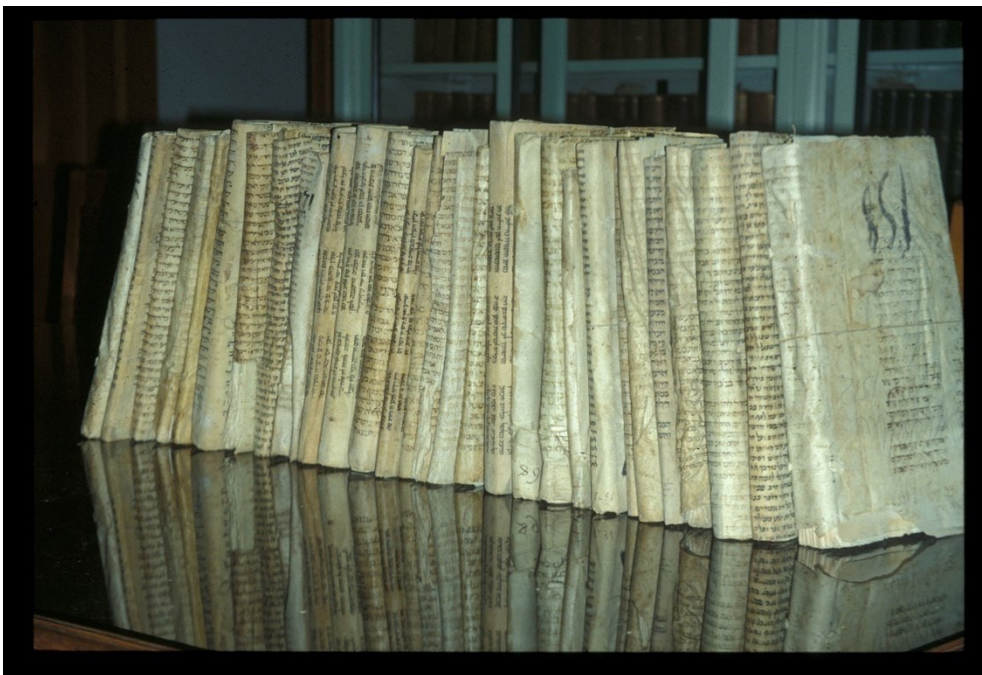


Figure 1. Municipal Archive of Bazzano (Bologna). Registers from the sixteenth century, bound with medieval Hebrew manuscripts containing the Talmud and other texts. Credits: Mauro Perani.

<sup>2</sup> MAURO PERANI, 'A trentasette anni dal decollo della ricerca dei frammenti ebraici riusati come legature in Italia. Il tutto nel frammento,' in *Frammenti di un discorso storico. Per una grammatica dell'aldilà del frammento*, ed. CATERINA TRISTANO (Spoleto: CISAM, 2019), 285–323; MAURO PERANI, 'The Italian Genizah Project founded by Prof. Josef Baruk Sermoneta zal in 1981. An Updated Report after 37 Years of Researches,' *Zakhor* 2 (2018), 265–284.

<sup>3</sup> See BENJAMIN RICHLER, *Guide to Hebrew Manuscript Collections* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2014).

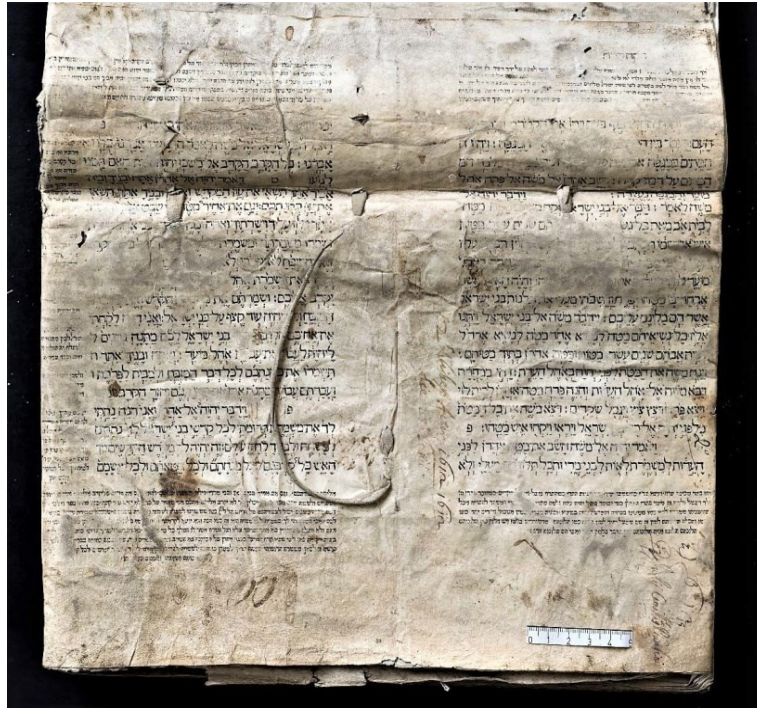


Figure 2. A bifolio from the Bologna *editio princeps* of the Torah, printed on parchment, surfaced on 25 January 1482. It was dismembered and repurposed as a binding for a register in the Notarial Archives of Cento, Ferrara, identified as fr. Heb. 25. Credits: Mauro Perani.

## 2. Causes of the Destruction and Consequent Scarcity of Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts

Throughout history, the reuse of cultural heritage materials has been a continuous and common practice. When any cultural good was no longer of interest, reusing its material support for other purposes was considered a normal practice enacted in all civilisations. Historical sources tell us that, among the vast amount of confiscated and looted Hebrew books destined for the stake, those on parchment were removed and taken to be sold to bookbinders.<sup>4</sup> According to Colette Sirat, only 5 percent of the manuscripts produced by Jews in Europe between the beginning of the second millennium C.E. and the Middle Ages still exist today.<sup>5</sup>

The scarcity of medieval Hebrew manuscripts can be attributed to a multifaceted set of factors. Firstly, the intense and exhaustive use of manuscripts for study and prayer contributed to their wear and eventual destruction. Unlike in the

<sup>4</sup> MAURO PERANI, *Colligere fragmenta ne pereant. Aspetti della liturgia medievale nei frammenti dell'archivio storico comunale. Norcia, Rocca della Castellina, 15 luglio–31 dicembre 1997*, documentary exhibition catalogue (Norcia: Comune di Norcia), 43–45.

<sup>5</sup> COLETTE SIRAT, *Hebrew Manuscripts of the Middle Ages*, trans. NICHOLAS DE LANGE (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Christian world, the absence of *scriptoria* in the Jewish community limited the systematic reproduction and preservation of these texts. Moreover, manuscripts not held in secure abbeys faced precariousness in terms of their preservation. The deliberate and systematic destruction by the Church and the Inquisition, aimed at suppressing Jewish culture, further contributed to this loss. Additionally, the reuse of parchment codices, both Hebrew and non-Hebrew, in bookbinding processes as part of market circuits played a role in diminishing the availability of original manuscripts. Lastly, the legislation of the Genizah, a repository for sacred Jewish texts, also had implications for the preservation and scarcity of Hebrew manuscripts. Together, these factors form a complex narrative pointing to the challenges and deliberate actions that led to the diminished presence of medieval Hebrew manuscripts. Below, I delve more deeply into some of these dynamics.

### 2.1 The Legislation of the Genizah

Since ancient times, Jews have been required to store sacred scriptures in a place inaccessible to the public. This practice applies to all sacred texts in Hebrew, whether manuscript or printed, but particularly the Pentateuch scrolls containing the sacred tetragrammaton thousands of times. For millennia, Jews have adhered to a religious law mandating that manuscripts of sacred texts, or texts written in the holy language that could contain the tetragrammaton, be stored in a deposit known as *genizah* to avoid profanation. Typically, after a certain period, the texts deposited in the Genizah were buried in cemeteries. Over centuries, the Genizah rule has actually represented a form of systematic destruction of Hebrew manuscripts and scrolls carried out for ritual reasons to prevent the profanation of sacred texts, particularly the Sifre Torah.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.2 The Intense Use of Manuscripts for Study and Prayer

Another cause of the destruction of the Hebrew manuscript is the intense use Jews made of their sacred books for prayer and study, gradually leading to the manuscripts' deterioration. The degradation of Hebrew manuscripts can thus be attributed to their extensive use by the Jewish community, as the repeated handling of and frequent engagement with these sacred books resulted in a gradual deterioration of the manuscripts over time. As the manuscripts performed a crucial role in religious practices and intellectual pursuits, their pages experienced wear and tear that ultimately impacted their physical condition. While reflecting the profound significance of the manuscripts in Jewish life, this intense use paradoxically also contributed to their inevitable destruction. The wear incurred through the genuine and dedicated utilisation of these manuscripts for spiritual and educational purposes sheds light on the complex interplay between reverence for the sacred texts and the physical constraints of their material form.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> MAURO PERANI, 'Death and rebirth of Hebrew manuscripts,' in *Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts*, ed. PERANI, 48–49.

<sup>7</sup> PERANI, 'Death and rebirth,' 48–49.

### 2.3 The absence of *scriptoria* in the Jewish world

The limited production of manuscripts in the Jewish world can be attributed to distinctive methods of reproduction. In contrast to the Christian world characterised by numerous *scriptoria* equipped with teams of scribes and copyists dedicated to manuscript reproduction, the Jewish tradition did not adopt such a large-scale practice. Jewish scribes operated in a more solitary fashion, often working from home. This individualised approach to manuscript creation involved a father-son dynamic in which a son would assist his father in the meticulous process of copying texts. Unlike the collaborative efforts carried out in Christian *scriptoria*, the Jewish method emphasised an intimate and familial approach, leading to a more personalised but less prolific production of manuscripts. The uniqueness of this approach sheds light on the cultural and practical distinctions between the two traditions in the realm of manuscript production.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.4 The precariousness of Hebrew manuscript preservation

The historical mobility of the Jewish people has played a significant role in the challenges involved in preserving textual heritage. Continuous instances of mobility, whether driven by forced expulsions from settled lands or undertaken voluntarily, created precarious conditions for the conservation of important texts. The nomadic nature of Jewish communities, frequently on the move throughout history, presented obstacles to the careful preservation of fragile belongings, particularly sacred scriptures. Constant relocation made it difficult to establish stable environments conducive to the protection of these precious manuscripts. The wear and tear incurred during the journeys, whether compelled or voluntary, resulted in premature deterioration of the texts. This persistent state of mobility became a defining factor in the historical context of Jewish communities, shaping the difficulties they have encountered in safeguarding and conserving their textual heritage.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.5 The Systematic Destruction Perpetrated by the Church and the Inquisition

To elucidate the scarcity of Hebrew manuscripts that have endured to the present day, it is crucial to underscore a final and undeniably significant cause: the systematic destruction of the Jewish book heritage carried out over centuries by the Church. This historical pattern of intentionally dismantling and obliterating Jewish texts represents a deeply impactful factor contributing to the limited preservation of Hebrew manuscripts. Over an extended period, the Church engaged in deliberate measures to suppress and eliminate Jewish literary and cultural contributions. This systematic destruction, fuelled by various historical and religious factors, has left an indelible mark on the availability of Hebrew manuscripts. It underscores the complex historical dynamics between different religious and cultural communities, highlighting

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<sup>8</sup> PERANI, 'Death and rebirth,' 49.

<sup>9</sup> MAURO PERANI, 'Death and rebirth,' 49.

the profound impact of intentional actions on the preservation of cultural and intellectual artifacts. The recognition of this systematic destruction is integral to understanding the challenges and losses faced by the Jewish literary tradition over the centuries.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Hebrew Books ‘Kidnapped’ and Saved from Burning en route to the Vatican Apostolic Library

Giacomo da Lugo, a former vicar of the Inquisition, relates that, in 1574, Rome asked Cardinal Paleotti of Bologna to send nine Hebrew manuscripts, stolen (rescued) from the flames, to the Vatican Apostolic Library with the specific request that the books be handled with the utmost care. Below is an example of the instructions:

Si sono abrugati quelli libri hebrei che se gl’era dato ordine che s’abrugassero, il che s’ha per ben fatto. [Si riferisce, quindi, della risposta di Roma, da cui si raccomanda che] li nove pezzi d’essi libri che dice che Mons Rev.mo Card. Paleotti gl’ha consignato per la Libreria Apostolica di S.S. sarà bene che V. P.tà vegga mandarli quanto prima sicuramente e di maniera ben confectionati che non patiscano per viaggio. Il restante di sette libri hebrei quando essi avranno finito di soddisfare al debito che hanno li con il Depositario o sia Thesoriario della Camera Apostolica si potranno restituire ad essi hebrei.<sup>11</sup>

In a fascinating twist, the instructions elucidate that, while the Hebrew books earmarked for burning were duly destroyed, nine of particular value were singled out for preservation. These were to be consigned by Cardinal Paleotti to the Apostolic Library, emphasising the importance of their safekeeping. The instructions underscore the urgency of their being transferred promptly and securely to prevent any damage during travel. Furthermore, seven Hebrew books, confiscated but spared from destruction, were slated to be returned to the Jewish community upon the settlement of taxes owed to the Confessor or Treasurer of the Apostolic Chamber. This historical account offers a glimpse into a unique instance in which, amidst the

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<sup>10</sup> MAURO PERANI, ‘Confisca, censura e roghi di libri ebraici a Bologna nella seconda metà del Cinquecento,’ in *La cultura ebraica a Bologna tra Medioevo e Rinascimento. Atti del convegno internazionale, Bologna, 9 aprile 2000*, ed. MAURO PERANI (Florence: Giuntina, 2002), 103–116; PERANI, ‘Death and rebirth,’ 49–50.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Those Hebrew books ordered to be burned were duly destroyed. [And he refers to instructions from Rome with the request that] nine of these books of particular value to be consigned by Monsignor Rev. Cardinal Paleotti to the Apostolic Library of his holiness and that it will be good for your mercy to send them as soon as possible, safely and in a well-confectioned manner [so] that they do not suffer from travel. The remainder of seven Hebrew books, confiscated but retained from destruction, are to be returned to the Jews after due and complete settlement of the tax levied and owed to the Confessor or Treasurer of the Apostolic Chamber.’ See PERANI, ‘Confisca, censura e roghi di libri,’ 103–116.



tumultuous period of book burnings, certain valuable Hebrew manuscripts found an unexpected sanctuary in the Vatican Apostolic Library.<sup>12</sup>

#### **4. The Commercial Circuits of the Parchment Codex Market: Reuse in Hebrew, Christian, and Other Manuscripts**

The commercial circuits of the parchment codex market, encompassing both Hebrew and Christian manuscripts among others, as well as their subsequent reuse, constitute a multifaceted dynamic in the historical context of manuscript transmission. These circuits served as intricate pathways through which parchment, the material foundation of these manuscripts, exchanged hands for various purposes. The trade not only involved the sale of existing manuscripts but also contributed to the practice of reutilising parchment to create new manuscripts or book bindings. The interconnectedness of these markets played a crucial role in the recycling and repurposing of valuable materials. Additionally, this cross-cultural exchange of parchment codices reflects the economic and material practices shared between different religious and linguistic communities, offering insights into the collaborative aspects of manuscript production and dissemination in historical contexts. Exploring the complexities of these commercial circuits unveils a tapestry of cultural interplay, economic interests, and the sustainable repurposing of material resources within the intricate web of manuscript transmission.<sup>13</sup>

#### **5. Studying Dates of Reuse and their Connection With Anti-Jewish Persecution**

Examining the timelines associated with the dismemberment and recycling of Hebrew parchment codices provides a valuable method for reconstructing the peaks of reuse in the realm of Hebrew manuscripts (fig. 3). This analytical approach allows researchers to discern patterns and trends in the repurposing of these manuscripts over time. By scrutinising the specific instances in which parchment codices were disassembled and their materials repurposed, scholars gain insights into periods of

<sup>12</sup> MAURO PERANI, 'Italia "paniere" dei manoscritti ebraici e la loro diaspora nel contesto del collezionismo in Europa tra Otto e Novecento,' in *Il collezionismo di libri ebraici tra XVII e XIX secolo*, eds CHIARA PILOCANE and AMEDEO SPAGNOLETTI, supplement, *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, vol. 82, no. 2–3 (2016): 63–91.

<sup>13</sup> For further information on the topic, please refer to the following studies: MAURO PERANI, 'Codicum hebraicorum fragmenta. I manoscritti ebraici riusati nelle legature in Italia,' in *Fragmenta ne pereant. Recupero e studio dei frammenti di manoscritti medievali e rinascimentali riutilizzati in legature*, eds MAURO PERANI and CESARINO RUINI (Ravenna: Longo, 2002), 51–74; MAURO PERANI, 'Iter Hebraicum Italicum. L'Italia crocevia dei viaggi dei manoscritti ebraici per le rotte e i paesi del Mediterraneo,' in *Quod ore cantas corde credas. Studi in onore di Giacomo Baroffio Dabnk*, ed. LEANDRA SCAPPATICCI (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012), 103–127; MAURO PERANI, 'Ebraisti e bibliofili europei a caccia di manoscritti ebraici in Italia fra Sette e Ottocento: Bernard de Montfaucon e David Kaufmann,' in *Patrimonio culturale condiviso: viaggiatori prima e dopo il Grand Tour*, ed. FIAMMETTA SABBA, Ebook/Collection *Atti di Convegni 2* (Naples: Associazione culturale *Viaggiatori*; Bologna: Dipartimento di Beni culturali, Università degli Studi di Bologna, 2019), 193–211, available in digital open access at [https://www.academia.edu/41296438/Patrimonio\\_culturale\\_condiviso\\_viaggiatori\\_prima\\_e\\_dopo\\_il\\_Grand\\_Tour](https://www.academia.edu/41296438/Patrimonio_culturale_condiviso_viaggiatori_prima_e_dopo_il_Grand_Tour).

heightened reuse. This historical detective work involves delving into the nuances of manuscript lifecycles, revealing crucial moments when manuscripts faced dismantling for various reasons such as economic considerations or shifts in cultural practices. Through this meticulous examination of chronological data, a narrative emerges which captures the ebbs and flows in the recycling practices of Hebrew manuscripts. Such a nuanced understanding enhances our comprehension of the life histories of these manuscripts and the broader cultural, economic, and historical contexts that influenced their reuse.<sup>14</sup>

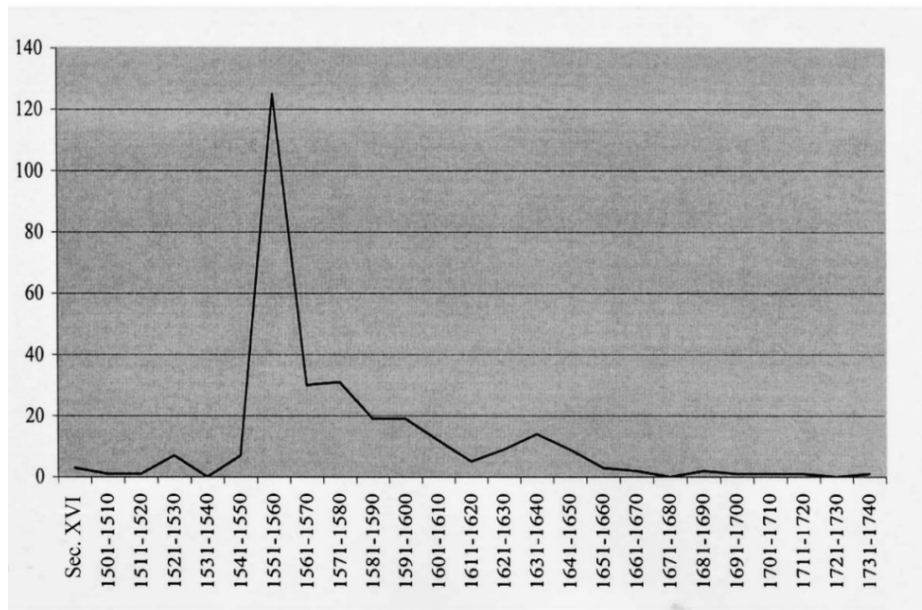


Figure 3. Diagram of the seizure and destruction of the Talmud, with the peak of reuse in the years following the burning of the Talmud ordered by Pope Paul III in 1553. Credits: Mauro Perani.

## 6. Copies of the Talmud Stolen from the Flames and Sold to Bookbinders for Parchment Reuse

The discovery of over 370 Talmud sheets in Italy unveils a significant historical narrative, revealing a peak period of intense reuse of Talmudic codices (fig. 3). This surge in repurposing occurred prominently between 1554 and 1560, right after the infamous burning of the Talmud at Rome's Campo de' Fiori in September 1553. Remarkably, 170 Talmud codices were resurrected through meticulous efforts by reassembling the 370 Talmudic fragments. This process of reconstruction is particularly noteworthy, as it saved a substantial portion of the Talmudic heritage

<sup>14</sup> MAURO PERANI, 'Morte e rinascita dei manoscritti ebraici: il loro riuso come legature e la loro recente riscoperta,' in *Studi di storia del cristianesimo. Per Alba Maria Orselli*, eds LUIGI CANETTI, MARTINA CAROLI, ENRICO MORINI, AND RAFFAELE SAVIGNI (Ravenna: Longo, 2008), 313–336.



that would otherwise have been lost forever. The reuse of these fragments as bindings not only contributed to the preservation of the textual content, but also stands as a testament to the resilience of cultural artefacts in the sense that they were able to find new life even in the aftermath of deliberate attempts at their destruction. The successful restoration of these Talmud codices illuminates the intricate interplay between destruction, reuse, and preservation in the historical journey of sacred texts.<sup>15</sup>

### **7. The Reuse of Parchment Hebrew Codices as Bindings for Printed Books**

The prevalent practice of binding printed books with Hebrew manuscripts is underscored by the discovery of 385 such instances at the Estense and University Library of Modena alone. This discovery sheds light on the widespread use of Hebrew manuscripts as coverings for printed books. The sheer volume, totalling over 1,300 Hebrew fragments, emphasises the significance of this practice in historical bookbinding traditions. Each bound book represents a unique convergence of printed content and the repurposed material of Hebrew manuscripts, contributing to a rich tapestry of textual amalgamation. This archival evidence not only highlights the practicality of reusing materials in historical book production, but also reflects the interplay and cultural exchange evident in the bindings of these books. The multitude of Hebrew fragments found in this collection serves as a testament to the enduring life and utility of these manuscripts beyond their original context, contributing to a broader understanding of the dynamic history of bookbinding practices.<sup>16</sup>

### **8. Noteworthy Examples of Reuse**

The discovery of sheets from a singular Hebrew manuscript both in Italy and at the Leipzig University Library represents a fascinating case. Initially, it was presumed that a second-hand dealer responsible for selling Hebrew codices to be disassembled and repurposed as book bindings had also distributed sheets to locations in Italy and Germany. Upon closer examination, however, a more nuanced narrative emerged. In instances where two or more sheets from the same Italian manuscript are found dispersed across diverse locales, countries, or even continents, it becomes apparent

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<sup>15</sup> MAURO PERANI, 'I manoscritti ebraici, le loro vicissitudini e la loro «morte». A proposito dei frammenti di Bazzano,' in *I frammenti ebraici di Bazzano. Un piccolo tesoro nella «Genizah italiana». Atti del Forum internazionale, Bazzano (Bologna), 25 maggio 2000*, ed. MAURO PERANI (Florence: Giuntina, 2001), 193–199; FAUSTO PARENTE, 'La Chiesa e il "Talmud",' in *Storia d'Italia. Annali 11. Gli Ebrei in Italia*, 2 vols., vol. 1, *Dall'alto Medioevo all'età dei ghetti*, ed. CORRADO VIVANTI (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), 521–643; MAURO PERANI, 'Nuovo inventario dei frammenti di manoscritti medievali della Mishnah, della Tosefta e del Talmud rinvenuti nella "Genizah italiana",' in *Una manna buona per Mantova. Man Tov le-Man Tovab. Studi in onore di Vittore Colorni per il suo 92° compleanno*, ed. MAURO PERANI (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2004), 333–363.

<sup>16</sup> MAURO PERANI, '385 Printed Books of the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, Bound with Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts in the Estense Library,' in *'Genizat Germania' – Hebrew and Aramaic Binding Fragments from Germany in Context*, ed. ANDREAS LEHNARDT, *European Genizah Texts and Studies 1* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 217–275.

that these parchment sheets were not disassembled and sold separately. Rather, they had originally functioned as the bindings—either internally or externally—of books acquired in Italy.<sup>17</sup>

A noteworthy illustration of such reuse was detailed in a 2017 study by Donatella Melini and Roberta Tonnarelli Corsi. Their research highlights the discovery of parchment fragments from Hebrew manuscripts repurposed to reinforce the adhesive elements in the restoration of wooden components of violins or violas, as illustrated in figure 4.

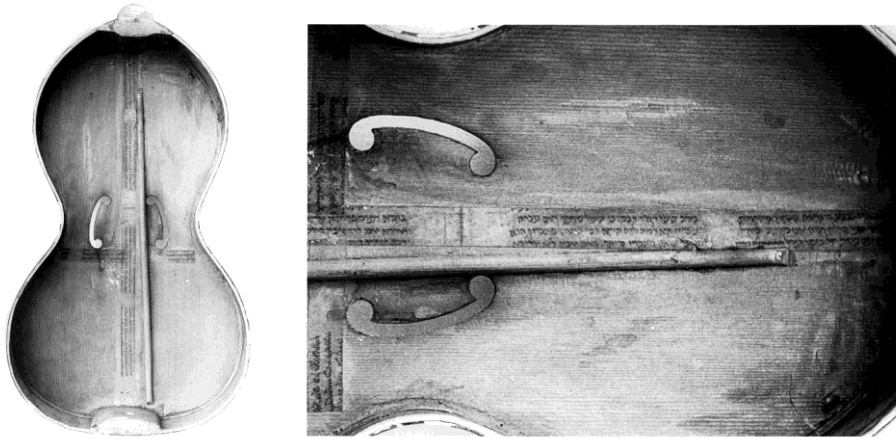


Figure 4. Fragments of Hebrew manuscripts in parchment were reused to reinforce the gluing of the wooden parts of violins or violas during a restoration. Credits: Donatella Melini and Roberta Tonnarelli Corsi.

### Conclusions

The varied investigation of medieval Hebrew manuscript destruction and reuse reveals a rich tapestry woven of historical, cultural, and religious threads. The epochal phenomenon of manuscript reuse, catalysed by the invention of the printing machine, becomes especially prominent in the Jewish context; this particular significance is attested to by the deliberate persecution and burning of Jewish texts following Inquisition and papal decrees, such as the burning of the Talmud in 1553. The interconnected dynamics, ranging from intentional destruction and looting during historical events such as the Frankfurt pogrom to the intentional preservation of Hebrew manuscripts by Christian intellectuals, highlight the intricate interplay of destruction and salvation within the historical narrative.

<sup>17</sup> For a comprehensive reconstruction of the story, please refer to MAURO PERANI, 'Juridical Books Bound in 16th-Century Bologna with Folios from a 12th-Century Manuscript of Halakhot Gedolot, Found in Bologna and in Leipzig University Library,' in *Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts*, ed. PERANI, 282–305.

The causes contributing to the scarcity of medieval Hebrew manuscripts are diverse and intertwined. The intense use of manuscripts for study and prayer, the absence of *scriptoria* in the Jewish world, precarious preservation conditions, systematic destruction by the Church and Inquisition, market circuits of parchment codices, and the legislation of the Genizah collectively form a narrative of challenges and deliberate actions that led to the diminished presence of original manuscripts.

Furthermore, the systematic destruction perpetrated by the Church emerges as a significant factor, highlighting the intentional efforts to suppress Jewish culture and intellectual heritage. The challenges posed by continuous Jewish mobility further contribute to a nuanced understanding of the factors leading to the scarcity of Hebrew manuscripts.

The historical accounts of Hebrew books 'kidnapped' and saved from burning to be sent to the Vatican Apostolic Library, the commercial circuits of parchment codices, the study of reuse dates in connection to anti-Jewish persecutions, and the discovery of Talmudic fragments reused as book bindings add layers to the narrative, illustrating the resilience and adaptability of cultural artifacts in the face of destruction.

In essence, this comprehensive study illuminates the intricate and sometimes paradoxical relationship between destruction and preservation, providing valuable insights into the broader historical, cultural, and religious contexts that have shaped the fate of medieval Hebrew manuscripts.