

Fall 11-13-2017

# Jewish Culture in the Christian World

James Jefferson White

*University of New Mexico - Main Campus*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/hist\\_etds](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/hist_etds)



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

White, James Jefferson. "Jewish Culture in the Christian World." (2017). [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/hist\\_etds/207](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/hist_etds/207)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in History ETDs by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [disc@unm.edu](mailto:disc@unm.edu).

James J White

*Candidate*

---

History

*Department*

---

This thesis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

*Approved by the Thesis Committee:*

Sarah Davis-Secord, Chairperson

---

Timothy Graham

---

Michael Ryan

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**JEWISH CULTURE IN THE CHRISTIAN WORLD**

**by**

**JAMES J WHITE**

**PREVIOUS DEGREES  
BACHELORS**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Masters of Arts  
History**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**December 2017**

# JEWISH CULTURE IN THE CHRISTIAN WORLD

BY

James White

B.S., History, University of North Texas, 2013

M.A., History, University of New Mexico, 2017

## ABSTRACT

Christians constantly borrowed the culture of their Jewish neighbors and adapted it to Christianity. This adoption and appropriation of Jewish culture can be fit into three phases. The first phase regarded Jewish religion and philosophy. From the eighth century to the thirteenth century, Christians borrowed Jewish religious exegesis and beliefs in order to expand their own understanding of Christian religious texts. This phase came to an end as Jews and Christians came into increasingly close contact in the twelfth and thirteenth century. This led to a backlash by Christians in power. The second phase ran concurrent with the end of the first phase. As Christians and Jews came into closer contact, they began sharing experiences and cultures beyond the realm of theology. In the third and final phase, only marginalized Christians such as magicians continued to appropriate Jewish culture.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 1: The Appropriation of Judaism by Religious Writers .....	15
CHAPTER 2: The Thirteenth Century and the Exchange of Culture.....	57
CHAPTER 3: Kabbalah, Jewish Mysticism to Christian Magic .....	90
CONCLUSION.....	126
WORKS CITED .....	131

## **Introduction**

Cultural exchange happened throughout the medieval period. Certain segments of the public have viewed the medieval period as a white Christian utopia. However, even at Latin Christendom's most insular, there is evidence that Christians still made use of the works of other cultures. Muslims and Jews interacted with Christians throughout the medieval period. This occurred regardless of how actively Christians pursued persecution. Likewise, this was not dependent upon Christians living close to those who did not share their religion. Christians continuously used the ideas of other religions to bolster their own religion.

### **Origins of Jewish-Christian Relations**

The religion from which they borrowed most heavily was Judaism. This is due to the unique relationship the two religions shared. However, Christians did not always view their Jewish peers with kindness. Instead, Christians often persecuted Jews throughout the medieval period. Despite this persecution, there was never a time in the medieval period in which Christians were not borrowing something from their Jewish neighbors. This borrowing of Jewish culture came in a variety of contexts as the relationship between Christians and Jews changed. When Jews and Christians had relatively peaceful relations, it came in the form of religious borrowing; at times of intense interaction, cultural borrowing became both more pronounced and more condemned. During times of high persecution, cultural borrowing became an illicit activity done in secret. Regardless, the appropriation of Jewish culture by Christians was a consistent factor throughout the medieval period.

Christianity and Judaism have a unique relationship amongst all the major world religions. Christianity arose out of Judaism, and admits such from the earliest writings to the present. However, from the start of Christianity, Jewish religious practices have served as both a basis for, and been rejected by the new religion. The Christian Bible is separated into two sections, the Old and New Testament. The Old Testament is unique amongst religious texts, for unlike any other religious text, it is taken wholesale from the Hebrew Bible with only slight differences in translation choices when translating it out of Hebrew, and preferences of editions.<sup>1</sup> This creates a distinctive and fraught relationship between Christianity and Judaism that does not exist between other religious traditions. Islam has a similar, albeit slightly different, relationship with Christianity and Judaism. Many of the stories in the Quran are similar to those of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. However, unlike simply using the Hebrew Bible as the Old Testament in the way Christians do, the Quran reframes and reworks these stories to fit the narrative of the Quran.

In addition to the Old Testament being identical to the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament relies heavily on the Hebrew Bible in order to make points regarding Christian ethics and beliefs. In the four gospels, the authors either quote or make clear references to the Hebrew Bible eighty-nine times. In the Gospel of Matthew, there are a total of thirty-nine paraphrases and quotes from the Hebrew Bible. Fifteen of these references came from the Torah, seventeen come from the prophets, while seven come from the Book of Psalms. However, one of those quotations from Psalms comes from the devil, so it might

---

<sup>1</sup> Although the Old Testament is known also known as the Hebrew Bible, it will primarily be referred to as the Old Testament in this study. As this study explores Christian understandings and uses of Judaism, it will use Christian terminology when discussing holy texts.

not count.<sup>2</sup> In the Gospel of Mark, there are only seventeen references to the Hebrew Bible: nine from the Torah, five from the prophets, and three from Psalms. In the Gospel of Luke, there are a total of twenty clear biblical quotations and paraphrases: nine from the Pentateuch, six from the prophets, and five from Psalms; however, like with Matthew, one of the quotes from Psalms comes from the mouth of Satan. Finally, there are only thirteen quotes and paraphrases found in the Book of John: only one comes from the Pentateuch, six from the prophets, five from Psalms, and one from Nehemiah.

Additionally, there are some obtuse and unclear references that might be referring to the Hebrew Bible.<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that not all of these are unique, distinct references to the Hebrew Bible. Many of the references found in any one of the gospels can be found in the other gospels. This is especially true for Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which are more similar to each other than the Gospel of John.

One large segment from the Gospel of Matthew known as the Sermon of the Mount beginning in chapter five and ending with the first verse of chapter eight sees Jesus paraphrase or quote the Hebrew Bible six different times.<sup>4</sup> These quotations and paraphrases come completely from the Torah, specifically Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. The references to the Hebrew Bible in the Sermon on the Mount reveal

---

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 4:6.

<sup>3</sup> Looking at these references as a group some interesting patterns appear. Despite thirty-four clear references to the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, only one of those references stems from the Book of Numbers. Even then, the passage could have also been pointing to a verse from Exodus. To make that passage even stranger, it is the only time in which John refers to the Torah or Pentateuch. From these passages, John stands out as odd in another way in that it is the only one of the gospels to refer to a book of the Hebrew Bible that is not prophetic, from Psalms, or from the Torah. Out of the other books, Mark and Luke have near identical references with a few extra found in Luke while Matthew has the greatest number of references.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 5:21, Matt. 5:27, Matt. 5:31, Matt. 5:33, Matt. 5:38, and Matt. 5:43.

one of the ways in which the gospels use the Hebrew Bible. In each of these instances, the pericope begins with Jesus referencing a passage from the Torah explaining an ethical guideline such as prohibitions against murder or adultery. Once this guideline is laid down, Jesus expands the ruling to include a prohibition on the attitude that leads to people breaking the previous prohibition.<sup>5</sup> This expansion of Jewish legal prohibitions creates one of the most distinct differences in how Christians and Jews saw sin. Under Jewish law, sin was an action performed by an individual.<sup>6</sup> This performative nature of sin can be seen in how the laws and later exegeses of the laws were set up. Christian ethics regarding sin revolve much more heavily on desires and motivations. This is most

---

<sup>5</sup> Scholars have debated what Jesus did and did not say as written by the gospel writers. Ultimately, it does not matter to this investigation whether Jesus spoke the words he is said to have spoken, as medieval people firmly believed he said every word attributed to him in the Bible. However, the most famous of these debates occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A group known as the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar attempted to go line by line through the four canonical gospels and the Gospel of Thomas to determine what they believed Jesus actually said. They separated the sayings of Jesus into four categories: words most likely spoken by Jesus, words likely spoken by Jesus but are less certain than the first category, inauthentic words given to Jesus, and words that may reflect Jesus' ideas. However, there are several problems with their work. Firstly, the scholars who participated in the Jesus Seminar use evidence to support their claims without ever having evidence that supports their claims. Secondly, they are dismissive of Jesus' knowledge of Jewish scriptures, despite the fact that memorization of scripture was part of the ancient Jewish tradition. Thirdly, they make plenty of assumptions that are taken as truisms. Finally, they are inconsistent with the rules they themselves set up. Robert W. Funk et al., introduction to *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*, trans. Robert W. Funk et al., (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993), 16-32.

<sup>6</sup> Jewish religious writings focus on actions rather than the heart. Everything that is banned in Judaism relates to an action. Therefore, all the cleanliness laws within Judaism either ban something that can, but should not, be done. Likewise, laws relating to the forgiveness of sin require sacrifices or actions on the part of the sinner. In this way, forgiveness is based not on a change of heart but rather an action that can be done. This general pattern of actions and reactions can be found in both the Torah and extra biblical texts such as the *Mishnah*. Christianity added extra layers to this dimension of Judaism by including thoughts into the mixture of what was and was not acceptable. However, medieval Christianity retained an action-oriented forgiveness in the form of confessions.

clearly seen medieval Christianity's relationship to sex. Sex was frowned upon in medieval Christianity; however, it was permitted under specific circumstances. One of those circumstances was that the participants were not supposed to enjoy themselves while partaking in nighttime activities.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, from these passages in Matthew, distinctions between Christianity and Judaism began to emerge.

While Jesus began to formulate the distinction between Jewish and Christian thought that would later dominate medieval theology, St. Paul finalized the division between the two religions in his epistles. Paul continuously defines Jewish beliefs as being almost incomplete versions of Christian beliefs.<sup>8</sup> St. Paul makes it clear that the Torah is good; he just makes it clear that the new Christian law is infinitely better. Larry J. Swain argues that Paul, in doing so, was not breaking from Jewish tradition, but rather upholding contemporary rabbinical standards, which placed the "oral Torah" at least at the same level as the written Torah.<sup>9</sup>

However, in other ways, the Apostle Paul made distinctions that greatly influenced medieval religious scholars. The first way he did this was by separating Christianity from the cleanliness laws of the Jewish law.<sup>10</sup> St. Paul criticizes St. Peter for refusing to eat with Gentile converts to Christianity, as that would be inconsistent with the dietary and cleanliness laws of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>11</sup> Medieval scholars struggled with this passage and what it meant for both the relationship between Christians and Jews and

---

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., (London: Routledge, 2012), 84.

<sup>8</sup> Larry J. Swain, "Moses: A Central Figure in the New Testament," in *Illuminating Moses: A History of Reception from Exodus to the Renaissance*, ed. Jane Beal (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 66.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>10</sup> Galatians 2:16.

<sup>11</sup> Gal. 2:12-14

whether or not Peter had sinned by refusing to eat with the new converts.<sup>12</sup> While this passage from Galatians made some scholars struggle with whether or not St. Peter sinned, it did give Christian converts an opportunity to avoid the process of circumcision.

With the rise of the Patristic Fathers, Judaism came back into popularity with Christians. During the lives of the Doctors of the Church, orthodoxy was only just being established within Christian communities. This was done in response to figures such as Marcion and the Gnostics pushing the boundaries of what was acceptable to call “Christian.” The Gnostics, the Marcionites, and the Manichees all opposed the addition of the Hebrew Bible as part of the Christian Canon for being too Jewish.<sup>13</sup> They stated that since Christ had removed the need for the Hebrew Bible. Marcion and the Gnostics both claimed that the god of the Old Testament was not the same god as the Jesus of the New Testament.<sup>14</sup> The early Church Fathers felt they needed to keep the Hebrew Bible in the Christian Canon as they saw a deep connection between Jesus and the Jews through the belief that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Jewish covenant.<sup>15</sup> The first generation of Christians were Jewish; however, that changed after that first generation. These second and third generations, while not Jewish themselves, understood that Christianity had its origins in Judaism. They did take steps to separate themselves from the Jewish origin of

---

<sup>12</sup> Thomas M. Isbicki, “Circumcision in Early Dominican Sentence Commentaries,” in *Dominicans and Jews: Personalities, Conflicts, and Perspectives from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. Elias H. Füllenbach OP and Gianfranco Miletto (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 234.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher A. Hall, “Moses and the Church Fathers,” in *Illuminating Moses: A History of Reception from Exodus to the Renaissance*, ed. Jane Beal (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 82.

<sup>14</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, (New York: Vantage Books, 1989), 27-8. Most works found at the Nag Hammadi Library are skeptical or dismissive of the Old Testament. This is in stark contrast to orthodox Christianity, which incorporated the Jewish texts into its own tradition.

<sup>15</sup> Hall, “Moses and the Church Fathers,” 83.

their belief system by consistently placing Jesus and other New Testament figures in a superior position over the heroes of Judaism, such as Moses.<sup>16</sup>

St. Jerome was the first of the Patristic Fathers to explore Jewish theology and interpretation of the Old Testament. Since the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, St. Jerome felt a need to look into the original text to understand its meaning. However, he was quick to differentiate the types of theological understanding that could be learned from reading Jewish exegesis. Jerome believed that the only exegesis that could be borrowed from the Jews was the exegesis regarding the literal meaning of the text.<sup>17</sup> His Latin translation of the Old Testament relied heavily on the Hebrew version of the Hebrew Bible rather than the Septuagint. He did this due to his belief that an accurate understanding of the literal sense of the Hebrew Bible could only be derived from the Hebrew.<sup>18</sup>

Once the early Church Fathers agreed that Jews had a place within the Christian intellectual landscape, they had to determine where the Jews stood within the Christian community. St. Augustine created the answer that would last until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. He argued that the Jews served as a witness to Christians, reminding them of their covenant with God.<sup>19</sup> However, after the twelfth century, Christians began moving away from this belief. Instead, they saw the Jews as heretics who had abandoned

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>17</sup> Ari Geiger, “*Historia Judaica: Petrus Comestor and His Jewish Sources*,” in *Pierre le Mangeur ou Pierre de Troyes, Maître du XII<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, ed. Gilbert Dahan (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 125.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 28.

and murdered God. Therefore, they had to be either converted or punished.<sup>20</sup> Through this change, Jews went from being a necessary part of the Christian community to a threat to that same group of people.

### **Historiography**

When two cultures collide, one culture never completely dominates the other. Instead, hybrid cultures emerge from the previous two. This becomes a little more complex when looking at societies in which one of the cultures has political dominance over the other. However, several scholars have explored this area of conflict. Two of the most prominent scholars to write about the merging of two cultures are Richard White and David Nirenberg. Richard White, in *The Middle Ground*, explored the merging of French and the Algonquin cultures in the Great Lakes Region of the United States. His work revealed how two societies interact when they are on fairly equal terms.<sup>21</sup>

David Nirenberg, in *Communities of Violence*, explores medieval Spain, which had a similar relationship between Jews and Christians to that Richard White discussed regarding the French and the Algonquin. However, Nirenberg explores how violence punctuated a semi-peaceful merging of societies and cultures.<sup>22</sup> White's societies maintain a certain amount of social and political parity between the two cultures coming together. Nirenberg's involved temporary outbursts of violence against minorities. This violence is best seen as a series of negotiations between those in power and those out of power. It created interplay between intolerance and tolerance in medieval Iberia.

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>21</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), xxv-xxvi.

<sup>22</sup> David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Medieval Period* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1996), 9.

Therefore, White explores societies of social parity, while the middle ground explored by Nirenberg involved groups of people of unequal power.

Historians have struggled with understanding the relationship between medieval Christians and Jews. One of the earliest and most well-known schools regarding the question of medieval Christian-Jewish relations is the Lachrymose or Jerusalem School. This school of historiography, best known for producing scholars such as Yitzhak Baer and Benzion Netanyahu, argued that all of Jewish history could be seen as a veil of tears and trials leading ultimately to the Holocaust and the eventual salvation of the Jews through the creation of the State of Israel. In Baer's magnum opus, *The History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, Baer focuses on the persistence in which Jews suffered yet always survived persecution by Christians.<sup>23</sup> He accomplishes his goal through a narrative retelling of Spanish history with a focus on increasing persecution with a few periods of respite between the pogroms. However, these periods of respite were inevitably followed by even stronger and harder persecutions.

Benzion Netanyahu, like Yitzhak Baer, saw Jewish history as a series of persecutions leading to the Holocaust. However, Netanyahu focused his scholarship on the Spanish Inquisition and the conversion of Jews to Christianity. He created the argument, explored and expanded later by David Nirenberg, that the persecution of Jews in late medieval Spain was predicated on racial animosity rather than political or religious animosity.<sup>24</sup> Netanyahu argues that the purpose of the Inquisition and other persecutions of the Jews were never to eradicate Judaism as a religion, but rather Jews as a people.

---

<sup>23</sup> Yitzhak Baer, *The History of the Jews in Christian Europe*, Vol. 1, trans. Louis Schoffman (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), 2-3.

<sup>24</sup> Benzion Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain: From the Late 14<sup>th</sup> to the Early 16<sup>th</sup> Century* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 4.

This subtle shift in the understanding of the persecution of the Jews creates a direct line to the Holocaust.

On the other side of the historiographical debate lies the idea of *convivencia*. This idea, championed by Americo Castro, argues that Spain was a land of tolerance during the medieval period. The three faiths that shared the land lived in relative peace until it was shattered with the reign of Ferdinand and Isabel. This view has largely eclipsed the others in non-academic and less academic works. They frame al-Andalus as a place of peace between the different faiths. Medieval Christianity is the villain in this narrative as the Christians are the ones who broke the peaceful relations between the three Abrahamic religions and created religious intolerance.

Despite the move away from the notion of *convivencia*, some scholars have still defended modified versions of the theory. One such scholar, Maya Soifer Irish, places the origins of Spanish tolerance not in al-Andalus, but rather northern Spain.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, despite a general move away from the ideas of Castro in the historiography of Spanish religious interaction, his ideas clearly have not been completely abandoned.

Modern scholars began seeking a middle ground between the apocalyptic nature of Baer's history and the utopian history of *convivencia* in the 1990s. Historians such as David Nirenberg and Mark Cohen lead this charge. Out of the two, Cohen used the more conventional method of arguing that neither Christians nor Muslims treated Jews particularly well, while arguing that neither initially sought the ultimate destruction of the

---

<sup>25</sup> Maya Soifer Irish, *Jews and Christians in Medieval Castile: Tradition Coexistence, and Change* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 8.

Jews.<sup>26</sup> Cohen relies on a nuanced understanding of interreligious interactions in the medieval period. According to him, there was never an Islamic utopia for Jews, nor was there ever a completely catastrophic persecution of the Jews in Christian Iberia until the end of the medieval period. Instead, both Christians and Muslims engaged in persecutory practices against Jews when it benefited them most. However, he does argue that Christians tended towards persecution of the Jews since they viewed Jews not in how they were similar, but rather the differences in their religions.

The key century in the historiography of violence in the medieval period is the thirteenth century. The first scholar to point to the importance of this century was John Boswell. In his exemplary work, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, Boswell argues that the thirteenth century marked a turning point for Christianity's relationship with homosexuality.<sup>27</sup> According to Boswell, it was at this point that Christians began persecuting homosexuals and began viewing sodomy as a sin.

Boswell's argument was expanded upon by R.I. Moore. Moore argued that it was not just homosexuals who faced persecution beginning in the thirteenth century, but rather all minorities. He explored the relationship medieval Christian society had with lepers, Jews, sodomites, and heretics in the thirteenth century. He argues that this persecution came about as a result of the bureaucratization of power in the thirteenth

---

<sup>26</sup> Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4-14. Despite viewing history as sitting between the myth of the Gold Age and the Lachrymose School, Cohen does argue that Jews faced more persecution in Christian lands as the Christians were more likely to view the persecution of Jews from a singular and special religious lens. Jews in the Dar al-Islam were just one of many different religious minorities living under the rule of Muslims.

<sup>27</sup> John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 270.

century.<sup>28</sup> However, Moore fails to spend enough time exploring how the various minority groups related to each other. For it was during the twelfth and thirteenth century that Jews and heretics became intertwined in the minds of Christian authorities.<sup>29</sup> Moore acknowledges that lepers became associated with sexual sin, but he does not explore the association heretics and Jews had with sexual sins to the same degree as he did with lepers.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, while Moore and Boswell found a key point to understanding medieval persecution, there is still space for scholars to explore the causes of this persecution.

### **Organization**

Each chapter explores a different way in which medieval Christians borrowed and used Judaism to their own ends. Additionally, each chapter follows in a loose chronological order. The first chapter primarily explores religious interactions up to and including the thirteenth century. The second chapter explores the influences on and of religious interaction in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The final chapter primarily explores the late medieval and early modern periods. However, these time frames are less the focus and more the backdrop from which arguments and different interactions took place.

The first chapter explores Christian uses of Jewish intellectual culture. It focuses on three Christians: the Venerable Bede, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Friar Paul Christian. Bede represents how early medieval scholars understood and used Jewish exegesis to advance their knowledge of the Bible. Both Aquinas and Paul Christian lived in the

---

<sup>28</sup> R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 132.

<sup>29</sup> J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 158.

<sup>30</sup> Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 57-8.

thirteenth century. Friar Paul used Jewish exegesis and extra-biblical texts for political and polemical purposes. Aquinas sat in between the two other scholars as the transition from the apolitical and sometimes personal usage of Jewish exegesis to the publicly political exegesis of the later medieval period. By exploring how each of these scholars used Judaism, a decline in Christian-Jewish relations inversely mirrors the intensity in which Jews and Christians interacted with each other.

Chapter two investigates Christian-Jewish relations through Christian and Jewish writings on homosexual relations. Medieval Jewish texts on homosexuality appear to be at least somewhat influenced by Greek and Muslim writings. While pre-medieval Jewish texts were not tolerant of sexualities and genders that diverged from procreative norms, there was an acknowledgement of other sexualities and genders. This allowed for the rise of Jewish homoeroticism in the medieval Muslim world. Openly homoerotic literature, and literature aware of homosexual behaviors, only appeared in large quantities in the thirteenth century. Therefore, when Judaism became more visible, a rise in awareness of homosexual behavior also occurred.

Chapter three explores the way in which Christians used and misused Jewish mystical practices in the late medieval and early modern periods. This chapter explores both the ways Christians used Jewish mysticism and the trajectory of the use of Jewish mysticism by Christian scholars. Most of the usages of Kabbalah by Christian scholars came from fundamental misunderstandings that the Christians had of Kabbalistic texts. Additionally, the way in which Christians used Jewish mysticism inversely mirrored the way in which Christians used Jewish theology. As the sixteenth century wore on, Christian Kabbalists expanded how they used Jewish mysticism.

These three chapters reveal a continuous push and pull amongst Christians as to how, and if, they would use Jewish culture to shape their own beliefs. Throughout the medieval period, Christians never developed a consistent answer to this question. The Christian majority only appears to have agreed once Jews and Christians came in contact with each other on a daily, or semi-daily basis. However, once the Christian leadership agreed that Judaism should be condemned by the public, Christian subcultures, which maintained the use of Judaism for Christian purposes, emerged.

## Chapter 1: The Appropriation of Judaism by Religious Writers

Appropriation of aspects of Jewish religious culture by the dominant Christian societies ran rampant throughout the medieval period. This appropriation ran across political, geographic, and temporal boundaries. Since Christianity rose from Judaism, some religious borrowing is to be expected. However, this borrowing did not stop as Christianity drifted away from Judaism. The appropriation of Judaism for religious purposes slowed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as persecution of Jewish communities became more common. By exploring a cross-section of three medieval societies, it becomes clear that elite scholars and converts from Judaism appropriated Jewish theology to advance their careers and reclaim Jewish intellectualism for Christianity.

### Bede and the Hebrew Truth

The first society to be explored regarding the appropriation of Jewish theology is Anglo-Saxon England. Anglo-Saxon England was not a society known for a thriving Jewish community. There is no evidence that points to a Jewish presence on the island.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, there is even less evidence pointing to any knowledge of Hebrew in England.<sup>32</sup> The British Isles was known for being rather polyglottal in nature. However, this polyglottal nature only extended to languages spoken by natives of the British Isles. The

---

<sup>31</sup> Norman Golb, *The Jews in Medieval Normandy: A Social and Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 112-14. Norman Golb states that William the Conqueror brought the first Jews to England after 1066 C.E. He relates how William of Malmesbury claims that William moved a community of Jews from Rouen in Normandy to London after the conquest. He also states that *The Magdeburg Centuries* says that William bribed the Jews to move to London. Golb argues that these Jews were entrepreneurs attempting to assist in the development of England while retaining their connections and lands in Normandy.

<sup>32</sup> Calvin B. Kendall, Introduction to *On Genesis* by Bede, trans. Calvin B. Kendall, *Translated Texts for Historians* 48 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 21.

Venerable Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, refers to four spoken languages on the islands: Anglo-Saxon (Old English), British, Irish, and Scottish, with the addition of Latin as a written language.<sup>33</sup> Outside of his Biblical commentaries, Bede's writing does not focus on Hebrew or Judaism.

There were few chances for the Anglo-Saxons to learn Hebrew to study the Hebrew Bible in its original language.<sup>34</sup> This can be seen both in Bede's commentaries

---

<sup>33</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 45. Despite being described as a language used only for writing, there is evidence that Latin was used outside of books. This use of Latin was regulated to liturgical settings during Bede's life, so Bede most likely chose to leave it out of his list of spoken languages because of its limited use.

<sup>34</sup> Not every Jew during the medieval period knew Hebrew. However, most Christians who studied the Hebrew language and Hebrew texts studied at the feet of a Jewish or formerly Jewish scholar. While translating the Hebrew Bible into Latin, St. Jerome relied heavily on the scholarship of his Hebrew teacher, who was a Jew from Palestine. Likewise, most of the Italian Hebraists of the late medieval and early modern periods studied Hebrew with Jews from southern Italy and Sicily.

Anglo-Saxons traveled outside of England with relative frequency. Benedict Biscop traveled to Rome on six different occasions. George Hardin Brown, *A Companion to Bede* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2009), 4. Likewise, St. Wilfred traveled to Rome three times, and many Anglo-Saxon missionaries traveled to Germany to evangelize to the Germanic pagans. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 225, 280-4. Returning from his journeys to Rome, Benedict Biscop brought many books to Northumbria. However, all, or at least most, of those books appear to have been in Latin. The Anglo-Saxon missionaries who traveled off the island were all connected to Ireland. *Ibid*, 276-84. While the schism between the Irish and the Roman forms of Christianity had mostly mended by the time Bede wrote his biblical commentaries, there was still a difference between the two Christianities. Since Bede followed the Roman form of Christianity, he most likely did not have as great of interactions with the Celtic Christians outside of Lindisfarne, which housed Cuthbert and Aidan, two monks Bede greatly admired.

The only person who definitely brought knowledge of a language besides Latin to England was Archbishop Theodore. He was not an Anglo-Saxon, but rather a Greek-speaking refugee from Anatolia who was sent to England by Pope Vitalian to serve as archbishop of Canterbury after the previous archbishop died of the plague while receiving his pallium in Rome. *Ibid*, 202-4. He taught exegesis by looking at the literal meanings of words that Anglo-Saxons would not have knowledge of if they never left England. Michael Lapidge, "The Career of Archbishop Theodore," in *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on His Life and Influences*, ed. Michael Lapidge, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

explored in this text and from a general overview of Old English literature. Linguist Damian Fleming did a survey of the name of Jesus in Old English texts. Before stating his findings, it should be noted that the name Jesus is a Greek form of a Hebrew name. In Fleming's study, he found no instances in which Jesus' name was used in Old English writings.<sup>35</sup> Instead of writing "Jesus", the Anglo-Saxon authors used "Haeland", the Old English word for "savior." This implies that while the Anglo-Saxons did not use Hebrew, Bede's appropriation of Hebrew through the Hebrew Truth allowed the Anglo-Saxons to explain who Jesus was without resorting to an unfamiliar language.

Judaism fell into an entirely theoretical framework for Bede. George Hardin Brown sums up Bede's ideas about Jews by saying that he "thematizes as evil, dark, and diabolical the Judaism that rejected Christ."<sup>36</sup> Bede distinguishes between the Jews of the Old Testament, whom he occasionally associates as allegorically representing Christianity, and the Jews of the New Testament, who fit into the description given by Brown. Bede's stance on Judaism is based almost completely on that of Augustine and other early church fathers. However, despite having little knowledge of Hebrew and

---

Therefore, early Anglo-Saxon travelers did not heavily interact with Jews due to the nature of their travels and where they went. Travelers such as Benedict Biscop and Abbot Ceolfrith went to Rome in to bring Latin Christian knowledge to their monastery in England. St. Wilfred traveled to Rome to have the pope solve an ecclesiastical argument between him and Archbishop Theodore. The Anglo-Saxon missionaries who had studied in Ireland traveled to the continent to convert people with whom they shared kinship ties. Finally, the only known non-Anglo-Saxons to settle in England during the early Anglo-Saxon period were Christians, such as Augustine of Canterbury and Archbishop Theodore, sent to the island by various popes to serve in ecclesiastical capacities.

<sup>35</sup> Damian Fleming, "Jesus, that is Haeland: Hebrew Names and the Vernacular Savior in Anglo-Saxon England," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 112, no. 1 (2013): 26.

<sup>36</sup> Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, 43.

almost certainly no personal experiences with Judaism, Bede felt a need to include what little he knew about Hebrew in his commentaries on the Old Testament.

Bede's appropriation of Judaism fell into a larger pattern of appropriation of non-Christian religious beliefs by early medieval Christians. These early medieval Christians commonly appropriated parts of the local cultures as they converted to Christianity. Usually, this involved the appropriation of religious spaces. In a letter from Pope Gregory the Great to Abbot Mellitus (as found in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*), the pope ordered the missionaries to England to destroy any idols found in pagan temples, consecrate the land, and turn the temples into churches.<sup>37</sup> Occasionally, the Christian appropriation of paganism came in the form of beliefs being appropriated. Some astrological practices became acceptable in the early medieval period.<sup>38</sup> Bede took the methods of Gregory the Great to heart in his exploration of the Hebrew Truth as he found aspects of Judaism he could use in his commentaries.

Bede's use of Jewish exegesis appears to have primarily aimed at innocently understanding the Bible more fully. Many of the commentaries Bede chose to work on explored texts other scholars had not written about.<sup>39</sup> In texts that had previously been explored by other authors, Bede presents his work as being designed to distill the confusing exegesis of his biblical forefathers into works meant to be easier to digest.<sup>40</sup> However, since Bede's commentaries show large amounts of innovation, he may have

---

<sup>37</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 92.

<sup>38</sup> Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 128.

<sup>39</sup> Scott DeGregorio, "Bede and the Old Testament," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 128.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

suffered from false modesty.<sup>41</sup> Bede cared deeply about proper understanding of the Bible, so he used any tools he could in order to develop a deeper and more orthodox understanding of Christianity.<sup>42</sup> This drive led him to use Hebrew exegesis, which was seen as more accurate due to its shared language with the original text of the Old Testament.

Although Bede presents himself and many other monks of Northumbria as faithful and true Christians who only desired to advance the Kingdom of God, there is evidence that Northumbrian Christianity was subtly quite competitive. The most obvious example of Northumbrian monks bickering with each other involves Bede and Wilfred's monks at Hexham. In this event, Wilfred's monks accused Bede of heresy for miscalculating the date of Jesus' birth in a world chronicle.<sup>43</sup> Alan Thacker has argued that Bede's prose *Life of Cuthbert* was written as a response to the growth of the Cult of St. Wilfred, the same man whose monks accused Bede of heresy.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, Anglo-

---

<sup>41</sup> Bede's work is known for being innovative, and Bede was known for using less common interpretations of the Bible. One instance in which Bede went against the interpretive grain regards the symbolism of the Four Living Creatures found in Ezekiel and Revelation. In another instance, Bede recalculated the age of the earth using Jerome's Vulgate instead of the Septuagint.

<sup>42</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 56, 170. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* focuses on the proper method of practicing Christianity. In book one of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede condemns the Pelagian Heresy without going into detail as to what the heresy was. The nature of this heresy was less important to Bede than the fact that it was heresy. Even figures Bede admired, such as St. Aidan, were ultimately condemned if they failed to fully commit to the Roman Catholic version of Christianity. Aidan celebrated Easter on the wrong date, so he could not be used by Bede as an example of a holy figure despite his piety, humility, and dedication to taking care of the poor.

<sup>43</sup> Roger Ray, "Who did Bede Think He Was?" in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of The Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio, Medieval European Studies VII (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2006), 20-1.

<sup>44</sup> Alan Thacker, "Bede and History," in Gregorio, *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 186. Prior to the creation of Bede's *Life of Cuthbert*, Wilfred's monks at Hexham insulted Bede's scholarship. After Wilfred's death, a cult associated with the man began to form

Saxon England was not a place where all monks got along peacefully, but rather they were jockeying for power and prestige amongst each other. Despite acting as if he was above petty bickering in most of his texts, a clear case can be made that Bede successfully positioned himself as the best scholar in early medieval England.

While Bede rarely left his monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow, the prefaces to his works reveal that the priest and monk was well connected politically. Bede's *On Genesis* is dedicated to Bede's close friend Bishop Acca.<sup>45</sup> *On the Temple* only specifies that it was written on behalf of a bishop and close friend of Bede's, so it was most likely written for Acca as well.<sup>46</sup> Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* was written on behalf of King Ceolwulf of Northumbria.<sup>47</sup> These relationships, to at least one bishop and king, point to a man who was well connected and a member of the upper echelons of society. Bede's exemplary exegesis played a role in these relationships; therefore, his uses of foreign and difficult sources in his exegesis help distinguish Bede from his peers and near contemporaries who did not make use of these sources.

Bede's knowledge of Hebrew and the Hebrew Truth came extensively through two sources. To understand the Jewish exegesis, he relied extensively on two of Jerome's works: *The Location and Names of Hebrew Places* and *The Meaning of Hebrew Names*.<sup>48</sup>

Bede explored the meaning of names outside the context of his exegesis. In his preaching,

---

amongst his followers. The main rival cult in England at the time revered Cuthbert, a man associated with Lindisfarne and the Celtic form of Christianity. Therefore, by writing two hagiographies about Cuthbert, Bede was placing his support behind Cuthbert, effectively using the weight of his scholarly mantle to make Cuthbert more important to English Christianity than Wilfred.

<sup>45</sup> Bede, *On Genesis*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> Bede, *On the Temple*, trans. Seán Connolly, *Translated Texts for Historians* 21 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 2-4.

<sup>47</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 41.

<sup>48</sup> Kendall, Introduction to *On Genesis*, 5.

Bede used Jerome's analysis of Hebrew names to pull symbolic significance out of the passages he used in homilies.<sup>49</sup> While Bede used the Hebrew Truth and Jerome's works on Hebrew etymology throughout his writings, one of the places where his methodology stands prominently is in the beginning of his *On Genesis*.

Bede's use of Jewish sources appears almost immediately in each of his commentaries.<sup>50</sup> In Bede's *On Genesis*, he first references Hebrew while discussing Genesis 1:10. In that passage, most translations state "God saw that it [the creation of the second day] was good"; however, the phrase "God saw that it was good" is missing from the Hebrew Truth.<sup>51</sup> Bede's use of the term "Hebrew Truth" is important, for he did not develop it. Rather, St. Jerome used "Hebrew Truth" to denote ideas and exegesis that came through the reading of the Old Testament in Hebrew. Bede uses Jerome's exegesis in a multitude of places. However, he treats Jerome's Hebrew Truth as separate from Jerome's exegesis. Before discussing the Hebrew Truth in relation to Genesis 1:10, Bede extensively quotes and cites Jerome while analyzing Genesis 1:2.<sup>52</sup> However, this was not the Hebrew Truth, but rather the thoughts of Jerome. Therefore, Hebrew Truth, despite coming from Jerome, was not the same as Jerome's exegesis.

The distinction Bede makes between the Hebrew Truth and Jerome is important. However, he never directly states what the difference between the two is. Looking at these two passages together, however, allows historians to make inferences regarding the

---

<sup>49</sup> Lawrence T. Martin, "Bede and Preaching," in DeGregorio, *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 164.

<sup>50</sup> Bede organizes his commentaries by sequentially exploring each verse and its meaning.

<sup>51</sup> Bede, *On Genesis*, 77.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 70. While Bede created his own method for citing other scholars, the medieval period is not known for having scholars who cite the scholars they reference.

differences. The first noteworthy fact regarding Bede's treatment of the Hebrew Truth is what he does not say about it. Bede does not explain what the Hebrew Truth is, or why it is important. Bede treats the Hebrew Truth as another source in which he receives his information. The other sources Bede uses are either Biblical figures or Biblical commentators who were also saints. Bede felt that the Jews were at least somewhat capable of knowing truth, despite their rejection of Jesus. By not explaining what the Hebrew Truth was, or why he was using it, Bede demonstrates that he did not find treating this as an independent source to be problematic or controversial. Therefore, he was readapting Jewish ideology when Judaism was already falling out of favor in Christian communities.

Not only was the Hebrew Truth not seen as controversial by Bede, he saw it as an authority to be used in theological debates. In a letter to his friend Plegwin, Bede uses Hebrew Truth to defend the controversial position regarding the age of the world for which Bishop Wilfred accused him of heresy.<sup>53</sup> During a gathering of monks at Hexham, Wilfred, or one of his close associates, accused Bede of heresy for incorrectly calculating the age of the world. Upon hearing of this, Bede argued to Plegwin that the previous date had been incorrectly calculated from the genealogies found in the Septuagint. The correct dates could be found by using the genealogies in the Hebrew Truth. Therefore, Bede used the Hebrew Truth to defend a controversial position he took.

While Bede revered the Hebrew Truth, it was also a puzzle that needed to be solved. In the previously mentioned passage on Genesis 1:10, the Hebrew Truth does not state that God found his work to be good. This troubled Bede, for later God states that all

---

<sup>53</sup> Faith Wallis, "Bede and Science," in Gregorio, *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 120-1.

things he made are good.<sup>54</sup> When it was possible, he avoided creating his own ideas; instead, Bede served as a synthesizer of the ideas of the patristic fathers. He acts as though the Hebrew Truth was of equal authority to Augustine, Jerome, Gregory the Great, and Ambrose. Despite treating the Hebrew Truth as an equal to the Church Fathers, he needed the exegetical skills of Jerome to explain the peculiarity of the Hebrew Truth. Bede quotes Jerome, who states that the number two is not good. He uses evidence from the story of Noah, as all the unclean animals come to the ark in pairs while the animals that were clean come in odd numbers.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the Hebrew Truth was more than just an exegetical tool. Instead, it sat at the crossroads between the tool for exploring exegesis and that which exegesis explored. This crossroads existed because the Hebrew Truth included the Hebrew version of the Bible Jerome used while writing the Latin Vulgate as well as the exegesis provided by Jerome's Hebrew teacher.

Most of Bede's usage of the Hebrew Truth in *On Genesis* focuses on the literal meaning of the Bible. In the passage discussed above, when Bede needed to clarify a confusing set of circumstances regarding the Hebrew Truth, he turned not to a different passage in the Hebrew Truth, but St. Jerome's commentary on it. However, as Bede turned to exegesis of other parts of the Bible, his usage of the Hebrew Truth changed. St. Jerome used the Hebrew Truth for almost purely literal exegesis. Bede slowly began breaking away from Jerome's search for the literal meaning of the Old Testament through the Hebrew Truth; instead, he used this same information to derive allegorical meanings from the Old Testament.<sup>56</sup> One of Bede's commentaries, *On the Temple*, acknowledges a

---

<sup>54</sup> Bede, *On Genesis*, 77.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Jennifer O'Reilly, Introduction to *On the Temple*, xxviii.

literal meaning of the Bible, but it predominantly seeks to explain the biblical passages being explored from allegorical, tropological, and anagogical perspectives. Therefore, while Bede still uses Jerome's method of borrowing exegesis from the Jews that was intended for literal interpretation only, he relies much more heavily on Jerome's etymological works to appropriate ideas from the Jews.

When discussing what type of stone of which the temple was constructed, Bede states that the men of Biblos prepared the stone and wood for the temple.<sup>57</sup> Bede begins by giving a quick summary of where the city of Biblos was. However, Bede does not leave it there; he continues by stating that Gebal, the Hebrew name for the city, means "defining" or "limiting."<sup>58</sup> Therefore, by exploring the Hebrew associated with this city, Bede argues that the men of Biblos are allegories for teachers of the Bible, for they are defined by the way they prepare peoples' hearts for God.

This reveals the complexity with which Bede used a language he did not understand for exegetical purposes. At times, he used the Hebrew Truth in order to have his readers understand the world of ancient Israel. In *On Genesis*, Bede uses the Hebrew Truth to explain the position of the window in Noah's Ark.<sup>59</sup> However, this knowledge, which was inaccessible to those who did not know Hebrew (or had access to Jerome's commentaries), does not stop at a literal interpretation. Bede immediately states that the window represents the spiritual mysteries, which are revealed to the baptized in the same way the window revealed the sun's light only after the rains had ceased.

---

<sup>57</sup> Bede, *On the Temple*, 15.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>59</sup> Bede, *On Genesis*, 178.

In another example, while discussing the creation of statues of cherubim in *On the Temple*, Bede begins by explaining the symbolic significance of the cherubim being made out of olive wood. He argues that the olive wood represents the anointing of angelic virtues. After he has made the symbolic connection between angels and the anointment of heavenly virtues such as wisdom, he brings in the symbolic meaning of Hebrew words, for according to Bede, “cherubim” means “a great store of knowledge” in Hebrew.<sup>60</sup> These passages reveal how Bede’s commentaries deftly merged what little Hebrew knowledge Bede had into his commentaries to bring greater clarity about the Bible to his readers. Bede’s primary desire was to be a teacher; as such he used Jewish exegesis to fulfill this purpose.<sup>61</sup>

Bede’s use of the Hebrew Truth had great implications for Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>62</sup> He did not make Judaism acceptable to the Anglo-Saxons, but he was not trying to either. Instead of making Judaism acceptable, Bede was trying to raise his own status while reclaiming Jewish exegesis for Christianity in the same way that Gregory suggested the missionaries did with pagan holy places. One way in which his writings accomplished this was through the people who patronized Bede. His patrons included bishops and kings. Bede’s use of the Hebrew Truth allowed scholars to understand where his ideas came from. This allowed Bede’s more controversial ideas, like the recalculated age of the world, to be accepted by his audience. However, this would not have been

---

<sup>60</sup> Bede, *On the Temple*, 47.

<sup>61</sup> DeGregorio, “Bede and the Old Testament,” 127. Despite being best known for his history of England, Bede primarily explored biblical exegesis.

<sup>62</sup> Bede’s use of the Hebrew Truth influenced the way Anglo-Saxons understood Christianity. He found allusions to Jesus in the Old Testament through the translation of Jesus’ name. This fundamentally changed the way Anglo-Saxons understood the concept of Jesus, as there are no extant Old English sources that use the name Jesus.

possible had Bede not appropriated Jewish exegesis for Christian purposes first. Therefore, Bede had to mix his use of the Hebrew Truth with the use of accepted Christian scholars such as Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. By mixing the Hebrew Truth with the Doctors of the Church, Bede reclaimed Jewish exegesis for Christianity while he became one of the most influential exegete of the early medieval period.

### **Maimonides, Aquinas, and Gersonides**

Unlike early Anglo-Saxon England, high medieval France definitely had a thriving Jewish community. It did not have the political clout associated with the Jewish communities of Christian or Muslim controlled Spain, but Paris was a thriving Jewish intellectual center.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, literate Christians had controlled France for centuries before the thirteenth century. Therefore, the situation in thirteenth-century France could not be more different than the recently converted Anglo-Saxon England of Bede's age.<sup>64</sup> The Christians of high medieval France had greater interactions with Judaism, Hebrew, and Jewish exegesis; therefore, the influence the Jews had on French scholars was vastly different than in Anglo-Saxon England. Some of the greatest scholars of the medieval period emerged from this period of heightened interactions between Jews and Christians.

Moses ben Maimon, Thomas Aquinas, and Levi ben Gerson ranked amongst the best and brightest scholars to come out of the high medieval period. All three of these individuals wrote about God's knowledge of himself and others. Each one of these

---

<sup>63</sup> Geiger, "*Historia Judaica: Petrus Comestor and His Jewish Sources*," 130.

<sup>64</sup> There is no evidence that points to a literate Anglo-Saxon society before they converted to Christianity. The last Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to be converted to Christianity were the Isle of Wight and the Kingdom of the South Saxons. St. Wilfred led the conversionary efforts of both of those kingdoms. Since his life overlapped with Bede's, it is likely that Anglo-Saxon paganism and illiteracy were still in the living memory of the monks at Wearmouth-Jarrow.

philosopher-theologians appears to be in dialogue with the others, despite not being contemporaries. Maimonides was the first of the three to live (1135 to 1204).<sup>65</sup> Aquinas lived from 1225 to 1274, roughly twenty years after Maimonides died, and Gersonides was born in 1288, roughly fifteen years after Aquinas died.<sup>66</sup> All three of them openly admit to looking to Aristotle for answers and the logical basis for their arguments. Gersonides added Maimonides as one of his cited influences, as the third chapter in his treatise on God's knowledge is focused on arguments developed by Maimonides.<sup>67</sup> Thomas Aquinas fails to directly address Maimonides in his work on God's knowledge. The correlations between the arguments of Gersonides, Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas are too striking to be passed off as chance or the convergent evolution from Aristotle's ideas; however, the increasing marginalization of the Jews caused neither Aquinas nor Gersonides to acknowledge the roles that those outside of either their religion or the Greeks played in the formation of their ideas.

These three scholars lived in different places under vastly different circumstances. Maimonides was a Jew who lived under the Almoravids in al-Andalus, a group of Muslims who increased the persecution of minorities in their realm, and later moved to Egypt. Aquinas was an Italian Christian who lived part of his adult life as a member of the religious majority in France. Gersonides was a Jewish scholar who served under a pope in Avignon. Despite the differences in their circumstances, Maimonides and

---

<sup>65</sup> M. Friedländer, Introduction to *The Guide for the Perplexed* by Moses Maimonides, trans. M. Friedländer (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), xvi-xxv.

<sup>66</sup> Norbert Max Samuelson, Introduction to *On God's Knowledge* by Levi Gersonides, trans. Norbert Max Samuelson (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1977), 2.

<sup>67</sup> Levi Gersonides, *On God's Knowledge*, trans. Norbert Max Samuelson (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1977), 95.

Aquinas both wrote the most influential works regarding their respective religions. While Gersonides is best known for his writings on astronomy, he too wrote extensively on religious matters.

Aquinas lived at a time in which great change was occurring in the Christian world. The thirteenth century saw increased persecution of the Jews. Unlike Bede, who had no problem reclaiming Jewish exegesis for Christian purposes, Aquinas could not easily do so without being accused of Judaizing. Bede, unlike Aquinas, worked with theoretical Judaism. Thomas Aquinas' experiences with Judaism came at a time in which Jews increasingly became seen as a threat to Christians who lived as their neighbors. Jeremy Cohen argues that Aquinas was not voraciously anti-Jewish in the way that many of his Dominican peers were.<sup>68</sup> Instead, Cohen argues that Aquinas followed the traditional Augustinian belief that the Jews served as a witness to Christianity. Aquinas, despite the backlash against Judaism in the thirteenth century, still saw wisdom in the writings of the Jewish scholars. Therefore, Thomas Aquinas openly disagreed with some of the doctrines of Maimonides while using other parts of Maimonides' works without citing him.

Bede's and Aquinas' goals were similar, but their methods differed in how willing they were to address their Jewish sources. Both the Christian scholars attempted to understand the world they lived in through a religious lens. Bede looked to Jewish exegesis as a method for more clearly understanding God's world as found in the Old Testament. Aquinas looked to the logic of a pagan and a Jew to understand God's world. While Bede was willing to openly find meaning in the works of Jewish scholarship,

---

<sup>68</sup> J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 364.

Aquinas was willing to openly find meaning in the works of a pagan. Both of their responses can be traced to the cultures in which they lived. Bede lived at a time in which England had only recently converted to Christianity but had little access to Jews. On the other hand, Aquinas lived during a period in which the Jews were very visible but paganism had effectively been eradicated from Europe. Therefore, Aquinas was much more willing to quote Aristotle than Maimonides.

Maimonides, Thomas Aquinas, and Gersonides began their inquiries into the nature of God through the exploration of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Aristotle's work leaves the divine in a highly impersonal place. It has almost no role in the world except as the first cause in the world.<sup>69</sup> Both Judaism and Christianity have a much more active God than the one allowed in Aristotle. However, Islamic interpretations of Aristotle were at the cutting edge of scientific and philosophical knowledge during the lives of each of the three scholars. Therefore, all three felt a need to adapt Aristotle to fit their own religious purposes.

Moses Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas are perhaps two of the best Aristotelian scholars of the medieval period. Maimonides reshaped Jewish intellectual thought. Jewish scholars from across the Mediterranean world tried adapting Maimonides so that they could claim him as part of their intellectual heritage.<sup>70</sup> Aquinas fit a similar role in the medieval Christian world. He was one of the most prominent scholars of the high medieval period. While Gersonides was not as important to shaping Jewish theology as

---

<sup>69</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Santa Fe: Green Lion Press, 2002), 244.

<sup>70</sup> Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy, 1280-1510: A Survey* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 30.

Maimonides, some of his writings are important to describing the similarities between the two giants of philosophy.

Differences in structure create difficulties when comparing the books of the three scholars. The clearest structure of each of these works comes from Gersonides. His work, *On the Knowledge of God*, is part of a larger work called the *Wars of the Lord*. *On the Knowledge of God* is a tract devoted to exploring what God knows, and how God knows it. Thomas Aquinas' work in question is his fourteenth question in the first part of his three-part, *Summa Theologiae*. Question fourteen is titled "On God's Knowledge." Each question in Aquinas' work is broken into sub-questions or articles. Each article begins with an assumption based on his answer to the sub-question answered in the previous article. From there, Aquinas uses a mixture of logic, quotations from Aristotle, the Bible, or earlier theologians to show how the earlier assumption is incorrect.<sup>71</sup> Gersonides and Aquinas chose to organize their works in ways that allow the reader to follow the author's train of thought.

Maimonides' work is not organized like the others. His chapters on the attributes of God are spread throughout *The Guide for the Perplexed*. Part III chapter XX sees Maimonides discuss the differences between man's knowledge and God's knowledge. However, this chapter and the following chapter, also focusing on knowledge, are sandwiched between chapters dedicated to God's providence.<sup>72</sup> Other chapters regarding

---

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, trans. Herbert McCabe (Manchester: Blackfriars, 1964), 27.

<sup>72</sup> Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedländer (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 295. Immediately following Maimonides' chapters on God's knowledge in Part III, he discusses the purpose of the book of Job, then follows it with an explanation of God's providence in Job.

God's knowledge appear in part I.<sup>73</sup> While *The Guide for the Perplexed* does have a logical organization, it does not follow a similar organizational structure to the other two works being discussed. This removes the possibility for easily identifiable, direct, one-to-one comparisons. Additionally, Maimonides spends a much shorter amount of space in his work on questions of God's knowledge, as he does not go into nearly as detailed analysis as the other two scholars.

While discussing the knowledge of God, Thomas Aquinas exclusively quotes Christian scholarship and Aristotle. However, Aquinas does reference Maimonides directly while discussing ways in which people describe God. According to Aquinas, Maimonides' position was that anything attributed to God was a negative description since it denied God a potential characteristic.<sup>74</sup> This includes phrases such as "God is living," for it denies God is like inanimate objects. Aquinas rejects Maimonides' ideas about descriptions of God. Most scholarship directed at the relationship between these two great medieval writers focuses solely on Aquinas's rebuttal of Maimonides' views on describing God.<sup>75</sup> Jennifer Hard Weed has argued that Aquinas misunderstood Maimonides' argument.<sup>76</sup>

However, it is possible something else is at play. It is likely that Aquinas needed to find a theological discussion in which he and Maimonides somewhat disagreed, and he felt could separate his beliefs from Maimonides'. For he copies copiously from

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 100-1.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, trans. Herbert McCabe (Manchester: Blackfriars, 1964), 53.

<sup>75</sup> Timothy L. Smith, *Thomas Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology: A Study of Theological Method* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 225.

<sup>76</sup> Jennifer Hart Weed, "Maimonides and Aquinas: A Medieval Misunderstanding?" *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 64, no. 1 (2008): 386.

Maimonides' work at a different part of the *Summa Theologiae*, doing so without acknowledging his inspiration. Prior to Thomas Aquinas' writing of *Summa Theologiae*, Maimonides' *The Guide for the Perplexed* was condemned by the Church in southern France.<sup>77</sup> This condemnation began as a debate between Jews over the validity of Maimonides' writings. However, the Church became involved after the anti-Maimonidean side accused the text of mocking Christianity. Therefore, by the time Aquinas wrote his magnum opus, writing anything approving of Maimonides by a Christian would be difficult to justify.

As stated earlier, one of the major questions each of the three sought answers to was determining what God knew. Both Christianity and Judaism acknowledge that God knows things, but it was which things he was capable of knowing that needed to be addressed through Aristotelian logic while maintaining orthodox beliefs. These questions were often multifaceted, as they called into question God's sovereignty, power, and perfection. The first type of knowledge that will be explored is God's knowledge of himself versus the knowledge of others. Ultimately, each of the scholars developed similar answers to this question.

Despite coming to similar conclusions about the knowledge of God as those who followed him, Maimonides frames his questions regarding the knowledge of God differently than either Thomas Aquinas or Gersonides. In the section about God's knowledge, he begins his discussion with a set of two beliefs, which he believed would be generally agreed upon by his readers.<sup>78</sup> The first of these theses states that God cannot

---

<sup>77</sup> Nina Caputo, *Nahmanides in Medieval Catalonia* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 22.

<sup>78</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 292.

acquire new knowledge that he did not previously have. The second thesis states that God is incapable of having a plurality of knowledge. He sets the two theses up as previously established and proven laws by which the rest of his arguments hinge.<sup>79</sup> Maimonides boils his argument down to a seemingly simple concept: namely that God's knowledge is not like human knowledge.<sup>80</sup> God's knowledge, according to Maimonides, is his essence. In this argument, God's essence is the cause of the existence of all things. As creator of all things, nothing is hidden from it. Since God's essence is his knowledge, he has knowledge of all things.

When exploring whether or not God knows specifics about things other than himself, Thomas Aquinas, while creating an argument to argue against, states that God only knows things through himself and in order to understand things, they must be known through their own "proper idea."<sup>81</sup> Aquinas presents this as the logical conclusion of his previous question.<sup>82</sup> His prior conclusion states that God knows about things other than himself "because his essence contains their likeness."<sup>83</sup> Aquinas then presents a counterargument, stating that generic knowledge is incomplete knowledge, as people who only have general knowledge on the similarities between subjects have incomplete knowledge on the subject. Since he had already shown that God does not have imperfections, Aquinas argues that God must know how things are different, which is a type of specific knowledge.<sup>84</sup> He thus argues that knowledge of a source, whether God,

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>81</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, 21.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Aquinas' previous question was over whether or not God had knowledge about whether or not God knows things other than himself in a general sense.

<sup>83</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, 19-21.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 23.

the center of a circle, or light, does not instantly create knowledge of that which those mentioned above create. In the case of Aquinas' examples, all things created by God, such as radii coming from the center of a circle, and colors created by light, are different from their sources and each other.<sup>85</sup>

However, Thomas Aquinas also argues that God is not just the source of all things, but also the perfection of them. He compares God to the number six, which is perfect, as it is the sum of all its factors. Therefore, God must have knowledge of everything since he is the perfection of everything, much like how six has the knowledge of all of its imperfect parts.<sup>86</sup> Eventually, Aquinas argues that God must have perfect knowledge of things other than himself; however, as the essence of creatures is imperfect compared to God, they cannot "lead to knowledge of the divine essence."<sup>87</sup> This is in contrast to God's knowledge, which as part of the divine essence, can lead to perfect knowledge of lesser essences.

Looking at Gersonides' work on a similar question, he begins with a similar argument to the one initially mentioned by Aquinas. In his work, Gersonides begins by exploring the beliefs and statements of his predecessors. He states that "the Philosopher," or Aristotle, believed that God could not know particulars because God only knows himself and he is of a universal nature, so he cannot know particulars.<sup>88</sup> Afterwards,

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>88</sup> Gersonides, *On God's Knowledge*, 98-100.

Gersonides explored the role of the sages of the Torah, including “the Master The Guide,” in the argument regarding the aforementioned question.<sup>89</sup>

When finally getting to his own argument, Gersonides argues that God knows particulars through his role as the source of all things. Levi ben Gerson uses a mathematical instrument as an example to explain his meaning. Instruments are unable to act according to their purposes except “by the means of the knowledge of the craftsman.”<sup>90</sup> A second argument proposed by Gersonides is that God knows particulars because he is the source of the particulars. If he did not know of that of which he was the source, then his knowledge would be deficient.<sup>91</sup> Gersonides’ final argument is almost the same as his second, with a change of focus. Instead of pointing to God’s role in the creation of individual objects, Gersonides focuses on God’s creation of the world as a whole.<sup>92</sup>

As shown above, Thomas Aquinas and Levi ben Gerson begin their discussions of God’s ability to know about things beside himself with very similar arguments. Aquinas presents an argument, born out of a previous argument, that God only knows things through their “proper idea,” which is to say through God.<sup>93</sup> Gersonides’ argument is almost identical. Instead of presenting it as a logical conclusion created from a previous argument, he attributes it to Aristotle. In both cases, the author chose to reject this idea. It

---

<sup>89</sup> Gersonides refrains from referring to individuals by name throughout the majority of his work. Aristotle is consistently referred to as “the Philosopher,” and Maimonides is called “the Master The Guide.” This refusal to regularly name individuals does not continue into discussions of their works, as Gersonides specifically states that the Master The Guide wrote *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

<sup>90</sup> Gersonides, *On God’s Knowledge*, 227.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 231-2.

<sup>93</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, 21.

is clear that Thomas Aquinas knew the works of Aristotle and even references him in *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>94</sup> However, despite knowing the works of Aristotle, he chose to portray this idea of God's knowledge as one of his own instead of that of his intellectual forbearer. This reveals a problem in how modern scholarship address the work of Thomas Aquinas. Although it was common for medieval scholars to borrow ideas from other scholars without citations, modern scholarship has failed to explore this aspect of Aquinas' work in relation to Maimonides.<sup>95</sup> Both the Venerable Bede and Thomas Aquinas are unique amongst medieval scholars in that they cite earlier scholars.<sup>96</sup> While modern scholarship continuously points to Bede's uncredited influences, less has been said about Aquinas' uncredited Jewish influences.<sup>97</sup>

Similarities can be detected in the arguments of the three scholars. All three of the scholars discuss whether or not God's being the source of all particulars was enough to justify him knowing particulars. Despite coming later than Aquinas, Gersonides' second argument is nearly identical to an argument rejected by Aquinas. However, Gersonides is responding to Maimonides. Maimonides' argument appears similar to Aquinas'. The main difference between their arguments is the role of metaphor. Maimonides claims that

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>95</sup> Smith, *Thomas Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology*, 225. Stephen Louis Brock, *The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas: A Sketch* (Cambridge: James Clark and Co., 2016), 132. Weed, "Maimonides and Aquinas," 386. Out of these three sources, only Smith looks at Aquinas' relationship outside of the passage on the attributes of God. He mentions Maimonides in relation to some of Aquinas' writings on ethics. However, it can be inferred from his writing that the passages on ethics might be direct citations much in the same way as the passage on the attributes of God.

<sup>96</sup> Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, 40. Bede developed one of the earliest methods for citations. In his commentary on Luke, he would place a two-letter combination in the margins next to passages that came from St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, or Pope Gregory the Great.

<sup>97</sup> Arthur G. Holder, "Bede and the New Testament," in DeGregorio, *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, 145. Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, 40.

any metaphors are lacking, while Aquinas and Gersonides rely heavily on metaphor to make their points.<sup>98</sup> There is one additional similarity between Maimonides' and Aquinas' arguments. These scholars end their discussions of God's knowledge as a source in similar ways. Maimonides states that confusion arises because the term "knowledge" is used to describe both God's knowledge and human knowledge, but God's knowledge is completely different than human knowledge.<sup>99</sup> Aquinas goes into less detail, but he also acknowledges the difference between the knowledge of creatures and the knowledge of God. He does this specifically by comparing their essence with God's essence. There are enough similarities between these arguments to point to some influence between the two scholars; however, there is not enough to make a definitive case based on this argument alone.

All three scholars argue that God's knowledge does not change, and that God cannot know anything that he does not already know.<sup>100</sup> Each of these arguments comes in the form of exploring whether God knows things that do not exist. Maimonides and Aquinas both explore this question in similar terms. However, they serve different purposes for their various works. In *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Moses Maimonides comes to the problem of God's knowledge through the question of God's knowledge of non-existent things. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* spends more time exploring these questions, but it is not as central to his inquiries as it was with Maimonides. In both cases, Aquinas and Maimonides arrive at the conclusion that God must have some knowledge of non-existent things.

---

<sup>98</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 293.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 292.

Maimonides enters the debate regarding God's knowledge due to the nature of human life. In part III, chapter XVI, Maimonides discusses God's omniscience through what modern philosophers have named "the Problem of Evil."<sup>101</sup> He states, through accusing philosophers of spreading perverse ideas, that sometimes pious men live miserable lives while the vile and wicked live pleasant and prosperous lives.<sup>102</sup> It is through this debate, in which Maimonides has to argue against the argument that God has abandoned humanity, does not know the problems of humanity, or is too weak to change the fortunes of evil and pious men, that Maimonides comes to discuss whether or not God has knowledge about people. Through this he explores whether God can have knowledge of people, for their lives are short compared to that of God's eternity. Maimonides argues that God's knowledge cannot change.<sup>103</sup> However, Maimonides spends very little time discussing alternatives to the fact that God has knowledge of people. He merely states that God has foreknowledge of things that will occur. Therefore, when a person is born, God knew that the individual would exist. Later, upon death, that person will cease to exist. This does not increase God's knowledge, since God has foreknowledge of things that will exist, that do exist, and of things that have not yet come to exist.<sup>104</sup>

However, Maimonides initially argues against the notion that God has knowledge of things that will never exist. If God does not have knowledge of things that will never exist, then Maimonides argues that God could not have knowledge of infinities.<sup>105</sup> While Maimonides points to other philosophers who have taken this stance, it bothered him

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 280-1.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

greatly. While Maimonides' work is by no means simple, it is usually rather consistent. At the point when discussing God's inability to know infinities, Maimonides makes an about face and changes his argument to the previously mentioned idea that God can only know his essence.

As stated above, Thomas Aquinas also explores the relationship between God's knowledge of future events and infinite possibilities. Several of the arguments Aquinas creates in *Summa Theologiae* are similar to those created by Maimonides. When discussing God's knowledge of non-existent things, Aquinas instantly goes to the discussion of things that either used to exist or will exist in the future.<sup>106</sup> This is the exact same argument that Maimonides used when discussing the same topic. Only two differences exist between the two arguments. The first difference is that Maimonides refers specifically to people, while Aquinas refers to the less specific things. The second difference is that Aquinas names this type of knowledge as "knowledge of vision," while Maimonides does not give any terminology to describe this type of knowledge.<sup>107</sup> However, they are both incredibly small differences to the point where they are unimportant. Ultimately, Aquinas makes the same argument as Maimonides while making minor changes to differentiate himself from Maimonides, the origin of this argument.

Aquinas continues to follow Maimonides' lead by arguing that God is existence, which sounds suspiciously similar to Maimonides' argument that God is only his essence.<sup>108</sup> Aquinas implicitly connects "God as existence" to "God as essence" in the

---

<sup>106</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, 33.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

way he describes God as existence. It greatly mirrors a previous argument he made regarding God's essence.<sup>109</sup> Aquinas expands upon Maimonides' ideas instead of merely copying them. He uses man's contingent nature and free will to prove that God has knowledge of contingent and possible futures.<sup>110</sup> Through this, Aquinas creates free will in Maimonides' largely deterministic view of the world. He uses the potential futures of humans, in addition to knowledge of vision, to explain how God can know infinities, whereas Maimonides could not. Not only are the ideas argued by Maimonides and Aquinas shockingly similar, the structure and examples share striking resemblances. Therefore, this argument, along with the previous argument, continues to shrink the possibility that Aquinas was not copying Maimonides.

Aquinas and Maimonides continue to have similarities outside of the debate about the knowledge of God. Maimonides takes a metaphorical route to explaining his ideas regarding the attributes of God. In one of the earliest moments in *The Guide for the Perplexed* in which he mentions the knowledge of God, Maimonides argues that God knowing things is a description used to help the readers of the Bible visualize God.<sup>111</sup> He makes this claim as part of an argument explaining how God can be ascribed actions such as seeing or moving. God cannot do physical things without a physical body, and he is a spiritual, not physical being. However, as stated above, Maimonides' exploration of God's knowledge is predicated on the fact that God, according to Maimonides, is only his essence. Being only an essence allows him to do all actions ascribed to him.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 47-9.

<sup>111</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 60.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 62

Maimonides and Aquinas take similar positions on several key components of God, although these may be the results of similarities in their religions rather than direct influences upon each other. Maimonides states that God is only his essence; he has no form or matter. Thomas Aquinas takes a similar position regarding the corporality of God. In his section on the simpleness of God, Aquinas argues that God cannot be composed of matter because that would mean he had a body, and if God had a body then he would contain potentiality rather than pure actuality.<sup>113</sup> When describing God's actions, both Maimonides and Aquinas take similar approaches to how to understand God's attributes. Maimonides clearly expresses that God hearing and seeing is metaphorical for him understanding the world, which is why God does not feel or taste, as these sensations do not lead to perfect understanding.<sup>114</sup> Aquinas argues something similar, although he is much less direct in his discussion. He does explain that in describing God, one must use models of composite things, from which Aquinas believed human knowledge was derived. It was only when talking about God's simplicity that abstract ideas could be used.<sup>115</sup>

These two philosophies are similar, but not the same. One states that God's attributes are metaphorical, while the other says they should be considered in abstract thoughts only. These two, when explored individually, would suggest that Aquinas and Maimonides had ideas that were similar, but nothing more. However, they are not the only parts of the writings of these two monumental scholars bearing similarities.

---

<sup>113</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Vol. 2, 25.

<sup>114</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 63.

<sup>115</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, 29-31.

Therefore, slightly similar arguments become more suspicious under the magnifying glass of the rest of their work on God's knowledge.

The three arguments of Moses Maimonides, Thomas Aquinas, and Levi ben Gerson relating to God's knowledge of particulars are remarkably similar. However, this alone does not necessarily prove that Gersonides was influenced by Thomas Aquinas, or that Aquinas was influenced positively by Maimonides. Gersonides specifically mentions Maimonides as an influence and addresses problems he sees in the work of his fellow sage.<sup>116</sup> Likewise, Maimonides and Aquinas have somewhat similar ideas and ways they expressed the attributes of God. This does not necessarily prove that Aquinas copied the works of Maimonides. All three of these scholars worked from an Aristotelian base, so it is possible they were deriving similar conclusions from the same base of knowledge. However, the similarities between Maimonides' and Aquinas' arguments relating to God's knowledge of infinities and the non-existent are too similar not to be related. Those arguments, when placed next to other similarities, reveal that Aquinas was using the work of Maimonides to help bolster his own scholarship. Therefore, these arguments reveal an intellectual borrowing from Jews by Christians in scholastic France. It would be easy to blindly say that Aquinas influenced Gersonides, as Gersonides worked for the pope in Avignon during a period of high Aristotelian influence in Christianity; however, Gersonides only uses Aristotle, the Talmudic sages, and Maimonides as his referenced sources. Likewise, Aquinas only uses Christian sources, Aristotle, and the Bible to make his claims. However, there is much greater evidence to support a direct influence from Maimonides on Aquinas than Aquinas on Gersonides.

---

<sup>116</sup> Gersonides, *On God's Knowledge*, 182.

Aquinas' relationship to Jewish ideology was much more convoluted than Bede's. Bede did not have access to original Jewish texts, whereas Thomas Aquinas did. Both scholars were willing to use this non-Christian knowledge to supplement the writings of Christians. However, in Bede's quest to understand scripture, Jewish knowledge was accepted and praised for being close to the origins of Christianity. Aquinas lived at a time in which Jews faced increased persecution. While he did not partake in the most persecutory beliefs of the time, they influenced how open Aquinas was to using a Jewish scholar to pursue knowledge of the universe. Because the Church banned the writings of Maimonides, Aquinas could only openly use Maimonides as a source when he disagreed with him. When Aquinas agreed with Maimonides, he changed the argument slightly to hide the relationship between himself and a controversial source.

### **Nahmanides and Friar Paul**

Spanish Christianity had a vastly different experience with Judaism than high medieval France. Christian views on Judaism had collapsed since the seventh and eighth centuries. Spain sat at the vanguard of Christian ideology regarding to minorities. Whereas Aquinas took a conservative Augustinian approach to Judaism, that view was quickly falling out of favor in Spain.<sup>117</sup> His contemporaries in Spain argued that Jews and their extra-biblical texts were heretical. Therefore, Dominicans in Spain were at the forefront of the push against the idea of "the Jewish witness."

The vast majority of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Spanish Christians rejected Judaism and saw it as a fundamental threat to Christianity. However, not all Christians in Spain treated Judaism as something to be avoided. A small minority looked to Jewish

---

<sup>117</sup> J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 321, 367.

practices and exegesis as a way to confirm their Christian beliefs. Other Christians held peaceful relations with their Jewish peers.<sup>118</sup> Jewish converts to Christianity saw Judaism as something that glorifies and points to Christianity and therefore should be praised within the larger Christian community. However, the larger Christian culture of medieval Iberia clamped down on the majority of these alternate interpretations of Judaism's relationship with Christianity. To understand the majority view on Judaism's relationship with Christianity, it is best to look at the only accepted alternative view.

According to the Church there were two accepted relationships that Christianity could have with Judaism in medieval Iberia. The first of these was that Judaism was a danger to Christianity. Those who held this view sometimes held a contradictory view that Christians needed to have Jews living in their midst as a reminder of the Jews' rejection of Christ. However, the Dominicans pushed against this idea by arguing that the Jews abandoned their right to live in the midst of Christians due to their rejection of the Old Testament and acceptance of the Talmud.<sup>119</sup> The second was that Jewish theology could be used to convert Jews to Christianity.<sup>120</sup> By the thirteenth century, most Christians had abandoned the use of Jewish theology except for conversionary purposes.

As shown above, medieval scholars such as Bede used Jewish exegesis to explore the Old Testament. A select few Iberian scholars used these methodologies, especially allegorical interpretations, while reading extra-biblical Jewish texts such as the Talmud. They found passages from these texts that supposedly supported the idea that Jesus was

---

<sup>118</sup> Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 39.

<sup>119</sup> J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 325. The Dominicans argued that contemporary Judaism was different than that of the Old Testament. They saw the Talmud as a new law that superseded the Old Testament. Therefore, they lost the ability to be a "Jewish witness" living amongst Christians.

<sup>120</sup> Caputo, *Nahmanides in Catalonia*, 91.

the messiah foretold in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>121</sup> Despite the ease with which this could have been construed as sacrilegious, the scholars who took this approach to the Talmud received royal backing from the Aragonese kings. They could receive this royal backing because they sought to use Christian interpretations of the Talmud and Mishnah to convert Jews to Christianity.

One of the greatest examples of this type of conversionary tactic came from Friar Paul Christian, a formerly Jewish Dominican from southern France who operated in the kingdom of Aragon.<sup>122</sup> Paul Christian, while serving as a missionary to the Jews, debated against Nahmanides before King James of Aragon in Barcelona. During Friar Paul's disputation with Nahmanides, he consistently used Jewish ideas and exegesis to support Christianity. While Paul Christian knew biblical sources as well as extra-biblical sources, the main point he is trying to prove, by using the Talmud, is that the messiah had already appeared in the form of Jesus.<sup>123</sup> Therefore, the Talmud, the Mishnah, and the Haggadah were not part of Friar Paul's framework for converting the Jews, but rather the foundation on which his argument was formed. Unfortunately, historians have only snippets of Paul Christian's theological framework involving Jewish ideas and ideology.

---

<sup>121</sup> Nahmanides, *The Disputation at Barcelona*, trans. Charles B. Chevel, in *Ramban: Writings and Discourses* (New York: Shilo Publishing House, Inc., 1978), 692.

<sup>122</sup> Out of the mendicant orders of the high and late medieval periods, the Dominicans, became the most closely related to the evangelism of the Jews in Spain. Dominican missionaries saw the *aljamas* of Castile and Aragon as places ripe for their evangelistic efforts. However, Christian kings in Castile and Aragon served as gatekeepers to the Jewish communities, choosing who could and who could not preach to the Jews in towns they controlled. While the kings had a vested interest in retaining the Jews as a religious minority, they sometimes forced the Jews to listen to the missionaries' sermons, while at other points the missionaries could not enter the Jewish quarters, and had to preach just outside of the *aljamas*.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 658.

Despite appearing as the most inclusive of the scholars explored here for his use of texts condemned by the Catholic Church, Paul Christian's appropriation of Judaism was much more political than that of Bede's personal disputes or Aquinas' omissions. Bede's use of the Hebrew Truth became most political when he had to defend himself from accusations of heresy. However, in that instance, Bede's defense showed how Jewish theology could be used to support Christianity. Aquinas' omissions were a result of the political pressures of the thirteenth century. He could not easily engage with a text that had been banned by the Church without condemning it. Aquinas avoided the problematic nature of what he was doing by ignoring his source. Paul Christian rejected the belief that Jews had a right to live under Christian rule.<sup>124</sup> His use of Jewish texts was in support of his rejection of Judaism. Therefore, the Disputation at Barcelona was not an honest debate between two scholars. Instead, it was a public display of Friar Paul's method for converting the Jews away from their "heretical" beliefs.

Two accounts of the Barcelona Disputation exist. Unfortunately, the Christian version of the debate is somewhat lacking in details. Out of the two, the more detailed account was written by Nahmanides, the Jewish participant in the debate. Most scholars have been rather dismissive of this source and tend to treat it as less reliable than the Christian sources. This comes from the fact that Nahmanides constantly portrays himself as having the last word and the ability to routinely dismiss every argument leveled by Paul Christian.<sup>125</sup> The second source, which was written by Christians, is much shorter than Nahmanides' version and much less detailed. Nahmanides' account is problematic in that all the Christians, including King James of Aragon, appear as pushovers who

---

<sup>124</sup> J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 336.

<sup>125</sup> Caputo, *Nahmanides in Medieval Catalonia*, 100.

constantly bend to the will of Nahmanides.<sup>126</sup> This is unlikely, as Nahmanides did not come into this debate from a position of power and eventually had to leave Aragon because of his account.

One of Friar Paul's arguments revolved around heaven and the Garden of Eden. In traditional Jewish ideology, heaven, or paradise, and the Garden of Eden are synonymous. One Jewish exegetical work stated that the Garden of Eden could only be entered by the living, Paul Christian argued that since Jesus ascended into heaven without dying, the Jewish exegesis pointed to Jesus as the messiah.<sup>127</sup> According to Nahmanides, Friar Paul said:

Behold, their Sages say that Messiah entered the Garden of Eden [alive]. There in the Haggadah it is stated, "Why did Messiah [enter the Garden of Eden]? It is because he saw his ancestors worshipping idols, and he separated himself from their way and served the Holy One, blessed be he, and he reserved him for the Garden of Eden."<sup>128</sup>

Since the more descriptive text describing this incident was written by Nahmanides instead of Friar Paul, it is somewhat lacking in overall details regarding the Dominican's argument, but some noteworthy points can be made from it. Firstly at no point does Friar Paul quote the Old or New Testament; his argument is based completely on analyzing the Haggadah. Nothing in Friar Paul's line of questioning suggests that Nahmanides needed a

---

<sup>126</sup> Nahmanides, *The Disputation at Barcelona*, 669. In this instance, King James announces that Friar Paul will have the opening statement since it was the start of a new day and he was the claimant. Nahmanides persistently asks to speak first and, although it never states that King James relented, Nahmanides is allowed to speak first anyway. While the disputation may have unfolded in such a fashion, it is unlikely that Nahmanides would have been given the authority he claims to have had in the debate.

<sup>127</sup> Lena Roos, "Rhetoric and Religious Heritage: Paul Christian Preaching to Jews and Christians at the Barcelona Disputation," in *Dominicans and Jews: Personalities, Conflicts, and Perspectives from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed., Elias H. Füllenbach OP and Gianfranco Miletto (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 126.

<sup>128</sup> Nahmanides, *The Disputation at Barcelona*, 682.

deep understanding of Christianity to answer. Instead, Paul based his question on a part of the Haggadah that states that the messiah travels to Eden without dying. Nahmanides understood Paul Christian to be making an implicit reference to Jesus, who entered heaven without dying.

Secondly, although Nahmanides states that Paul Christian returned to his questioning, no question is actually presented to Nahmanides. The only question in this line of questioning, “Why did the messiah enter the Garden of Eden?” was answered by Friar Paul before Nahmanides has a chance to speak. However, this question and answer format appears to be how both Nahmanides and Friar Paul presented their cases. Friar Paul would both ask and answer a question, and then Nahmanides would have a chance to ask a question and give an answer to his own question as a rebuttal. Friar Paul’s question, according to Nahmanides, manipulates the Haggadah to make it appear that the only person who enters Eden alive is the messiah. By the time of the Barcelona Disputation, Christian scholars were not only using Jewish exegesis of the Old Testament to build their reputations as scholars, but they also had the skill to manipulate extra-biblical texts as well.

One tactic that Nahmanides attributed to Friar Paul was the way in which he tried to trick Nahmanides into admitting things that would make him appear to support Christianity. In one such incident, Friar Paul Christian backed Nahmanides into a corner by having Nahmanides admit that various Jewish commentaries claim that the messiah is both human and in some ways superhuman. By doing so, he was once again subtly connecting Jewish exegesis to Jesus.<sup>129</sup> However, it should be noted that, according to

---

<sup>129</sup> Roos, “Rhetoric and Religious Heritage,” 128.

Nahmanides, these tricks did not faze him, as he just admitted that there were differing opinions amongst the sages.

The works of Paul Christian are vastly different than the work of Bede or St. Thomas Aquinas. Looking back onto the four types of exegesis found in Bede's work, Hebrew names and the Hebrew Truth were usually only used to explain the literal meaning of the Bible. Paul Christian, and other preachers to the Jews like him, took the Hebrew Truth and used it to translate Jewish extra-biblical texts into a Christian context. The aforementioned arguments created and utilized by Paul Christian are allegorical and anagogical in nature. Friar Paul connects Jewish extra-biblical writings with Jesus to show that the writings are allegories for the New Testament. In a similar way he tangentially shows how they reveal a heavenly outlook of the end times by stating that the Garden of Eden will be opened for Christians. Paul Christian managed to do this while keeping the literal meanings of the texts he was working with relatively intact.<sup>130</sup> Friar Paul was not condemned for using Jewish texts to prove the accuracy of Christian beliefs. Instead, the king of Aragon praised his abilities and demanded that all the Jews in Barcelona listen to what he had to say. Therefore, within the context of missionary work, it was at least temporarily considered permissible to engage with Jewish texts as a Christian. However, these ideas relating to the Christian use of Jewish texts did not last forever. Eventually, animosity between Christians and *conversos* led to even works like those of Paul Christian's being seen as inappropriate.

---

<sup>130</sup> Nahmanides claimed that much of what was stated by Paul Christian was taken out of context for he did not understand what the sages were talking about. Nahmanides, *The Disputation at Barcelona*, 670.

Iberian Jewish converts to Christianity continued to use Friar Paul's argument that extra-biblical Jewish texts pointed to Jesus as the messiah. However, as the medieval period came to a close, relations between Christians and Jews in Spain deteriorated. David Nirenberg attributes this radical departure of interreligious norms to the pogroms and forced conversions of 1391.<sup>131</sup> During these pogroms, massive numbers of Jews in the Kingdom of Aragon were forced to convert to Christianity under the threat of death. Nirenberg sees this as problematic to Jewish-Christian relations because the people who were born and raised as Christians felt their uniqueness was lost by the emergence of these new Christians.<sup>132</sup> Therefore, Jewishness became not a matter of religion but a matter of blood. Under Nirenberg's thesis, it was in the post-1391 period that Jews could not become Christians, as they were understood to be inherently Jewish.<sup>133</sup> This radically changed the nature of Christians' relationships with Jewish exegesis.

Jewish converts, in their efforts to confirm their Christianity, relied on the Jewish nature of New Testament heroes such as Peter, Paul, and the Virgin Mary.<sup>134</sup> However, this argument did not sit well with the Christians of Spain. They saw a break between themselves and the Jews. This break was not new; the Venerable Bede, almost 650 years before the Spanish pogroms of 1391, had already begun separating the Jews of the Old Testament from the non-Christian Jews of the New Testament and contemporaneous Judaism.<sup>135</sup> Bede saw the new covenant created by Jesus as the separation between Jews

---

<sup>131</sup> David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 145.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>135</sup> Bede, *On the Temple*, 6. Bede connects the Tabernacle to the Hebrews of the Old Testament, whereas the Temple represented Christianity. By connecting the Jews to their

of which he and God approved. In his commentary on Genesis, Bede states that Ishmael represented Jews while Isaac represented Christians.<sup>136</sup> It should be noted that according to Bede, Ishmael is the ancestor of all of the Saracens.<sup>137</sup>

### **Rising Persecution of Judaism**

After 1391, Christians picked up on this pre-existing notion that there is a marked difference between Christians and Jews. Instead of acknowledging the closeness of their pasts, Christians saw the *conversos*' use of Judaism to further their claims to the Christian tradition as a way of connecting *conversos* to Judaism rather than Christianity.<sup>138</sup> A fear arose that Judaism was corrupting Christians. Under this assumption, the new converts continued to practice Judaism in secret after publicly professing allegiance to Christianity. Spanish Christians then assumed that the secret Jews were actively corrupting the souls of Christians by secretly converting them to Judaism. This Judaizing became a deep fear within the Christian communities of the Iberian Peninsula.

In some ways, what happened in Spain was not that much different than the earlier forced conversions of the Jews in France during the First Crusade. In both cases there were mass forced conversions of the Jews by the commoners. On neither occasion did the kings actively pursue the policy of forced conversion. In the case of the pogroms

---

history as he did, Bede adds the Hebrews in the Old Testament to the overarching teleology of Christianity. Additionally, this effectively cuts his Jewish contemporaries out of the history of Judaism entirely.

<sup>136</sup> Bede, *On Genesis*, 279.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. This may be an early connection of Muslims and Jews in the eyes of Christians. Bede wrote *On Genesis* some time after the year 711. This can be determined because Bede references the Saracens as controlling part of Europe, which only happened after the Muslims crossed into Spain in the aforementioned year. However, Bede died in 735, only twenty-four years after the Muslims began their conquest of Spain. Therefore, it is unlikely that Bede would have been particularly familiar with Islam or Arabs. This is most likely an interesting coincidence and not a willful connection on the part of Bede.

<sup>138</sup> Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths*, 161.

of 1391, the king of Aragon actively tried to protect the Jews from the mass violence. Despite the similarities between the violence in Spain and France, the results of the two pogroms were vastly different in terms of how Judaism was understood in its relationship to Christianity.

Use of Jewish theology to advance a Christian's career became increasingly difficult in Spain as Jewish communities theoretically vanished into the Christian populace. When formerly Jewish scholars attempted to show their devotion to Christianity by pointing to Christianity's Jewish roots, they were persecuted for Judaizing. In this environment, no scholars were willing to openly use Jewish exegesis for Christian purposes. Many Jewish converts to Christianity who adamantly disavowed Judaism were themselves subject to persecution in the kingdoms of Spain. This raises the question as to what made the situation in France different than the situation in Spain. As argued above, Aquinas was influenced by Maimonides. Aquinas made no positive references to Maimonides, even though he was known to the Church in France. Therefore, it is likely that he followed a similar path to the scholars of late medieval Spain.

However, other Scholastic scholars and near contemporaries of Aquinas had a range of opinions about the Jews. Peter Comestor was born about one hundred twenty-five years before Aquinas and shortly after the French pogroms of the First Crusade. Comestor used Jewish exegesis much in the same way as Bede, but focusing on history instead of exegesis.<sup>139</sup> He, along with his contemporary, Hugh of St. Victor, not only

---

<sup>139</sup> Ari Geiger, "*Historia Judaica*: Petrus Comestor and His Jewish Sources," 127.

used Jewish exegesis, but consulted Jews in their research.<sup>140</sup> Unlike Comestor or Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Abelard's views were more similar to Aquinas' treatment of Jewish scholarship. Abelard openly dismissed Jewish scholarship as lacking in reason.<sup>141</sup> While Aquinas' use of Maimonides reveals that he did not think that Jews were lacking in reason, his refusal to admit to using Maimonides reveals that he was aware of controversy in using Jewish ideologies in his work.

Two situations emerged in Spain and France regarding the persecution and mass conversion of Jews. These two situations regarding pogroms against the Jews of France and the Jews of Spain were different in scope and how they affected Christian scholarship. Since foreigners predominantly perpetrated the pogroms of France, Jewish reactions could have been different than those of Spain.<sup>142</sup> Instead of neighbors attacking neighbors, the persecutors in France were crusaders. Therefore, the persecutors did not play as prominent a role in the French Christians' world as the Spanish Christians'.

In the case of the Aragonese pogroms of 1391, the Christians persecuting the Jews were locals displeased with their king. By attacking the Jews, who were owned by the king as *servi regis*, they were in fact attacking the king's authority.<sup>143</sup> Therefore, one group of persecutors was influenced by religious zeal as they moved through the area, while the other had political motivations and was embedded into the community. The transitory nature of the pogroms of the First Crusade allowed the Jews of France to

---

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>141</sup> Eileen C. Sweeney, "Abelard and the Jews," in *Rethinking Abelard: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Babette S. Hellemans, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 229 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 44.

<sup>142</sup> Susan L. Einbinder, *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) 17.

<sup>143</sup> Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths*, 77.

solidify their community and create a mythos surrounding their persecution.<sup>144</sup>

Additionally, they did less to create animosity between the Jews and Christians of France, as compared to the attacks in Spain.

These Jewish myths came in the form of martyrologies. They allowed the Jews of France and Germany to have heroes they could unify around. The Sephardic Jews of Aragon did not have that same fate. The myths that evolved out of the pogrom of 1391 were created by Christians celebrating the miraculous conversions of all the Jews of the various towns in the kingdom.<sup>145</sup> This marginalized and demonized the remaining Jews in Aragon. When Aragonese Christians viewed their Jewish neighbors, they saw either converts who apostatized, or Jews who had resisted the miracles that had previously occurred. This demonization of Jews, coupled with a growing sense of unease of losing what made Christians special, forced the Aragonese Christians to become suspicious of the newly converted.<sup>146</sup> Therefore, any form of Judaism, especially when connected to Christianity, was condemned in Spain.

However, the Jews of France maintained their community and relative marginalization after their time of intense persecution. This allowed the French Christians to see their Jewish neighbors as non-threatening, and they continued to use them for exegetical purposes. French Jews may have regarded their French Christian neighbors with less suspicion than the Iberian Jews of the late fourteenth century did with their neighbors, since they played less of a role in the pogroms of the late eleventh century.

---

<sup>144</sup> Einbinder, *Beautiful Death*, 20.

<sup>145</sup> Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths*, 81.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

The pogroms of the fourteenth century marked an end to elite Christians using Jewish theology in many parts of Europe. Prior to the fourteenth century, Hebraism had spread to the far reaches of Western Europe. In Angevin England, scholars in the high medieval period joined the forefront of the usage of Hebrew to study the Old Testament.<sup>147</sup> Much like their French counterparts, English Hebraists learned and studied Hebrew and Jewish exegesis from Jewish and formerly Jewish scholars. Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts show that Christian scholars were most interested in Jewish interpretations from the book of Psalms.<sup>148</sup> However, as local and kingdom-wide pogroms became increasingly common, Jewish theology became increasingly tied to Judaizing.<sup>149</sup> Therefore, those who tied their Christianity to Judaism were at risk of persecution along with the Jews.

## **Conclusion**

Bede, Thomas Aquinas, and Friar Paul are dissimilar in their scholarship and views of Judaism. Bede was an early medieval exegete who saw Jewish theology as a method to advance his standing amongst his monastic peers. Aquinas and Paul Christian were both thirteenth-century Dominicans, yet their views on Judaism were not congruent. Thomas Aquinas was a philosopher who did not explicitly condemn the Jews but kept them at arm's length due to the political climate of the thirteenth century. Paul Christian was the most polemical of these three Christians. He openly engaged with Judaism, but

---

<sup>147</sup> Eva De Visscher, "An *Ave Maria* in Hebrew: the Transmission of Hebrew Learning from Jewish to Christian Scholars in Medieval England," in *Christians and Jews in Angevin England: The York Massacre of 1190, Narratives and Contexts*, ed. Sarah Rees Jones and Sethina Watson (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2013), 174.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>149</sup> Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths*, 164.

his engagement was not for understanding his religion or the world around him. Instead, it was to eliminate Judaism.

Despite the lack of similarities regarding how they used Jewish writings, there is remarkable consistency amongst Christian elites in regards to the fact that they appropriated Jewish theology for their own glory. Bede deftly used the Hebrew Truth to create highly complex exegetical tracts and defend himself from charges of heresy. By doing so, Bede reshaped the way the English interacted with the Bible and figures within it. While the beginning of the schism between Jewish and Christian theology can be found in the Scholastic Movement, there was still an element of Hebraism in the movement. Aquinas, who shied away from Jewish theology, still secretly used the works of Maimonides to develop his own theological works. His philosophical and theological works defined late medieval theology. Friar Paul successfully used the theology found in Jewish extra-biblical texts to gain King James of Aragon's favor and patronage for his missionary efforts. While less successful in using Jewish theology to shape the medieval period, Paul Christian's polemics are emblematic of how medieval Christianity began distancing itself from Judaism while still engaging with Jewish texts. Therefore, throughout the medieval period, ambitious Christian scholars constantly used Jewish texts as keys to fulfilling their ambitions.

## Chapter 2: The Thirteenth Century and the Exchange of Culture

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were times of great change in Europe and the Middle East. Wars between the two dominant religions were raging across the Iberian Peninsula and the Holy Land. Additionally, persecution of minorities increased in Christian lands. Despite this rise in persecution, cultural exchanges between Christians and Jews reached a peak in this period of increased tension. These exchanges were not a one-to-one transference of knowledge and culture. Instead, the Christians used and discarded aspects of Jewish culture as they saw fit. While this happened in all areas of culture and knowledge, one of the noteworthy places in which this occurred was Christian views on homosexuality. Christian homosexuality briefly became more visible during the thirteenth century due to interactions with Jewish ideas on the subject, but instead of using a direct transference of the more tolerant aspects of Jewish views of homosexuality, Christians used the same understanding to ridicule and eventually persecute their homosexual peers.

It is difficult to define sexuality and gender in the pre-modern world. Words such as “gay”, “homosexual”, “transgender”, “lesbian”, “bisexual”, and “heterosexual” did not exist in the ancient and medieval worlds.<sup>150</sup> Throughout the historiographical debate on pre-modern sexuality, there have been several different approaches to the question of how to define pre-modern sexuality. The scholars who birthed the field of study, such as John Boswell and Judith Brown, took little issue defining medieval and early modern

---

<sup>150</sup> James Schultz, “Heterosexuality as a Threat to Medieval Studies,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15, no. 1 (2006), 14. James Schultz argues that if the term “homosexuality” should be avoided due to being anachronistic, then so should the term “heterosexual,” for if people did not understand one of those terms, they would have no reason to understand the other.

people's sexualities in terms of being "gay" or "lesbian", although both of them admitted that sexuality was unclear in the pre-modern and early modern worlds.<sup>151</sup> However, those terms are anachronistic, as there is little to no evidence that these pre-modern people understood their own sexuality in terms of sexual identity. LGBTQ people undoubtedly existed before the creation of the terms used to describe them. Likewise, homosexual acts did not begin with the creation of the word homosexual. The lack of medieval conceptions of sexual identity does not mean that these conceptions should be entirely avoided by historians, nor does it mean they should be embraced completely. Ruth Mazo Karras and Daniel Lorenzo Boyd argue that sexual identities did exist in the medieval period, but they were not based on sexual orientation. Instead, they argue that sexual identities were based on the role sex played in a person's life. Prostitution and celibacy were both considered sexual identities under Karras and Boyd's interpretation of medieval sexuality.<sup>152</sup> Therefore, terms like "homosexual relations" and "homosexuality" should be used cautiously with the understanding that they were not used by medieval people.

### **Jewish Religious Texts on Homosexuality**

In order to understand how thirteenth-century Christian scholars used Jewish conceptions about homosexuality, it is important to understand what those Jewish conceptions were. Jewish conceptions of homosexuality were not homogenous during the medieval period. Therefore, to understand the multitude of conceptions, one must explore

---

<sup>151</sup> Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 42. Judith Brown, *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 17.

<sup>152</sup> David Lorenzo Boyd and Ruth Mazo Karras, "The Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth-Century London," *GLQ: A Journal for Gay and Lesbian Studies* 1 (1995): 481.

both their religious and secular texts. Because the religious texts had some influence on the secular texts, it is important to begin the exploration with them.

Jewish religious texts say remarkably little on the subject of homosexuality. There is little written condemning homosexual acts and even less praising them. The most well-known of the early Jewish texts condemning homosexuality comes from Leviticus 18:22, which describes male homosexual activity as an “abomination” or “detestable,” depending on the translation. John Boswell softens the rhetoric by claiming the proper translation for this word is simply “unclean.”<sup>153</sup> However, even with Boswell’s attempt to rescue homosexuality within the Judeo-Christian tradition, this passage appears to be anti-homosexual. It would be expected that from a text with clearly anti-homosexual sentiments, Jewish exegetical texts and later works would latch onto this anti-homosexual attitude and increase its intensity. However, that was not the case as the anti-homosexual intensity decreased in Jewish writing throughout the ancient and medieval worlds.

The relative silence on homosexuality is one of the most surprising aspects of the foundational Jewish theological documents. One of the foundational works of the Kabbalah tradition, the *Zohar*, has remarkably little to say on the subject. The *Zohar*, which explores the Torah verse by verse, goes into great detail in its exegesis on the various illicit forms of sex listed in Leviticus 18. However, the authors of the *Zohar* chose to stop their exegesis of chapter eighteen after discussing the prohibition on sex with a menstruant. This occurs in verse nineteen, only three verses before the section on male homosexual relations. Only four of the different types of transgressions in this chapter are left out of the *Zohar* before it moves onto exegesis for Leviticus chapter

---

<sup>153</sup> Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 100.

nineteen.<sup>154</sup> They are: having sexual relations with a neighbor's wife, sacrificing children to Molech, male-to-male homosexual relations, and bestiality. The silence on these four subjects is striking considering the plethora of explanations given to some of the other sexual transgressions.

Out of the four transgressions not listed by the *Zohar*- the only one that does not appear to need much discussion- is the second transgression, namely sacrificing children to Molech. The *Zohar* was most likely written in medieval Spain, when Jews were living amongst Muslims and Christians; therefore, it is unlikely that passages dedicated to the rejection of human sacrifice would have as much importance as when Leviticus was written.<sup>155</sup> The other three transgressions, all of which are sexual in nature, would fit nicely with the previous exegesis on the other illicit sexual actions. However, this chapter is not the only section of Leviticus that discusses sexual transgressions. Leviticus chapter twenty also discusses similar sexual transgressions. The thirteenth verse focuses on male-to-male homosexual relations.<sup>156</sup> Unlike the previous section in the *Zohar* on sexual transgressions, which discusses most transgressions, this whole chapter is missing from the exegesis. These oversights on the part of the authors of the *Zohar* cannot be accidental. If the author had skipped over one verse that describes homosexuality, it could be considered an accident. However, doing so twice make it appear like the author did so on purpose.

---

<sup>154</sup> *The Zohar*, vol. 5, trans. Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 87-9.

<sup>155</sup> Joseph Dan, *The Heart and the Fountain: An Anthology of Jewish Mystical Experiences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8-9.

<sup>156</sup> Lev. 20:13 "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them." (KJV)

There are two possibilities as to why chapter twenty is conspicuously absent and why the sexual transgressions left out in the commentary on the early chapter were not explained. Regarding chapter twenty, it is likely that the author who wrote the *Zohar* did not feel a need to readdress issues he had just analyzed. However, the first instance of the missing condemnation of homosexuality is harder to rationalize. One potential explanation is that, in some places, Jewish society tended to assume heterosexuality was the norm.<sup>157</sup> However, Spanish Judaism was willing to accommodate homosexual behavior in its secular poetry, so it is possible that the author of *The Zohar* left out the condemnation of homosexual behavior because he was comfortable with it.

Unlike homosexuality, which is largely absent from Jewish religious texts, ancient Jewish texts acknowledge other non-heteronormative identities with relative frequency. One second-century source, *The Mishnah*, goes into several short discussions about people of “doubtful” and “double” sex. Neither of these terms, “double sex” or “doubtful sex”, are explained in much detail. People of double sex are given one relatively long passage dedicated to them. This section occurs at the end of the first division, which focuses on tithes. Therefore, a long passage on double-sexed people appears somewhat out of place. This passage breaks down the sages’ understanding of double-sexed individuals into four distinct categories: how they are like men, how they are like women, how they are like both men and women, and how they are like neither men nor women.<sup>158</sup> Double-sexed people, according to the *Mishnah*, are neither male nor female, but must still follow the religious precepts designed for men and women. Therefore, like a man,

---

<sup>157</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, “The Aerial Battle in the *Toledot Yeshu* and Sodomy in the Late Middle Ages,” *Medieval Encounters* 19 (2013): 522.

<sup>158</sup> *The Mishnah*, trans. Herbert Danby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 98.

they are not allowed to be in the same room alone with a woman, but like a woman they are not allowed to be alone with a man. These religious rulings are not condemning as they do not present double-sexed individuals as abominations, but due to the limited scope of their decision-making, the Talmudic laws presented here are discriminatory.

This same passage gives the closest account to a definition for what the ancient sages mean when they describe people of a doubtful sex.<sup>159</sup> Double-sexed and doubtful-sexed peoples are often lumped together in *The Mishnah*. However, they do not refer to the same thing. Whereas double-sexed individuals are understood to be both male and female, doubtful-sexed people are not. Instead doubtful-sexed individuals are either male or female. The sages of *The Mishnah* treat doubtful-sexed peoples as serving in a transitory space. At times they are men and at times they are women.<sup>160</sup> However, doubtful-sexed individuals are not understood to be men and women at the same time, for then they would fall under the category of double-sexed people.

Double sex and doubtful sex are problematic terms for modern scholars. As stated earlier, modern vocabulary relating to sex and sexuality cannot accurately be placed upon medieval or ancient societies, as they are naturally anachronistic for those periods. However, the terms double sex and doubtful sex are equally problematic for modern scholars for the opposite reason. They are not terms used in modern society. However, the ancient sages, and later Maimonides, did not give detailed explanations as to what the difference between these two minority genders and sexualities entailed. Their explanations are short and lack specifics; so modern scholars are stuck trying to define these terms according to their own understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality. For the

---

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

extent of this argument, double-sexed individuals appear to be in some way comparable to modern notions of intersex individuals, whereas doubtful-sexed people might be similar to modern conceptions of transgender people. However, this is speculative and should not be taken as irrefutable truth. Even so, it is dangerous to place these modern ideas onto ancient and medieval terminology.

These terms appear most often in passing. One such passage in *The Mishnah* that refers to double and doubtful sexed peoples states that, when suffering from the flux, “to one that is of doubtful-sex or of double-sex the stringencies that bear in the case of a man and the stringencies that bear in the case of a woman both apply.”<sup>161</sup> This passage states nothing relating to the state of the souls of these individuals. Therefore, these people who may have been intersex, were not seen as abominations. However, the rules created within *The Mishnah* were created with a gender binary as the norm, so anybody who did not fit this gender binary was an exception to the rules. This gender binary reveals the state of Jewish thought towards non-binary, and possibly homosexual, individuals. Ancient Jewish intellectuals did not see non-heteronormative individuals as standard humans; they were outside the common understanding of how people functioned. This did not cause these Jewish sages to view them as monstrous in the way later medieval Christians understood “the hermaphrodite.”<sup>162</sup> These double- and doubtful-sexed people were discriminated against because their path to holiness was more stringent due to not falling within the gender binary created by the sages.

---

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 768.

<sup>162</sup> George Rousseau, “Policing the Anus: Stuprum and Sodomy According to Paolo Zacchia’s Forensic Medicine,” in *Sciences of Homosexuality*, ed. Kenneth Borris and George Rousseau (London: Routledge, 2008), 85.

Contrary to *The Mishnah*, Maimonides' legal interpretations are undoubtedly and purposefully discriminatory towards people modern scholars would consider LGBTQ.

Without a doubt, both Maimonides' work and the work of the ancient sages are problematic in relation to sexual minorities, but Maimonides' work is much more forceful and noticeable given the context of the time and culture in which it was written.

In *The Code of Maimonides, Book X: The Book of Cleanness*, Maimonides has a single section focused on double sex and doubtful sex individuals. This passage reads as follows:

To those of doubtful sex or of double sex apply both the stringencies affecting a man and the stringencies affecting a woman: they are subject to uncleanness through red issue like a woman and through white issue like a man. But their uncleanness remains in doubt; therefore on their account heave offering and Hallowed Things need not be burnt, and on their account none is culpable for uncleanness respecting the Temple and its Hallowed Things. But if they suffer both a white issue and a red issue, we do burn heave offering and Hallowed Things on their account, although on their account none is culpable for entering into the Temple or partaking of its Hallowed Things; for it is said, *Both male and female shall ye put out* (Num 5:3): that is, they shall not be put out unless the uncleanness is that of one assuredly male or that of one assuredly female.<sup>163</sup>

From this passage, certain observations can be made. In the *Mishnah*, the authors' understanding of sex and gender was based on a gender binary. Doubtful and double sex people were placed within a schema of a gender binary. Under this schema they had no place in which they readily belonged. Whereas parts of *The Mishnah* could be considered attempting to use neutral assessments of the philosophical implications of people who are double sex or doubtful sex, Maimonides does not leave questions about his assumptions of them. Maimonides' notion that double- and doubtful-sexed people could be made

---

<sup>163</sup> Moses Maimonides, *The Code of Maimonides, Book 10: The Book of Cleanness*, trans. Herbert Danby, Yale Judaica Series 8 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 207-8.

unclean in the ways both women and men could (white issue, or semen for men, and red issue, or menstruation for women) comes almost directly from *The Mishnah*.

However, the ways in which Maimonides and the sages addressed these issues shows a difference in how they handled these philosophical questions. The sages' problematic response comes from the fact that they want to understand the "true sex" of people of doubtful sex.<sup>164</sup> If people of doubtful sex can be considered transgender people under modern conceptions of gender, then the sages were stuck trying to understand people in terms of their sex assigned at birth. While this is problematic, Maimonides seems to be inherently exclusive in his understanding of these minority groups. Maimonides is much more focused on whether people of doubtful or double sex are assuredly male or female than the sages of old. This is noteworthy for he came from an era in which the sexuality of Judaism was much more fluid.

However, some passages in *The Mishnah* appear to be persecutory towards homosexual and double-sex individuals. In Yebamoth 8.6, *The Mishnah* describes marriages of priests and how that affects who can eat of the Heave-offering.<sup>165</sup> If a woman marries a priest who was a "eunuch by nature" or one that was double sex, she would be allowed to eat of the Heave-offering, which was only to be eaten by those of the priestly household who were ritually clean. However, a woman "of doubtful sex" who was found to be a man "when the impediment was removed" may not eat of the offering.<sup>166</sup> This passage appears to suggest that people of doubtful sex may be similar to transgender individuals, and they were expected to be their gender assigned at birth. This

---

<sup>164</sup> *The Mishnah*, 230.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

would fit with the earlier description in which people of doubtful sex are sometimes considered men and sometimes considered women, but never both at the same time. People of doubtful sex, if they are found to be a man as stated above, could only marry women, for if they were found with a man they would be stoned.

While these ancient Jewish sources are anti-homosexual, their anti-homosexuality comes from their heterosexist nature. Heterosexism is the assumption that all individuals are heterosexual.<sup>167</sup> Throughout *The Mishnah*, sex is presumed to take place across gender lines. It discusses heterosexual relations on numerous occasions, but fails to address the same questions regarding homosexual relations. This could be a result of *The Mishnah*'s focus. This book explores and extrapolates religious laws found in the Pentateuch. Jewish laws are in and of themselves heterosexist in nature. Sex and marriage, according to Jewish law, served primarily as ways to reproduce and continue the line of Abraham.<sup>168</sup> This shows up most obviously in who could demand sex in a Jewish marriage. It was considered a man's sacred duty to have sexual relations with his wife. However, it was not his place to demand that sex occur, but rather his wife's place to do so.<sup>169</sup> If sex was primarily meant for procreation, inherently non-procreative sex such as prostitution or homosexual relations would naturally not fit into early Jewish ideas of what constituted licit sexual conduct.<sup>170</sup>

### **Sephardic Love Poetry**

---

<sup>167</sup> Dale B. Martin, "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32," in *The Boswell Thesis*, ed. Mathew Kuefler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 130.

<sup>168</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 52.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-57.

Medieval Judaism lacked tonal unity with regards to homosexuality. Religiously, there has always been at least some rejection of non-heteronormative sexual relations. From the writing of the Hebrew Bible onwards, there has been a connection between homosexual male relations and sin. Some medieval Jewish scholars did not deviate from this course in their religious writings. Religious Jewish scholars were not nearly as concerned with sexuality as their Christian neighbors, so questions about homosexual behavior did not occur in Jewish religious texts with the frequency it may have appeared in Christian texts. However, medieval Jewish secular love poetry heavily focused on homosexual and homoerotic love. This medieval Jewish love poetry acted as though the religious restrictions on homosexual actions and attraction did not exist.

This may have been a result of the earlier religious texts. Since *The Mishnah* explored deviations from the presumed heterosexual cisgendered norms of ancient Jewish society, it may have paved the way for acceptance of homosexuality in medieval Jewish literature. While the extra-biblical texts were not favorable to these breaks from the accepted norms, they admitted to the existence of sexualities and genders outside of the heterosexual gender binary. This left space in the Jewish literary world for the creation of homoerotic poetry.

Ancient Jewish poetry lacks the romanticism of later medieval courtly poetry.<sup>171</sup> However, this lack of romanticism does not equal a lack of love. Daniel Boyarin argues that traditional Jewish works display a different type of love than Christian European

---

<sup>171</sup> Joseph Tobi, *Between Hebrew and Arabic Poetry: Studies in Spanish Medieval Hebrew Poetry*, Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 3.

texts.<sup>172</sup> Courtly poetry's love is that of romance and instantaneous passion. It is a love born and fueled by violence and action. This violence and action is missing from the Song of Songs, an ancient Jewish love poem. The opening of the Song of Songs reveals a very passionate love, as it begins by saying "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine."<sup>173</sup> This passage is without a doubt both passionate and erotic; however, it is lacking the violence and power associated with later texts. The Song of Songs reveals a mutual love, as the first person given a speaking role is a woman counted amongst the virgins.<sup>174</sup> This mutuality is played with throughout the whole of the text, revealing a softer side of love.

This softness is missing from medieval Jewish texts. These medieval texts of love turned to more violent imagery. In Yitzhaq Ibn Mar Sha'ul's early eleventh-century poem "A Faun Sought in Spain," the author uses much harsher descriptions of the boy he loves. Ibn Mar Sha'ul's lover is described as killing and slaying him throughout the course of the poem. Love is shown to be an injustice and a hell that Ibn Mar Sha'ul needs rescuing from.<sup>175</sup> The violence of this poem is shocking in comparison to that of the Song of Songs.

However, the break between the Song of Songs and Ibn Mar Sha'ul is not complete. One of the hallmarks of Hebrew love poetry is the use of animal imagery. In the Song of Songs, the male speaker uses animals to describe the beauty of the woman he

---

<sup>172</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 48.

<sup>173</sup> Song of Songs 1:2 (KJV).

<sup>174</sup> Song of Songs 1:3-5 (KJV).

<sup>175</sup> Yitzhaq ibn Mar Sha'ul, "A Faun Sought in Spain," in *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain, 950-1492*, trans. and ed. Peter Cole, the Lockert Library of Poetry in Translation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 28-9.

loves. Her eyes are compared to doves, her hair to goats, her teeth to sheep, and her breasts are twinned roes “which feed among the lilies.”<sup>176</sup> Ibn Mar Sha’ul uses animal imagery to describe his beloved in a much more simplified manner than the author of Song of Songs. His object of affection is compared to a faun.<sup>177</sup> It is clear from reading these two works that Ibn Mar Sha’ul was at least somewhat influenced by the much earlier Song of Songs; however, there is enough of a difference between the two styles that he was not just basing his style upon that of the Hebrew Bible’s love poetry.

Ibn Mar Sha’ul’s poetry was not unique amongst his contemporaries within Muslim-controlled Spain. His poetry in many ways matched the Islamic and Jewish love poetry of his time. Medieval Muslim authors held similar beliefs regarding homosexual relations, specifically those of older men and beardless youths.<sup>178</sup> It is within this context that medieval Jewish scholars began turning their poetic attention to young boys in this violently subversive rhetoric. Scholars have debated the meaning of this poetry, arguing about whether or not it is homoerotic at its core. Joseph Tobi argues that Jewish seemingly homoerotic poetry was not necessarily homoerotic.<sup>179</sup> Tobi’s argument is that some of these poems are intended to discuss and describe homoerotic feelings, but others are just created to fit into a preexisting genre of poetry. This argument appears faulty at best; even if some of the poetry was not about real people, it does not mean the emotions

---

<sup>176</sup> Song of Songs 4:1-5 (KJV)

<sup>177</sup> Ibn Mar Sha’ul, “A Faun Sought in Spain,” 28.

<sup>178</sup> Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 26. These Islamic poems and stories regarding these pederastic relationships are presented in a playful and consensual manner. However, these relationships can be interpreted as predatory and exploitative. In Islamic sources, the older man typically uses his power and influence to have sexual relations with a student. Islamic scholars even claimed that men were naturally drawn to young men’s physical appearance as a means of procreating knowledge.

<sup>179</sup> Tobi, *Between Hebrew and Arabic Poetry*, 144.

behind said poems were not. Likewise, assuming a lack of feeling in these poems only trivializes their importance and reduces their usefulness in understanding changes within medieval Jewish society.

However, there is not consensus about whether these pieces of poetry were about real people. A group of scholars believe this poetic tradition represents an allegory rather than being actual love poems to actual people. Tobi states that out of all the Hebrew poetry from Spain, only three authors wrote poems about real people.<sup>180</sup> In his argument, these poems represented an ideal or a stereotype of courtly figures. Tobi connects the erotic poetry of the Spanish Jews to a reflection of the Jew's relationship with God.<sup>181</sup> However, this makes very little sense in relation to the Jewish homoerotic poetry explored earlier. In the poem by Ibn Mar Sha'ul, he describes his love in self-destructive terminology. Chasing after the boy he loved caused him immense pain and suffering. This pain came from not being in a sexual relationship with the boy in question. This does not sound like an allegory for God, but rather a poem that states what it means. This poem already uses metaphorical language to describe the boy, as he is never referred to by name nor is he referred to as human. These animal metaphors would not need to be used to represent a boy who represented God unless Ibn Mar Sha'ul was trying to create a double meaning to his poem. In this way, it seems clear that Jewish homoerotic poetry focused on boys whom the authors loved and not on God.

However, this poetry, and growing acceptance of homosexual behavior amongst Jewish communities in Muslim-controlled areas, was not without some backlash. Moses

---

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 145.

Maimonides was an especially harsh critic of *sevi* poetry.<sup>182</sup> He fervently condemned poetry and pederasty in his writings. His puritanical stances regarding sex and leisure show that there was not a consensus amongst Jewish intellectuals relating to homosexuality. The two groups of scholars can be broken into two camps. The first camp explored everything through religious lenses. These scholars, such as Maimonides, explored everything through the eyes of religion. The second group, with people such as Judah Halevi and Ibn Mar Sha'ul, seem to fall into the aforementioned notion that actions defined what was sinful. If this is the case, Ibn Mar Sha'ul's painful longing for his beloved makes sense.

### **The Thirteenth Century and Homosexuality**

The thirteenth century is known for being the turning point in the medieval period. Before the thirteenth century, the medieval period has been seen by scholars as being relatively tolerant. Under this historiographical theory, Christians, Jews, and Muslims lived in relative harmony in Spain.<sup>183</sup> Boswell argues that a homosexual subculture thrived in Europe in before the thirteenth century.<sup>184</sup> However, the thirteenth century marked a brief period of both tolerance and extreme discrimination.<sup>185</sup>

---

<sup>182</sup> Norman Roth, "'Fawn of My Delights': Boy-Love in Hebrew and Arabic Verse," *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury, Garland Medieval Casebook 3 (New York: Garland, 1991), 160. *Sevi* poetry is a genre of medieval Jewish poetry that was homoerotic in nature.

<sup>183</sup> Américo Castro, *The Spaniards: An Introduction to Their History*, trans. Willard F. King and Selma Margaretten (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 59.

<sup>184</sup> Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 243.

<sup>185</sup> Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 132. R.I. Moore was one of the earliest scholars to promote the thirteenth century as the point at which medieval society became focused on persecuting minorities. He argues that persecution emerged out of the creation of a bureaucratic class and the professionalization of power.

Before the thirteenth century, homosexual behavior is difficult to distinguish from homosocial behavior. In a poem written by Alcuin to Arno of Salzburg, he writes with unbridled passion towards his friend. Outside of one phrase, there is nothing explicitly sexual about Alcuin's letter.<sup>186</sup> In the only passage that could be understood as sexual, Alcuin describes licking his friend's inmost parts. With the rest of the poem being sexless, this could be metaphorical in nature. While it is entirely possible that Alcuin partook in homoerotic relations, as scholars such as John Boswell argue, it appears to have been hidden in sexless poetry and metaphor.<sup>187</sup> Homosexual individuals undoubtedly existed both before and after the thirteenth century, but during the early medieval period their feelings were hidden in much of the Christian West.

Another such example of hidden potentially homosexual love comes from Walafrid Strabo in the ninth century. In a poem to his friend, the cleric Liutger, Walafrid admits that there had been "little expression of love" from either party.<sup>188</sup> However, he believed that he had made an impression upon Liutger. Walafrid Strabo wrote two poems to Liutger; they both express a longing that cannot be fulfilled. Therefore, much like Alcuin's poem to Arno, Walafrid longs for something he cannot have. These two poems create the sense that homosexual relations and feelings could and did occur in early medieval Europe, but they remained hidden and kept private from the outside world.

Latin Christendom had much stricter customs relating to sex and sexuality than the Jewish world. Most rabbinical sources focused on when sex was permissible rather

---

<sup>186</sup> Alcuin, "To Arno of Salzburg," in *Medieval Latin Poems of Male Love and Friendship*, trans. Thomas Stehling (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 15.

<sup>187</sup> Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 189-91.

<sup>188</sup> Walafrid Strabo, "To the Cleric Liutger," in Stehling, *Medieval Latin Poems of Male Love and Friendship*, 17.

than with whom it was permissible, based on the cleanliness of the people performing the action. Christianity, however, had many strict rulings as to when, with whom, and how people were able to have sex.<sup>189</sup> Sex was prevented based on the time of year, what the social status of the people having sex was, and whether or not it was done in order to have children. This strict sexual structure was not nearly as present in Jewish societies due to Christians having a negative view on sex in general. This rigid understanding of sex did not affect all of Christianity equally. Priests and other clerical figures could not have sex at all, while lay people had sexual regulations based on the time of year and prostitutes had their sex regulated by the religion of their sexual partners.<sup>190</sup> However, these sexual prohibitions were not uniformly enforced. Once the thirteenth century rolled around, sexual mores became enforced with increasing regularity, while religious and other minorities faced increasing persecution.

The thirteenth century is a notorious time in the history of Latin Christendom. John Boswell famously pointed to the thirteenth century as the century in which the gay subculture was supposedly quenched by the religious and political elite.<sup>191</sup> Beginning in the twelfth century a hardening of religious lines began to emerge.<sup>192</sup> By the thirteenth

---

<sup>189</sup> Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, 240-1.

<sup>190</sup> Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths*, 100.

<sup>191</sup> Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 269-70.

<sup>192</sup> Carlos Espí Forcén, “El Corista de ‘Engraterra’: ¿San Guillermo de Norwich, San Hugo de Lincoln o Santo Dominguito de Val de Zaragoza?,” *Miscelánea Medieval Muciana* 32 (2008): 56. John M. McCulloh, “Jewish Ritual Murder: William of Norwich, Thomas of Monmouth, and the Early Dissemination of the Myth,” *Speculum* 72, no. 3 (Jul., 1997): 702. Less than a century earlier, William of Norwich died, marking the first instance of accusations of blood libel against the Jews. As the story goes, William of Norwich was a young boy from the English town of Norwich who was found dead in 1144. The townsfolk of Norwich ended up blaming a group of Jews for the death of William and killed several of them. Blood libel became an important part of Christian-Jewish relations during the thirteenth century. A case similar to William of Norwich’s

century, laws throughout the Latin West scoured minorities. Lepers, prostitutes, and Jews all faced increased scrutiny by the Christian majority.<sup>193</sup> From the beginning of the thirteenth century to the middle of the same century, the crown of France put an increasing amount of pressure on the Jewish community by switching from regulating the lending of money to completely banning the taking of interest completely.<sup>194</sup> Additionally, during this century inquisitors began travelling across Italy, France, and Spain looking for heretics.

Despite, and sometimes because of, this increase in hardening of religious lines the thirteenth century saw an increase in Christian-Jewish interaction. One of the foremost examples of this paradoxical relationship is the Dominican friar Paul Christian. As explored in the previous chapter, Friar Paul attempted to convert the Jews of Barcelona by showing how the Talmud pointed to Jesus. However, he only tried this method because of an increased persecution of the Jews.<sup>195</sup> A merging and trading of cultures must have occurred as the two societies came together. Richard White, in his groundbreaking study *The Middle Ground*, argues that when two societies meet, there can be, and often is, destruction. However, this destruction is often mirrored by the creation

---

murder appears in the *Cantigas de Santa María*, a thirteenth-century group of liturgical poetry and stories. In cases of blood libel, the severing of ties between the Jews and Christians went beyond accusations of murder, encompassing also a mockery of Christianity, which may have been more important to the Christians writing these accounts. Therefore, these texts reveal that the long thirteenth century marks a period of decline in the relationship between Christians and Jews in Europe. Likewise, the early twelfth century saw the first major pogroms against the Jews.

<sup>193</sup> Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, 4.

<sup>194</sup> Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 276.

<sup>195</sup> J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 322. In the thirteenth century, popes condemned the Jews for trying to supplant the Pentateuch with the Talmud. That allowed Christians to preach to Jews, as they no longer served as the “Jewish witness” since they had rejected the Old Testament.

of new societies.<sup>196</sup> In middle ground societies, both of the joining societies find accommodations within a space that is at times violent and at times accommodating. The thirteenth century, especially in Spain and France, served as a middle ground between Jews and Christians. In this shared space, Spanish Jews shared their tolerance of homosexuality to the Christian populace. It was not completely accepted, but in the texts rejecting it, there is evidence that homosexuality in thirteenth-century Spain and France saw an increase in visibility.

In Spain, King Alfonso X passed laws restricting the power and authority of Jews and Muslims.<sup>197</sup> These laws restricted the roles that Jews could play in the royal court. He banned Jews from serving as his court doctors and reduced the role they played in court politics. However, this period was not completely bad for Jews in the royal court of Alfonso X of Castile. During his reign, translation efforts began throughout Castile. These schools of translation often relied on Jewish and Muslim scholars to provide the base translation upon which other scholars would root their work. Therefore, Jews in Spain stood at a precarious crossroads, for while they were needed in order for Alfonso X's goals to be realized, they were increasingly pushed out of power and the influence of the king. So while Jewish political power was fading, Jewish cultural power saw a momentary sharp increase.

Beyond increased persecution of the Jews, the thirteenth century saw an increase in laws against sodomy and other non-heteronormative sexual activities. It was in this time that homosexuality first joined the ranks of deadly sins. Towards the end of the twelfth century, Peter Cantor urged the Third Lateran Council (1179) to rule on

---

<sup>196</sup> White, *The Middle Ground*, xxv-xxvi.

<sup>197</sup> Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 116.

homosexual behavior, while he included sodomy as being a deadly sin on the same seriousness as murder in his own religious tract.<sup>198</sup> By the beginning of the thirteenth century, many of Peter Cantor's ideas began gaining traction amongst the canon lawyers. Sodomy became increasingly associated with male-to-male homosexual behavior. Sodomy originally had a plethora of meanings under the Catholic Church. It could mean same-sex male relations, heterosexual anal sex, or any sort of sexual intercourse not sanctioned by the Church.<sup>199</sup> However, that began to change during the thirteenth century as sodomy became closely connected to homosexual behavior.<sup>200</sup>

Castilian legal works continued to follow the same direction in which that every other kingdom and principality seemed to be going. In many ways there is a disconnect between the poetic works of Alfonso X's reign and his legal work. The legal work follows the trend of the rest of Europe, hardening the religious and social lines while ostracizing minorities. The document in which this becomes most apparent is *Las Siete Partidas*. *Las Siete Partidas* is a legal code broken into seven different parts. Within this law code, written during the time of Alfonso X, great pains are taken to reduce the status of Jews in the kingdom of Castile.<sup>201</sup> One of the striking details about *Las Siete Partidas* is its use of Roman law.<sup>202</sup> The Kingdom of Castile originated from the remainder of the early medieval Visigothic kingdoms after the Islamic conquest of Iberia. Therefore, the laws of the Visigoths would have originally been Germanic common laws, closer to that

---

<sup>198</sup> Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 277.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>201</sup> Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 116.

<sup>202</sup> Marilyn Stone, *Marriage and Friendship in Medieval Spain: Social Relations According to the Fourth Partida of Alfonso X*, *American University Studies, Series II, Romance Languages and Literature*, 131 (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 7.

of England than the Roman Empire. However, Alfonso X chose to include Roman legal sources in his new law code due to the renewed interest in Roman law in the universities of Paris and Bologna.<sup>203</sup> Therefore, this part of the thirteenth century Castilian world originated in the Christian realms of France and Italy.

Within this larger consolidation of socio-religious power, accusations of sodomy became commonplace. Within the kingdom of Castile, Alfonso X outlawed accusations of sodomy.<sup>204</sup> These laws quite famously did not ban the act of sodomy, but rather accusing another person of sodomy. Other slurs banned under this law included: calling someone a cuckold, leper, Jew, or traitor for men, and whore, adulteress, or leper for women. Therefore, this law acted not as a law governing morality. Instead, it served as a law against libel. Josiah Blackmore notes that this law did not focus so much on the words, but rather upon one man made an accusation against another.<sup>205</sup>

It should be noted that, under this law, Jews and sodomites were considered equals. This is no coincidence, as Jews and sodomites were both often equated with heresy.<sup>206</sup> Later in the medieval period, Jews and sodomites became increasingly associated with each other. Therefore, this early association of general libelous insults blossomed into a belief that Jews were sodomites.

### **Christian Poetry and Homosexuality in the Thirteenth Century**

---

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>204</sup> Josiah Blackmore, "The Poets of Sodom," in *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S. Hutcheson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 197.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Marc Boone, "State Power and Illicit Sexuality: The Persecution of Sodomy in Late Medieval Bruges," *Journal of Medieval History* 22, no. 2 (1996): 139.

During the thirteenth century, increasingly open texts regarding homosexuality began to appear. Most of these texts were not laudatory regarding homosexual behavior in the way the earlier *sevi* poetry of the Jews of Spain was. Instead, they tended towards mockery and derision. However, something must have caused this new genre of poetry to emerge in Spain and France. Since there was an increased interaction between Christians and Jews in the thirteenth-century, it is likely this played a role in the development of this new, largely homophobic genre.

This genre emerged during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Written records show playful, yet harsh, poetry springing up in Spain around the same time as the cold legalistic works of Alfonso X. In the poetic and literary sources, sex became a site of conquest and humor. In this world of literature, sex became a proxy battleground for real conflicts. Yet these texts were not simply romanticized accounts of conversion through sexual prowess, as many religiously influenced sexual stories went. However, these quests and “humorous” anecdotes were not limited to heteronormative relationships. Homosexual anecdotes reveal a laxity within Spanish culture that was not seen in their laws or elsewhere in Europe.

Homoerotic poetry, and poetry exploring interactions with homosexual behavior, became relatively common in the thirteenth century. Such poetry could come in the form of praise of homosexual conquest or derision of those same actions. Since the Jews of Spain were relatively tolerant of homosexual and homoerotic poetry, it is possible that they tolerated homosexual behavior in their midst. Since Christians in France and Spain came in close intellectual contact with their Jewish neighbors, homosexual Christians may have felt more willing to reveal themselves when compared to earlier centuries.

Spanish Christians responded to this apparent increase in public homosexual activity by writing a series of mean-spirited poems regarding homosexuality in the thirteenth century. These poems, most of which come from the *Cantigas d'escarnho e mal dizer*, condemned homosexuality but lacked seriousness about what had become a very serious sin in the eyes of the Church. One such poem that had an anti-homosexual tint to it describes the narrator getting robbed one night. After leaving him naked on the street, his muggers call out to him, describing the narrator as a pathic.<sup>207</sup> This poetic story does not portray being a passive homosexual partner in a positive light. The accusation of such was used by the muggers to belittle the narrator (and it is implied he may have been raped). However, beyond its text, this poem reveals a different attitude towards homosexual acts. This poem is not a very serious poem. Despite the clear suffering the narrator is trying to portray, he also uses some levity in his writing. He allows the hope of his assaulters receiving the same fate he did as a punch line that appears to have been meant to be humorous.<sup>208</sup>

This poem reveals several important aspects about thirteenth-century Spain. It fits within the legal apparatus that stated that accusations of homosexuality were illegal. However, this poem does not take the claim as seriously as the law might suggest. Therefore, while the laws of the land may have discouraged homosexual behavior, this poem might suggest that the authors found these legal decrees somewhat silly. There is a

---

<sup>207</sup> Blackmore, "Poets of Sodom," 198.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 199. One thing modern scholars should remember when reading or reading about medieval texts is that humor is a property of culture. Therefore, what is humorous to modern audiences would most likely not have been found humorous by medieval individuals. Likewise, what medieval people found humorous would not be found humorous to modern audiences.

playfulness associated with sodomitical texts like this one that is intended to add lightness to the subject in the eyes of the readers.

Other poems in the *Cantigas d'escarnho e mal dizer* distance themselves from the homosexual acts described. One such poem, numbered 342, manages to be incredibly dismissive towards homosexuals while somewhat acknowledging their place in Spanish society. In this poem, the author, Pero da Ponte, describes how he writes about sodomites and their husbands.<sup>209</sup> However, he also describes how he hates this group of people, as he had been sexually assaulted by members of this community on several occasions. This case of assault is once again used for humorous purposes as the assaulter failed to penetrate and instead, merely hits his testicles against the author. Like the previous poem, in this one it is not difficult to determine the author's society's relationship with homosexuality. The author clearly places himself in a position in which he declares homosexuality abhorrent.<sup>210</sup> This is important, as da Ponte was himself believed by his contemporaries to be a participant in homosexual relationships. Blackmore believes da Ponte's abhorrence of homosexual behavior and denial of being passive during sex was a way to defend his masculinity.<sup>211</sup> However, regardless of da Ponte's intent, the poem also brings homosexual relationships to the forefront of society. They are described in a marital fashion. While he may have been mocking his poem's subjects, the notion of

---

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 205. This poem is unique in that it points to homosexuality as an identity. The first poem explored places the understanding of homosexuality through the lens of actions. The narrator discusses how his sexual identity is determined by what sexual act is forced upon him. However, in da Ponte's poem, there seems to be a larger focus on the people who are identified as homosexuals. This may indicate that the thirteenth century marks a point in time in which sexual identity stops being determined by what actions are performed, judging it instead by how a person feels they should be identified.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 205-6.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. 206.

connecting male-to-male homosexual relationships to marriage shows how common homosexuality was in this society.

Not every poem in this selection views homosexual acts as bad. However, all of these poems use sexuality in a way meant to elicit humor. Blackmore even argues that some poems tacitly admit that there is a small amount of tolerance for homosexual behavior in certain areas of Spain.<sup>212</sup> If there are cases in which poetry points to a social tolerance of homosexuality in Spain during this period, then Spain was unique for this time. Not only was Spain unique, but it also shows that the Spanish had a dualistic view on sex and sexuality. On one hand, the Castilian Crown has already been shown to have been condemnatory of non-heteronormative sexualities. On the other hand, Castilian poets showed a freedom to describe a multitude of sexual encounters in the first person. While the first person may have been a stylistic choice based on the poetry of the day, it still requires a certain amount of empathy to write in that style.

As shown earlier, the Jews of Spain were more than willing to write homoerotic literature. Not only did they write such literature, it was seen as completely normal for such writings to occur. However, when King Alfonso X ostracized the Jews of his kingdom, they lost much of the prestige they had under Islamic rule, so their influence on the culture of Castile would not be expected to be pronounced. Alfonso's undercutting of Jewish cultural influence was itself undercut by the Jewish work performed in the translation of Arabic texts. This allowed Jewish scholars to be in constant contact with the elite Christian intellectuals of the day. Through these work relationships, Jews likely

---

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 211.

passed part of their culture onto their Christian coworkers. This cultural transmission included a fluidity of sexual poetry.

Jewish homoeroticism did not stop once Jews fell under Christian rule. Some literary genres from the Muslim world only transferred to Jewish authors after they fell under Christian sway. One such genre was the homoerotic pederast tale.<sup>213</sup> Because of the location in which Jewish pederast tales emerged, they were somewhat different than those of the Muslims. In Islamic pederast tales, the pederast typically was not punished but rather rewarded for his actions.<sup>214</sup> Jacob ben El'azar's early Jewish pederast tale breaks from this tradition as the pederast is beaten to death for his actions. However, this is not a case of Jews rejecting homosexuality under Christian influence, for the object of affection is in a celebrated pederastic relationship before being kidnapped by an older man.

While different from the poems found in the *Cantigas d'escarnho e mal dizer*, the pederast tale of ben El'azar shares some similarities. Both seem to tacitly approve while explicitly condemning homosexual acts. Ben El'azar's tale approves homoerotic relationships through the relationship between Sapir and Shapir, a seemingly homosexual pair.<sup>215</sup> He condemns these same practices through the character of Birsha, who kidnaps Shapir and dies because of his actions. The poems of the *Cantigas d'escarnho e mal dizer* clearly condemn sodomy through the way they see homosexual acts as something worthy

---

<sup>213</sup> Jonathan Dector, "A Hebrew 'Sodomite' Tale from Thirteenth-Century Toledo: Jacob Ben El'azar's Story of Sapir, Shapir, and Birsha," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 3, no. 2 (2001): 190.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 191. Dector argues that they could have been in an eroticized same-sex friendship without actually being in a sexual relationship, yet he also argues that this appears unlikely in the context of the story.

of mockery. However, it is treated as something relatively common and not hidden by those who participate in homosexual acts.<sup>216</sup> Therefore, the genres in which these authors discuss sexuality may be different, but both Christians and Jews acknowledged the presence of homosexuality in thirteenth-century Spain.

There was no complete transmission of Jewish ideas of homosexuality to Christian scholars. Therefore, this incomplete transfer of the Jewish homoerotic sexual tradition created the “humorous” sexual homosexual poetry of the Christian thirteenth-century Castilian poets. Without the hardening of lines developed by the Fourth Lateran Council and *Las Siete Partidas*, Christian Spain might have developed a poetic tradition similar to the Judeo-Islamic homoerotic poetry. However, since that poetic tradition came about from the merging of Jewish homoerotic tradition with the discriminatory practices of thirteenth-century Christianity, the Iberian Christian satirical poems can be seen as a similar interaction between Judeo-Islamic homoerotic tradition and the Christian poetic tradition.

Outside of the *Cantigas d'escarnho e mal dizer*, other texts are more explicit and less condemnatory. In a French treatise on composition from the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, two letters can be found. The first letter is from a man to a young boy. He seeks sexual relations with the boy, using imagery from Greek mythology to do so.<sup>217</sup> Unlike the earlier letters from Alcuin and Walafred, this love is not sexless. Though it is still largely metaphorical, the metaphors are clearly about sex. The second letter is a rebuttal from the boy rejecting the man's advances.

---

<sup>216</sup> Blackmore, “Poets of Sodom,” 199.

<sup>217</sup> “Two Letters from a French Treatise on Composition,” in Stehling, *Medieval Latin Poems of Male Love and Friendship*, 91-2.

These two letters mimic the larger arguments surrounding the high and late medieval periods. During the thirteenth century, there was both an exploration and condemnation of homosexuality. Thirteenth-century poetry shows that scholars acknowledged homosexual behavior as a major part of life. In the French grammar book, the way the first letter was written allowed the author to explore homosexuality without condemnation. While anonymous, it is possible that the author's argument was not meant for rhetorical learning, but rather to display the actual feelings and beliefs of the author.

Likewise, the boy's response mirrors the eventual response by the Catholic Church and the political bodies of Europe. He rejects the man's advances in quite clear terms. He, like the unnamed man, uses allusions to the Bible and Greek mythology to make his point. He uses the fall of Orpheus and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to argue against partaking in a homosexual relationship.<sup>218</sup> Much like the boy's rejection of homosexual advances in this poem, the condemnations of homosexuality from the Lateran Council became the law of the land across Europe.

### **After the Thirteenth Century**

The end of the thirteenth century saw the end of Christian flirtations with homosexual behavior. After that century, Christians turned away from their temporary support for homosexuality. Homosexuality became linked to the unnatural at the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>219</sup> In one poem from the fourteenth century, there is no playful banter regarding homosexuality, nor is there any evidence that the author would support the idea of homosexuality. Instead, it begins with a condemnation of homosexual

---

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>219</sup> "Quam pravus mos est," in Stehling, *Medieval Latin Poems of Male Love and Friendship*, 137.

behavior and continues that strain throughout the whole of the poem.<sup>220</sup> Therefore, an obvious shift occurred between this poem and the poems found in the French treatise on composition described above.

The acknowledgement of homosexuality in the thirteenth century did not always come in the form of acceptance. Instead, it came in the form of degradation as often as acceptance. However, the homosexual communities were large enough that scholars and poets grappled with the role they played in society. Some catalyst must have occurred in the thirteenth century that caused Christian scholars to wrestle with this problem. The clearest reason was the renewed role Jews played in twelfth- and thirteenth-century society. Scholastics in twelfth-century Paris explored Jewish theology alongside scholars who either were Jewish or were at one point Jewish.<sup>221</sup> Likewise, Christian scholars in Spanish courts found themselves working side by side with Jewish scholars.<sup>222</sup> Since many Sephardic Jews had much more tolerant views on homosexuality, they may have shared their *sevi* poetry with their Christian peers. Evidence for this connection can be found in the post-thirteenth-century connections made between Jews and homosexuality by Christian scholars.

Sodomy became a common accusation against the Jews in the late medieval and early modern worlds. In the Italian city of Florence, accusations of sodomy on the part of the Jews were often used to fill the coffers of the city.<sup>223</sup> Often these accusations of

---

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 137, 162.

<sup>221</sup> Geiger, “*Historia Judaica: Petrus Comestor and His Jewish Sources*,” 129-30.

<sup>222</sup> José Chabás, “Interactions between Jewish and Christian Astronomers in the Iberian Peninsula,” in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, ed. Gad Freudenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 147.

<sup>223</sup> Michele Luzzati, “‘Satis est quod tecum dormivit’: Vero, verosimile e falso nelle incriminazioni di ebrei: un caso di presunta sodomia (Lucca, 1471-1472),” in *Una Manna*

sodomitical relations between Jewish men or converts were found false by the authorities, so not even the people pushing for the conversion could find evidence of such. In other cases, converts from Judaism paid fines to avoid litigation and accusations of sodomy.

In addition to accusations of sodomy, there were accusations against the Jews that Jewish men menstruated. While there is debate over what exactly Christian scholars were trying to accomplish by these claims, it is clear some used this accusation to feminize the Jews. Some medieval Christian exegetes argued that the menstrual prohibitions found in the book of Leviticus were symbolic of the feminization of sinners.<sup>224</sup> Therefore, by connecting Jews to menstruation, some scholars were feminizing Jews in their literature.<sup>225</sup> Beyond polemical treatises, medieval scientists and doctors medicalized Jewish male menstruation by using the same explanation they used for female menstruation.<sup>226</sup> This notion of Jewish male menstruation was never directly connected to Christian conceptions of male homosexual relations. However, some connections can be made through circumstantial evidence.

---

*Buona per Mantova = Man Tov le-Man Tovah: Studi in Onore di Vittore Colorni per il Suo 92*, ed. Mauro Perani (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2004), 261-2.

<sup>224</sup> Shanon Faye Koren, "The Menstruant as the 'Other' in Medieval Judaism and Christianity," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 17 (Spring 2009): 44.

<sup>225</sup> Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 158-9, 166-7. Unsurprisingly, tales of Jewish male menses as punishment for the death of Christ first began to appear in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Since these centuries marked periods of increased contact between Jews and Christians, the myths appear to be a backlash against the increasing prominence of Jews in Christian royal courts.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 45. Medieval scientists believed that menstruation occurred in women and Jewish men because they were naturally excessively cold and wet. Therefore, their humors would realign by having blood settle in the lower abdomen and periodically purge the excess blood by means of menstruation.

Once the thirteenth century came to its close, homosexuality became intrinsically linked to Jewish men in the eyes of Christians. Homosexual behavior, specifically passive forms of homosexual behavior, was associated with effeminacy from the time of the Romans through the medieval period. Evidence for this can be seen in Catullus's poem 16. In that poem, Catullus places his critics in passive sexual positions by referring to them as a pathic and a catamite in turn.<sup>227</sup> This view of homosexual behavior was carried through the Roman Empire into Christianity. Therefore, Christian scholars adopted this view of homosexual behavior that relied on activeness and passivity to determine the masculinity and femininity of individuals.<sup>228</sup> Since medieval Christian scholars placed their understanding of sexuality in terms of action, it would appear logical that sex is something that happens. It was not seen as a core component of one's identity, but rather something that individuals did.<sup>229</sup> Like passive sexual activity, menstruation was seen as a feminizing and demonizing act. Therefore, it can be presumed that the connection between these two forms of feminization and demonization of the male Jewish body were created in tandem as a result of the creation of each other. It cannot be surprising that both of these ideas became prominent as the Church began cracking down on minority groups, including Jews and homosexuals.<sup>230</sup>

Homosexuality became increasingly marginalized after the thirteenth century. In the thirteenth century, anti-homosexual poetry revealed a world in which homosexual encounters appear to have been relatively common. However, homosexuals after the

---

<sup>227</sup> Catullus, "Catullus 16," in *Catullus*, ed. Elmer Truesdell Merrill, College Classical Series (New Rochelle, New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1983), 36.

<sup>228</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), 4.

<sup>229</sup> Koren, "The Menstruant as the 'Other,'" 45.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

thirteenth century hid from the authorities. Instead of presenting themselves as spouses, like Pero da Ponte claims they did, court records show that people accused of homosexuality claimed their lovers were their siblings.<sup>231</sup> This shift in public presentation cannot be overstated. Pero da Ponte and the other authors of the *Cantigas d'escarnho e mal dizer* saw sodomy as a relatively common occurrence. They may not have liked people in that community, but the way they addressed what they saw as the issue of sodomy reveals how public the behavior was. Once the century ended, homosexual behavior went underground, only the closest confidants of homosexuals being admitted into the covert knowledge that individuals were lovers and not siblings.<sup>232</sup> Therefore, homosexuality had to go underground as persecution of non-heteronormative sexual practices increased in the late medieval and early modern periods.

## **Conclusion**

Jewish love poetry was fluid as to who was the object of affection. At times, poets and storytellers discussed the love between a man and a woman. The Song of Songs is one such example. Other times, Jewish poetry focused on the love between two men. These poems are clearly and explicitly romantic in nature. Some stories, such as the pederast tale of Sapir, Shapir, and Birsha, acknowledge that some people are not bound by heterosexual/homosexual binaries.<sup>233</sup> While the Christian world never came close to this level of progressive tolerance for different sexualities, acknowledgements of different sexual preferences seem to briefly appear in the late twelfth and early thirteenth

---

<sup>231</sup> Helmut Puff, "Female Sodomy: The Trial of Katherina Hetzeldorfer (1477)," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30, no. 1 (2000): 44.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Dector, "A Hebrew 'Sodomite' Tale from Thirteenth-Century Toledo," 191. Sapir is described as hunting both male and female gazelles. This implies that he found both men and women sexually attractive.

centuries. These acknowledgements sometimes appeared in the form of condemnation, but they still reveal a more complex sexual world than either before or after the thirteenth century.

### **Chapter 3: Kabbalah, Jewish Mysticism to Christian Magic**

In the late medieval and early modern periods, Christian appropriation of Jewish religious texts was on decline throughout most of Europe. However, Italian Christians somewhat revived the practice in the late fifteenth century. This revival had marked differences from the original use of Jewish theology by medieval Christians. Italian Hebraism held deep ties to Christian magical practices through the Renaissance mages and the Hermetic tradition. Kabbalah was not a magical tradition within Judaism; however, the mystical nature of Kabbalah sometimes lent itself to magical interpretations by some Jewish members of the Kabbalist community. Marginalized Christians in Italy took hold of the magical aspects of Kabbalah and made it their own. The rise of the Christian Kabbalah was not a revolution within the Christian community, but rather a continuation of the appropriation of Jewish culture through a lens that failed to fully grasp what the Jews believed.

There was never one uniform type of magic during the pre-modern era. Those in power always made distinctions between their elite magical traditions and the folk magic of the common people. Additionally, the distinction between mysticism and magic was not always clear. In order to explore the medieval magical world, mysticism, magic, and folk magic need to be defined. Mysticism is the least magical of the three. It refers to a religious experience in which the mystic has a close encounter with the divine.<sup>234</sup> Some scholars, such as Joseph Dan, have argued that mysticism was not native to Jewish religious practices, but was an import from Christianity. Magic is incredibly difficult to define. In antiquity, magic was a term used when an individual or group practiced a

---

<sup>234</sup> Dan, *The Heart and the Fountain*, 1.

different religion in order to otherize the individual or group.<sup>235</sup> According to medieval Jews, Jesus was a practitioner of magic who abused the name of God for his own purposes.<sup>236</sup> Medieval Christians rejected this interpretation of Jesus and saw him as a miracle worker. However, with the Christianization of Europe, magic became the manipulation of spiritual forces to affect the physical world. Folk magic, which is less important to this study, is the use of herbs and talismans by those without formal educations for magical purposes. Elites who practiced magic attempted to separate their magical practices from those of folk healers and wise women.<sup>237</sup> The lack of women in this study arises from the way in which male Christian mages distinguished their “elite” magic from “folk magic” that was traditionally practiced by women.<sup>238</sup>

Christians responded to Jewish magical and mystical practices in a number of ways. As the medieval period unfolded, Jewish mysticism became highly sought after amongst the mages of the early modern period, while Jewish folk magic followed the path of most forms of magic and became increasingly condemned by the Church. As stated in the previous chapter, pogroms and expulsions against Jews led to increased marginalization throughout Christian Europe. However, this period also saw an increase

---

<sup>235</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 10.

<sup>236</sup> Karras, “The Aerial Battle in the *Toledot Yeshu* and Sodomy in the Late Middle Ages,” 506-7.

<sup>237</sup> Elite and folk magic in the medieval period did not have clear organization. Since the beginning of modern scholarship on medieval magical practices, historians have attempted to categorize magic. However, these categories are only partially useful for scholars as scrying and chiromancy, for example have both been considered part of necromancy while also being somewhat distinct. Additionally, medieval magicians could not agree on what was to be considered part of their corpus and what was not.

<sup>238</sup> Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, 226-30. Some of the earliest magical practices to face condemnation by the Church were love potions and weaving magic. Both of these types of magic were associated with women in the early medieval period.

in the persecution of magicians and other practitioners of unorthodox deviations of Christianity. Therefore, it was within the marginalized communities of the Renaissance mages that Kabbalism became a method for social advancement. Renaissance mages who attempted to gain higher public social standing through using their knowledge of Kabbalah as religious conversionary tactics failed to be accepted by their peers in the way scholars like Friar Paul Christian had been in previous centuries.

One of the chief problems with exploring Kabbalism and Jewish magic is the relative impossibility of defining what Kabbalism is, or where the mystical ended and the magical began. Kabbalah was not used to delineate a mystical and magical tradition until relatively late into its existence.<sup>239</sup> Only in the eleventh century did Kabbalah become understood to be a set of semi-uniform mystical beliefs. Prior to that, Kabbalah could refer to any number of different interpretations and traditions regarding the Jewish law.<sup>240</sup> However, this lack of uniformity plays into the favor of historians. For while it makes Kabbalah hard to define, it allows historians to see how traditions change as they begin to be influenced by, and to influence, surrounding cultures. This lack of uniformity helps explain why Christian Kabbalah emerged in Italy rather than Spain, where there was a much stronger Kabbalist tradition.

### **Works of the Jewish Kabbalah**

Out of the Kabbalist corpus, two books stand apart from the rest as being influential on later Kabbalist works: the *Bahir* and the *Zohar*. The authorship of both of these books has traditionally been tied to the classical period. However, scholars disagree as to when exactly these works were written. Some argue that the *Bahir* and the *Zohar*

---

<sup>239</sup> Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy*, 22.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

were written during the time of the sages who are claimed to have written them around the first century CE. Others, such as Moshe Idel, point to a much later date and time. Idel argues that the *Zohar* was not written until the twelfth century in Spain, as that is where it had the most influence.<sup>241</sup> Nevertheless, both these books played a large role in the foundation of Kabbalism as a system of beliefs. Joseph Dan argues for a similar timeframe for the creation of the *Zohar* as Idel; however, he points to a specific scholar as the author of the *Zohar*, whereas Idel just gave a general time frame.<sup>242</sup>

The first of these books to be explored is the *Bahir*. Although it is attributed to Rabbi Nehunia ben HaKana, it was likely not written by him, or at least not entirely by him.<sup>243</sup> Even the most conservative scholars are skeptical of Nehunia ben HaKana's authorship of the *Bahir*. Out of all the Kabbalistic texts, the *Bahir* might be the most important in the corpus due to its age and accessibility across the Mediterranean.<sup>244</sup> Despite its association with a mystical and sometimes magical sect of Judaism, the *Bahir* is not a spell book. Instead of being a book of spells, the *Bahir* is written as a series of rabbinical lessons. These lessons are attributed to different Talmudic scholars throughout the *Bahir*. Its main foci are the Hebrew alphabet, the Sefirot, and the nature of the soul.<sup>245</sup>

Even though the *Bahir* is not a strictly magical text, it has several magical connotations. Rabbi Nehunia, the reported author of the text, is claimed to have been a

---

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 28. Part of Idel's argument appears to stem from the fact that the *Zohar* was not universally accepted within the Kabbalist tradition. It only gained traction in Spain during the later part of the medieval period.

<sup>242</sup> Dan, *The Heart and the Fountain*, 8-9.

<sup>243</sup> Aryeh Kaplan, introduction to *The Bahir*, trans. Aryeh Kaplan (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1979), xi. Rabbi ben HaKana is attributed as the writer of this work because he was a well-known mystical rabbi during the first century and he is quoted at the beginning of *The Bahir*; besides that there is no evidence that he wrote the text.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., xviii-xix.

skilled practitioner of the magical arts. According to the writings of one of Rabbi Nehunia ben HaKana's disciples, the rabbi was skilled at projecting himself into the “supernal universes.”<sup>246</sup> This means that Rabbi Nehunia was already connected to the more magical side of Judaism in the minds of Jewish scholars before the Renaissance mages turned to Kabbalah as a source of magical knowledge in the late medieval and early modern periods. Therefore, the *Bahir* became connected to this mystical world through the purported connection between it and Rabbi Nehunia ben HaKana.

The *Bahir* connects itself with Greek notions of the elements. However, unlike the Greek conception of four elements, the *Bahir* mainly focuses on fire and water. When discussing the creation of heaven and earth, the author of the *Bahir* argues that both these elements existed before the creation of the world.<sup>247</sup> The book of Genesis refers to God splitting the waters and placing a firmament, which is heaven, between the two sections of water.<sup>248</sup> The author of the *Zohar*, another mystical book with supposedly ancient origins, explores the separation of the waters as part of the origins of antagonism.<sup>249</sup> In the *Bahir*, the author's suggestion about fire comes from a bit of a logical stretch. He claims heaven is a fire because Deuteronomy refers to God as a jealous god and a consuming fire. The author appears to be making leaps in his logic when he describes heaven as fire because God is a fire. However, the author of the *Bahir* uses the Hebrew Bible in a self-justifying manner. The author treats the Bible as the ultimate authority, so he does not look for evidence to support his claims in places outside of the Bible. In that same section of the *Bahir*, the author notes that Solomon prayed to heaven, which he

---

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>247</sup> *Bahir*, 37.

<sup>248</sup> Genesis 1:6-8.

<sup>249</sup> *Zohar* Vol. 1, trans. Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 72.

would not have done unless it, heaven, was referring to God.<sup>250</sup> While discussing Genesis, the author of the *Bahir* uses passages from I Kings to explain the earlier passage.

The *Bahir* is not a simple text to summarize; it does not have a singular point it is trying to teach. It weaves in and out of various ideas throughout its body. At various points it discusses and explains the Torah and the prophets. At other points, it preoccupies itself with numerology and the power of numbers. Likewise, it treats the Hebrew alphabet in the same way. While it is not an easy book to read or explain, it reveals the intellectual underpinning of the Jewish Kabbalah.

The argument of the *Bahir* is hard to follow; it constantly jumps from one part of the Hebrew Bible to another. It cross-references every verse in its explanations of passages. Aryeh Kaplan, the first English translator of the *Bahir*, argues that the *Bahir*'s structure and style is purposefully vague.<sup>251</sup> He states that the Talmudic authorities treated the Kabbalah as a mystery religion, best “taught through hints and allusions.”<sup>252</sup> Due to the way the Kabbalah was taught, the *Bahir* never outright states what it is trying to purvey to its readers. Instead, it allows the reader to meditate on the words to decipher what it argues. Therefore, Jewish scholars could explore the text and discover greater truths about their religion, while Christians with magical inclinations could look at the same text and see a universe full of angels, other worlds, and the Divine Presence.<sup>253</sup> This vagueness had another influence on Christian magicians. Since Kabbalist texts are purposefully vague, it allowed the mages to infuse their own worldviews into the texts

---

<sup>250</sup> *Bahir*, 37.

<sup>251</sup> Kaplan, introduction to *The Bahir*, xix.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>253</sup> *Bahir*, 64-5.

and pull out what they desired. Christians may not have understood what the Jewish Kabbalists tried to teach, but they developed their own form of Kabbalah off of the multitude of possible interpretations off works such as the *Bahir*.

Unlike the *Zohar*, the second of the two most important Kabbalist texts, the *Bahir* was definitely translated into Latin in the late medieval period. Unfortunately for the Christian Kabbalists using this translation, it was written by the notoriously bad translator Flavius Mithradates. Kaplan specifically states that Mithradates' translation of the *Bahir* was highly unreadable.<sup>254</sup> This is not the only time in which Mithradates poorly translated a religious text. He wrote one of the few surviving Latin translations of the Qur'an from the medieval and early modern periods. Much like his translation of the *Bahir*, Flavius Mithradates' translation of the Islamic holy book was unreadable and full of errors.<sup>255</sup> Therefore, since he and his translations of Kabbalist texts were key to the creation of the Christian Kabbalah, it is unsurprising that the earliest experiences Italian Hebraists had with the Jewish Kabbalah gave them false impressions of what Kabbalah was.

The second of the two most important texts for the foundation of the Jewish Kabbalah is the *Zohar*. The text is comprised of commentaries on the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. The *Zohar* serves as one of the primary theological foundation for Kabbalah. The style of the *Zohar* allows it to masquerade as a Talmudic text, since it uses the teaching of rabbis to explain and extrapolate ideas not clearly present in the Pentateuch. These commentaries, while they sometimes take unexpected routes and conclusions, are not always or necessarily magical or esoteric. They occasionally appear

---

<sup>254</sup> Kaplan, introduction to *The Bahir*, x.

<sup>255</sup> Thomas Burman, *Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom: 1140-1560*, Material Texts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 138.

and present themselves as common exegesis, being no different than how any other medieval Jew or Christian would analyze their respective holy texts. Therefore, the *Zohar*, much like the *Bahir*, is not a spell book. Kabbalist spell books such as *Sepher ha-Razim* do exist; however, they do not make up either of the two biggest contributors to and examples of Kabbalist ideology. The *Zohar*, while it has magical elements in its text, was not designed for magical purposes.

Within the *Zohar*, the exegetical moments are often used to foreshadow other moments in the same book. In one such example in the book of Exodus, it is written that Moses' mother hid him for three months. The *Zohar* connects these three months with a later time in Exodus in which it is three months after the Israelites left Egypt that Moses had the Law passed down to him from God on Mount Sinai.<sup>256</sup> Exegetical moments like these lack any magical resonance; instead, they are meant to connect the reader and learner to the greater tradition of the Torah.

However, the exegesis of the *Zohar* is also filled with messianic and somewhat apocalyptic symbolism. Two exegetical comments before the commentary on Moses' mother's efforts to protect Moses as an infant, the *Zohar* discusses the lineage of Moses. The passage discussed is deceptively simple. All it says is "And there went a man of the House of Levi."<sup>257</sup> The *Zohar* presents two alternative interpretations to this simple passage. The first states that the man represents the angel Gabriel, whom the author describes as the guardian of the soul.<sup>258</sup> Under the second explanation, the conception of

---

<sup>256</sup> *Zohar* Vol. 3, trans. Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 35.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>258</sup> The author of *The Zohar* is debatable. There are several individuals whom tradition connects to the creation of *The Zohar*, but recent scholarship has ruled out all those

Moses is directly connected to the time of redemption. In this way, Moses is a messianic figure, yet the author does not conclude that Moses is the messiah or even a messiah. Instead, the author connects Moses with a foreshadowing of a later messianic figure. Despite the messianic nature of the *Zohar*, there is contradictory evidence supporting it as a primary influence for the Christian Kabbalah.

As stated above, the *Zohar* is not a magical text. However, the imagery of the book is confusing and cryptic enough that it can easily lend itself to a magically metaphorical reading. In a passage describing the ritual uncleanliness associated with menstruation, it describes how a serpent injects women with twenty-four poisons, so she must cut her hair and nails. Otherwise, sorcerers and demons become more powerful.<sup>259</sup> The magical imagery may have made the text an even more appealing text for Christian scholars to abuse. The lack of clarity found within the *Zohar* left it open for misinterpretation by Christian scholars.

However, the *Zohar* was not a universally accepted book across the Kabbalistic spectrum. The *Zohar* and the *Bahir* were highly influential in Spanish Kabbalah, while they, especially the *Zohar*, had much less influence in Italy. Italian Kabbalists did not have a set literature in the same way that their Iberian counterparts did. Because of the lack of a book like the *Zohar* in Italian Kabbalah, it never achieved the same level of unity that occurred in the Kabbalah in Spain.<sup>260</sup> According to Moshe Idel, Italian Kabbalah began as an offshoot of the teachings of the Sephardic Jew Abraham

---

individuals as potential authors for the book. It is likely that *The Zohar* was not written by a single author but was an amalgamation of the works of several different authors.

<sup>259</sup> *Zohar* Vol. 5, 88.

<sup>260</sup> Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy*, 29.

Abulafia.<sup>261</sup> Abulafia left Spain for Italy before Idel claims that the *Zohar* was written. This would explain why the *Zohar* and other similar books did not hold nearly as much sway in Italy as in Spain. This lack of clear distinctions made Italian Kabbalah more susceptible to adoption and manipulation by Christian scholars.

As stated earlier, the *Zohar* is filled with messianic imagery and messages. However, they did not likely lead directly to the creation of the Christian Kabbalah. One of the main reasons for this is the location in which the Christian Kabbalah sprang up. The only place in which Christian Kabbalah had a strong presence was Italy, a peninsula with relatively little influence from the *Zohar*. However, the ideas in the *Zohar* were not rejected in Italy, they were merely not used as a text. Many of the same general ideas found in the *Zohar* could and were found across Europe in various Kabbalist frameworks.

Within the Kabbalist tradition, one of the most powerful objects was the Hebrew alphabet. The *Zohar* begins with a dialogue by the Hebrew alphabet.<sup>262</sup> In this mythological dialogue, each of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet brings a case before God as to why they should be used to create the world. In this dialogue, each letter's argument begins with how they are connected to a word worthy of beginning the world. For example the letter *shin* argues that it represents *Shaddai*, one of God's names meaning almighty; however, *shin* also represents *Sheker*, which means falsehood.<sup>263</sup> God cannot have the alphabet begin with a falsehood, so *shin* cannot begin the alphabet. In this way, each of the letters appears to have power over the words they compose, especially if they begin that word. The *Bahir* begins in a similar fashion; only it does not

---

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>262</sup> *Zohar* Vol. 3, 9.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

include the more mythological elements such as the letters bringing their cases before God. Instead, the *Bahir* states that the Torah begins with the letter *bet* so that the Torah may begin with a blessing, which in Hebrew also begins with *bet*.<sup>264</sup>

The passage in the *Zohar's* prologue relates to heavenly and abstract notions and ideas. However, there are areas of this work in which the power of the Hebrew alphabet manifests itself on earth. One passage in which this becomes apparent is the aforementioned exegesis on the birth of Moses.<sup>265</sup> When the pharaoh's daughter finds Moses in the basket, she has compassion on the child and raises him as her own.<sup>266</sup> The author of the *Zohar* found the wording of this passage odd. The passage does not state that she saw the child but rather "she saw it, the child." The author of the text immediately points out the power of some of the letters in the Hebrew word for child. Therefore, the power of two of the Hebrew letters helped save Moses from certain death.

Both the *Zohar* and the *Bahir* are documents mostly associated with medieval Spain. While the medieval period brought numerous changes to the mystical and magical understandings of religious practices, conceptions of the inherent properties of the Hebrew alphabet remained consistent throughout the medieval Kabbalah. The thirteenth century Sephardic scholar Nahmanides opens his *Discourse on a Wedding* by discussing the seat of wisdom in the body.<sup>267</sup> In his statements regarding the seat of wisdom, he attempts to use the symbolic power of letters to reconcile two differing opinions on where

---

<sup>264</sup> *The Bahir*, 1.

<sup>265</sup> *Zohar* Vol. 3, 36-7.

<sup>266</sup> In the story of Moses' birth, the pharaoh orders all the male children of Israel under the age of two to be killed. Moses' mother chooses to hide Moses instead of having him killed. She does this by placing him in a basket in the Nile River. The pharaoh's daughter finds Moses and decides to raise him as her own.

<sup>267</sup> Nahmanides, *Discourse on a Wedding*, trans. Charles B. Chevel, in *Ramban: Writings and Discourses*, (New York: Shilo Publishing, 1978), 6-7.

wisdom resides. Rabbi Eleazer said it was the head, while Rabbi Yehoshua argued it was the heart. Nahmanides begins his reconciliation by pointing to the Book of Psalms. Psalms starts with the Hebrew word *ashrei*, which means happy. *Ashrei* begins with the letter *aleph*, which he argues represents wisdom. Since *aleph* begins the Hebrew alphabet, it means that the head is the seat of wisdom. However, the Book of Proverbs begins with the letter *mem*, which is in the center of the Hebrew alphabet in the same way that the heart is in the middle of the body. Nahmanides concludes, by looking at these letters in tandem with Proverbs 22:17, that the head is the source of wisdom, but it gets disseminated through the heart.<sup>268</sup>

Another more magical example of Kabbalists seeing magic and mystical properties derived from the Hebrew alphabet comes from the writings of the renowned early modern scholar Rabbi Loew of Prague. According to Rabbi Loew, the prophet Elisha used the name of God to curse and kill forty-two young men.<sup>269</sup> The number forty-two is significant to numerological magic because the name Elisha used was forty-two letters long. The stories found in the *Zohar* and the writings of Rabbi Loew reveal different ways in which the Hebrew alphabet had magical properties. In the first story, involving Moses, each letter has power related to some of the words beginning with that letter. The second story, involving Elisha, reveals how the name of God has power

---

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 7. “Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge...” (Proverbs 22:17).

<sup>269</sup> Low Ben Bezalel, “On Magic,” in *The Great Rabbi Loew of Prague: His Life and Work and the Legend of the Golem, with Extracts from His Writings and a Collection of the Old Legends*, trans. and ed. Fredrick Thieberger (London: Horovitz, 1995), originally in Fredrick Thieberger, trans., *Be'er Hagolah*, 108. In the story referenced by Rabbi Loew, which is found in 2 Kings 2:23-25, Elisha was mocked by a group of young men. Upon hearing their mockery, Elisha cursed them in the name of God and two bears came and tore the forty-two men apart.

according to other properties of the letters, such as how many letters were in the word itself. Rabbi Loew's and Nahmanides' connection with Jewish letter magic is important for understanding Kabbalah. As stated earlier, Kabbalah is a widespread group of traditions spread across Europe and the Middle East. Nahmanides came from the westernmost point of Europe while Rabbi Loew lived several centuries later in Eastern Europe. Despite the geographical and temporal distance between these two Kabbalist scholars, their scholarship reveals similarities between the diverse traditions within the larger Kabbalist umbrella.

### **Jewish Magic and Christian Magic**

Despite the two most famous Kabbalist texts not being strictly magical, there was still a magical tradition within Jewish Kabbalah. By far the most well-known piece of Jewish Kabbalist magic is the golem. The golem is an artificial individual created to defend and serve the Jewish people of central Europe. Golems are created from materials such as mud or wood.<sup>270</sup> Although deeply entrenched in the modern mind as being part of Jewish folk magic, those associated with the golem had ties to the Jewish Kabbalah. There are two individuals most commonly associated with the creation of golems: Eleazar of Worms and Rabbi Loew of Prague. Each of these figures stands as iconic Jewish magical individuals from the high and late medieval period. Therefore, they need to be explored individually.

Eleazar of Worms is the earlier of the two rabbis. Unlike his more famous successor from Prague, Eleazar left personal instructions on how to create a golem. Since the Hebrew Alphabet played an important role in Jewish magic, both rabbis used it for

---

<sup>270</sup> L. Weisel, "The Golem," in Thieberger, *The Great Rabbi Loew of Prague*, originally in Fredrick Thieberger, trans., *Sippurim I*, 134.

the creation of their golems. Eleazar of Worms uses the magical properties of the alphabet as the explanation of his magical techniques. He states that the creation of a golem must not be done alone, for the book of Genesis begins with the Hebrew letter *bet*.<sup>271</sup> Likewise, the creation of the golem involves writing Hebrew letters in order over the golem's body. In this way, the power of the Hebrew alphabet gives life to the golem.

Rabbi Loew is a much more complicated figure than Eleazar of Worms.

Additionally, the rabbi from Prague wrote on magical subjects, but not the golem. The story of his golem did not appear until several hundred years after his death. The legend of the Golem of Prague adds details left out by Eleazar's description. Eleazar of Worms specifies that golems must be created with virgin soil that has never been plowed.

However, in the legend of the Golem of Prague, Rabbi Loew is stated to have created golems out of wood as well as clay. In addition to the expanded amount of materials used to create golems, the letters used to bring them to life changed also. According to the legend of Rabbi Loew's golem, it gained and lost life by whether it had the letter *shem* inserted into its mouth.<sup>272</sup> The golem serves as an example of how Kabbalistic magic worked. By using the magical properties of the alphabet, Rabbi Loew's creation came to life.

However, the golem also served as a warning of the dangers of magic. In the legend of the Golem of Prague, Rabbi Loew forgets to remove the letter *shem* from the golem's mouth before the Sabbath starts. Once the Sabbath began, the golem proceeded to destroy large parts of the Jewish quarter of the city, as work could not be done to stop

---

<sup>271</sup> Eleazar of Worms, "Making a Golem," in *The Book of Magic: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, ed. Brian Copenhaver (London: Penguin Books, 2015), originally in Brian Copenhaver, trans., *Commentary on the Book of Formation*, 279.

<sup>272</sup> Weisel, "The Golem," 135.

it. While this could be argued as a morality tale against magic created by anti-magic individuals, this story fits into the larger magical tradition. Throughout the history of magical texts, there have always been clear warnings about the dangers of magic. Dating back to the Roman Empire, the adventures in *The Golden Ass* are caused by one man's careless use of a magic potion.<sup>273</sup> This need to be careful when dealing with magic fits into the larger esoteric nature of Kabbalism and its derivative Christian variant.

The Jews of medieval and early modern Europe were not the only people exploring the idea of the created man.<sup>274</sup> Early modern Christian alchemists developed the idea of the homunculus. Much like the golem, homunculi are individuals created through occult practices. In both cases, there appears to be a desire to play the role of God, or at least a demiurge, by creating artificial men.<sup>275</sup> This desire to act as God is typically punished in the stories of the golem, as the golem either causes mass destruction to the property of Jews of the area or the death of the creator. Early modern writings about homunculi rarely included the same morality tales the stories about golems had.

Despite the initial similarities between golems and homunculi, they do not seem to be directly related.<sup>276</sup> Moshe Idel argues that, while later scholars made the connection between the golem and Paracelsus's homunculi, there is no evidence that early modern

---

<sup>273</sup> Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. P.G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1994), 53.

<sup>274</sup> Both golems and homunculi are often described in masculine terms. However, gender is unimportant to the myths regarding golems. In alchemical treatises relating to homunculi, gender is the central to the treatise, as homunculi often serve as the purest examples of masculinity as they are men created without the help of women. Therefore, homunculi and golems differ in the role gender plays in the myths and writings associated with them.

<sup>275</sup> William R. Newman, *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 199.

<sup>276</sup> Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 186.

Jews had any indication that Paracelsus was describing a golem. Paracelsus' work does not appear in any early modern Hebrew texts. Idel furthers his argument by stating that other, less similar creations were discussed by early modern Hebrew sources. Golems are created through Jewish letter magic and inert materials such as clay. Homunculi are created through a less overtly magical alchemical process through the collection and putrefaction of semen. Similar practices are found in Islamic writings at least as old as the earliest tales of golems.

However, the Christian Kabbalah often radically changed aspects of Kabbalah when adapting it to Christianity. It mixed the largely mystical texts of the Jewish Kabbalah with the non-mystical Hermetic Tradition. Paracelsus, the Swiss alchemist who established the homunculus in European Christian culture, had knowledge of the Jewish Kabbalah through the Christian Kabbalah. Therefore, homunculi could have been influenced by golems. They could be interpreted as a mixture of Jewish magical ideas with the practical magic of alchemy. There is at the least an incidental influence on the homunculus through themes of playing God, which was not a theme present in the earliest Arab versions of homunculi; therefore, it is likely that the golem is a direct influence on the ideas behind the creation of the homunculus.

As far as the casting of spells was concerned, there was very little difference in how the Christians and Jews practiced their magic. The magical traditions of Judaism and Christianity involve a series of similarities. In both Christian and Jewish magical traditions, magic is based on calling on a higher power to perform a task. In Christian magic, these beings were often demons that were bound by the spell to do the biddings of

the wizard.<sup>277</sup> However, Christian magic did not always rely on demonic forces, for often these forces were from angels.<sup>278</sup> The Jewish magic found in the *Sepher ha-Razim* relies purely on angelic powers in order to create magical incantations. Each segment of the *Sepher ha-Razim* begins by listing off all the angels who could assist a magician in various magical experiments. These lists are then separated out by what types of experiments they help with; for example, the very first list of angels has those beings with the ability to help heal.<sup>279</sup>

Along with having similar origins to their magical powers, the spells themselves often share ingredients and methods. In spells involving changing the heart of a woman, both Jewish and Christian magic require the spilling of blood and the hearts of animals. In the *Sepher ha-Razim*, to change the desires of a beautiful woman's heart, a magician must slaughter a lion cub, catch some of its blood, and tear out its heart. After doing this, the experimenter must write the names of the angels assisting with the ritual between the eyes of the lion cub and wash it with three-year-old wine.<sup>280</sup> There are other steps after this, but the beginning of this spell must be compared to the beginning of a Christian love ritual. In one Christian ritual, the first step to love magic was biting out the heart of a pure white dove. Afterwards, the sorcerer needed to write the woman's name on a piece of parchment from a female dog in heat and, to the best of his abilities, draw a naked woman with the blood of the dove while reciting the names of the demons who would

---

<sup>277</sup> Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 127.

<sup>278</sup> Frank Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Magic in History Series (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 81.

<sup>279</sup> *Sepher ha-Razim: The Book of the Mysteries*, trans. Michael A. Morgan (Chico, CA: Scholar Press, 1983), 23-4.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

assist in the spell.<sup>281</sup> Both these spells have striking similarities. Both the Christian and Jewish spells make use of hearts and blood as forms of sympathetic magic. The heart has long held associations with love; so medieval scholars would logically use the heart as a key ingredient to seduction.

However, writing names with the blood of the dove and lion cub is an odd coincidence. The two magical spells require different names to be written, the potential lover's name and angelic helpers' names in the Christian and Jewish texts respectively. While this could be mere happenstance, it is likely these two magical traditions are related. Since the Jewish text is much older, it may have influenced this later Christian magical recipe. If there was a preexisting relationship between Jewish and Christian magical practices as these two spells indicate, Christian Kabbalists would have a greater reason to read magical practices in esoteric Jewish works.

### **Metatron and Jesus**

The Kabbalist tradition created a new cosmology not previously seen in traditional Judaism. In this mystical tradition, all souls existed before people are born. This is a clear departure from figures like Maimonides who believed that people did not exist before they were born.<sup>282</sup> The *Zohar* states that Moses descended into the world from a place referred to as the upper regions.<sup>283</sup> The upper regions, while not named in this passage, clearly represent heaven. The passage then states that Moses connected with another individual from the moment of his birth due to a connection they had in the upper regions. Therefore, under Kabbalist cosmology, the soul is an eternal element that can

---

<sup>281</sup> Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites*, 82.

<sup>282</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 292.

<sup>283</sup> *Zohar* Vol. 3, 36.

affect people as it moves from heaven to earth in the form of a physical birth. This is a marked difference from the Maimonidean orthodoxy of Sephardic Judaism, which states that prior to birth people do not exist.<sup>284</sup> In addition to the unique way of understanding the eternity of the soul, Kabbalist Jews had a unique way of conceptualizing angels. Most ancient Jewish texts do not focus on angels, except that they seem to vanish after their purpose has been completed. Kabbalists understood angels to have their own powers that operated independently of God. They even went as far as to say that one angel named Metatron assisted God in the creation of the world.<sup>285</sup>

Metatron's similarities to Jesus do not end with the creation of the world. Both Jesus and Metatron have both earthly and divine aspects to their personhood. In orthodox medieval Christianity, Jesus was both fully man and fully God. Metatron was similar in that he was at times fully human and at other times a semi-deity.<sup>286</sup> Metatron's divinity is somewhat complex, as he was not a demigod in the same way that the Greek heroes were. They were created when the Greek gods (typically Zeus or Aphrodite) procreated with humans. However, Metatron was not a typical angel in the Jewish tradition. Most angels in Judaism did not assist in the creation of the world, unlike some myths about Metatron that claim he did. Rather Metatron can be understood to be a demiurge in the same vein as Gnostics understood the God of the Old Testament to be.<sup>287</sup>

---

<sup>284</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 292. Maimonides was not a universally accepted scholar in the medieval Jewish world. His writings faced condemnation in parts of France and Germany. However, Mediterranean Judaism was much more receptive of his theological works. Late medieval Kabbalists tried co-opting Maimonides into their version of Judaism.

<sup>285</sup> Moshe Idel, "Métatron à Paris," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Moyen Age* 114, no. 1 (2004): 701-2.

<sup>286</sup> Dan, *The Heart and the Foundation*, 61.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

Another contradictory myth regarding the angel states that Metatron was in fact Enoch from chapter five of the book of Genesis. In the six verses that discuss Enoch, he is described as walking in the ways of God until he was eventually taken by God.<sup>288</sup> These verses are part of a genealogy stating the line from Adam to Noah. The last verse to mention Enoch does not explicitly state that he died in the same way that all the other members of this genealogy are clearly described as dying. While most Jewish exegesis explained this as mere poetics, some Kabbalist exegesis argued that Enoch was taken to heaven where he became the semi-divine figure known as Metatron.<sup>289</sup> While Metatron and Jesus are quite different in the narratives surrounding their lives, both had times in which they were humans walking the earth and both had times in which they were either divine or at least quasi-divine figures. Jesus and Metatron were given similar characteristics regarding their divinity in Christianity and Kabbalistic Judaism respectively; however, Metatron often lacked the messianic overtones that Jesus had.

Despite Metatron's lack of messianic characteristics, Kabbalism had a separate messianic nature. This messianic nature of Jewish Kabbalism appears throughout the *Bahir* and the *Zohar*. Throughout both works, the authors discuss past and future messianic figures. At times, Moses is described in messianic tones. Early in the *Bahir*, the author of the text describes two archangels thusly: "This teaches us that Michael, the prince to God's right, is water and hail, while Gabriel, the prince to God's left, is fire. The two are reconciled by the Prince of Peace."<sup>290</sup> This passage reveals how easy it was for Christian humanists to make connections between their own beliefs and those of the

---

<sup>288</sup> Genesis 5:18-24. Enoch does not appear in verse twenty, as that verse states when Jared, Enoch's father, died.

<sup>289</sup> Dan, *The Heart and the Foundation*, 63.

<sup>290</sup> *The Bahir*, 5.

Jewish Kabbalah. According to the Christian Bible, one of the descriptors for Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Whether or not the author of the *Bahir* had meant the Prince of Peace to be a reference to the messiah is irrelevant to how Christians would have interpreted this passage. The fact that the same language was employed in both situations allowed for early modern humanists exploring these texts to connect their religion with a deep magical tradition. By creating a Jewish tradition that included messianic overtones, a semi-divine figure that was connected to the creation of the world, and using language very similar to that used by Christians, Kabbalists created a cosmology ripe for plunder by Christian magicians and those with missionary intentions.

This cosmology would clearly sound appealing to Christian magicians. Magicians from the Christian world did not have the same cosmological understanding of the world that orthodox Christians held. According to one magical text, the clergy who fought against magic and persecuted magicians were tricked and controlled by the devil to thwart the will of God.<sup>291</sup> Christian magicians also created a new category of spirits. Orthodox Christianity had good spirits in the form of angels and evil spirits in the form of demons.<sup>292</sup> However, magicians added neutral spirits that did not fit into either moral category. Since Christian magicians were willing to abandon orthodox Christianity's spiritual world in favor of one that fit their understanding of the world, it is possible that they could have incorporated some of the Kabbalist tradition into their cosmology.

---

<sup>291</sup> Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic*, 108.

<sup>292</sup> Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, 153. While neutral spirits were new in the Christian context, Flint claims they come from a much older tradition. Many religions, including those of the Greeks and Romans, had minor spirits and deities who often interacted with humans. These divinities were neither good nor evil. Flint argues that these beings were reclaimed by Christian magicians and readmitted into the Christian worldview.

Certain Christian Kabbalists such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola adopted many of these parts of the Jewish Kabbalah's cosmology into their own cosmology.<sup>293</sup> The most important Kabbalistic cosmological idea to Renaissance magicians relates to their beliefs about angels. Spiritual beings were of paramount importance in the casting of spells and other magical properties. Therefore, by assigning them more power in their cosmology than assigned to angels in the orthodoxy, Renaissance magicians created a belief system that empowered what they were doing.

### **Condemnation of Magic**

Jewish authorities condemned most forms of magic. Rabbi Loew, the aforementioned Kabbalist associated with the golem, condemned all magic that did not originate from the power of God.<sup>294</sup> The rabbi's condemnation of magic is much more complicated than that of mainstream Christian authors. He states that anybody caught doing magic is subject to death, unless they are only creating optical delusions, or if their magical methods come from a book called *Yetzirah*. According to Rabbi Loew, magic comes from evoking the names of the upper beings, or angels, and altering their natures to the magic caster's will. Bending the nature of the upper beings is considered an abomination unless the book *Yetzirah* is used. Unlike other forms of magic, the book *Yetzirah* does not use the names of angels to perform its magic. Instead it calls upon the will of God to enact its power. It may seem strange that calling upon beings less than God for magical purposes was illicit while calling upon the power of the all-powerful God was not. However, Rabbi Loew saw this as the case because God can alter the natural world

---

<sup>293</sup> Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Kabbalah* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 122.

<sup>294</sup> Loew Ben Bezalel, "On Magic," 107-8.

without disrupting the order of the world for if he was doing it, the magic must be his will, whereas the upper beings had to act within the natural world or they would cause mass chaos.

By the thirteenth century, magic had officially become taboo in most of Western Europe. However, this diabolization of magic did not prevent magical practices from continuing. During this period, both Jews and Christians practiced magic in similar ways. Official responses to these magical practices were much more likely to be enforced upon Jews or *conversos* rather than Christians.<sup>295</sup> The Church focused on Jews and *conversos*, not because they were individuals likely to do magic, but because they were already marginalized groups of people. This increased marginalization allowed for further marginalization because Jews became more secretive, which led to them being seen as even more suspect.

Late medieval Christians were unfamiliar with contemporary Jewish practices. This was largely due to their own actions. Throughout the medieval period, religious persecution forced the Jews to practice most of their beliefs in private. The Christian authorities would not allow Jews to build new synagogues or practice their beliefs and rituals openly. Therefore, Judaism became increasingly secretive in the eyes of contemporaneous Christians. According to Elisheva Carlebach, “any doctrine that

---

<sup>295</sup> José Hinojosa Montalvo, “Brujería y Satanismo entre los judíos valencianos,” in *Castilla y el mundo feudal: Homenaje al profesor Julio Valdeón*, ed. María Isabel del Val Valdivieso, Pascual Martínez Sopena and Diana Pelaz Florez (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 2009), 254. *Conversos* were recent converts to Christianity, usually from Judaism. It is impossible to say whether *conversos* had actually converted to Christianity or still practiced their former religion in secret. However, that is not important to the larger question of the regulation of magic. *Conversos* were seen as suspect by many Church and local authorities because they often maintained social ties with their former co-religionists.

flourished out of sight of established religion was suspected of being subversive.”<sup>296</sup>

Since Judaism had to flourish in the shadows of medieval Christianity, contemporaneous Christians saw only the vague outlines and silhouettes of Judaism. This created a feeling of dread amongst those Christians in relation to Judaism. Therefore, amongst most Christians of the late medieval period, Jews became an object of fear and persecution.

One of the darkest ways in which this fear of Jewish secrecy manifested itself was through accusations of blood libel and ritual murder. The Jews were accused of ritually murdering Christians as part of an annual black magic ritual.<sup>297</sup> Jews faced torture and were forced to confess to accusations of blood rites.<sup>298</sup> Blood libel has a unique and not obvious relationship with the rise of the Christian Kabbalah. William of Norwich, one of the earliest people associated with Christian accusations of Jewish blood sacrifices, died in the twelfth century.<sup>299</sup> This was approximately one century after traditional Kabbalah began unifying into a semi-coherent set of beliefs. Christian Kabbalah did not begin forming until Pico della Mirandola began his work regarding Kabbalah in the fifteenth century. Unlike Italy, Christian Kabbalah had little influence in England until relatively late in the sixteenth century. The death of William of Norwich and his canonization led directly to the lack of direct Kabbalist influence in medieval and early modern England.

The death of William was attributed to Jewish magical practices. This led to an understanding in England that Jewish magic directly involved the blood of innocent Christian children. Therefore, there would be almost no incentive for Christian magicians

---

<sup>296</sup> Elisheva Carlebach, “Perception of Attribution of Secrecy and Perceptions of Jewry,” *Jewish Social Studies* 2 (1998): 117.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>298</sup> R. Po-Chia Hsia, *Myth of Ritual Murder* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 23.

<sup>299</sup> This was previously explored in footnote 192 in chapter two.

to look to magical practices that were supposed to involve Christian blood. Due to this, only after Christian Kabbalah became an established part of the hermetic tradition did it spread into areas in which Jewish magic was strongly associated with blood libel. While Christian Kabbalah did influence some later scholars from areas connected to blood libel, these accusations reduced the influence Kabbalah had on Christian magic.

The Italian Peninsula had a unique relationship with blood libel. Much like the rest of Europe, a tale of ritual murder arose in the northern Italian city of Trent. In this case, a young boy named Simon was found dead in the home of a prominent Jew in 1475. However, unlike the tales of the Jewish sacrifice of Christian children in England or Spain, Simon of Trent's death had a somewhat narrower effect on the Christians of Italy. Simon's death led to the deaths of many of the Jews of Trent, as they were collectively blamed for the act.<sup>300</sup> However, there was resistance on the part of the papacy to canonize Simon.<sup>301</sup> Pope Sixtus IV had investigators offer protection to the Jews of Trent. This lack of papal support for the pogroms, plus the relative temporal closeness of the blood libel case to the creation of Christian Kabbalah, allowed for the rise of Kabbalah in Christian intellectual circles. William of Norwich died long before Christians began using Kabbalah in their magic and for conversionary tactics. Therefore, the myth of blood libel became ingrained in medieval English Christian society. Italian blood libel myths did not

---

<sup>300</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Alleged Ritual Murder of Simon of Trent (1475) and its Literary Repercussions: A Bibliographical Study," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 59 (1993): 104.

<sup>301</sup> Kenneth R. Stow, "Papal Mendicants or Mendicant Popes: Continuity and Change in Papal Policies Toward the Jews at the End of the Fifteenth Century," in *Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. S.J. McMichael and S.E. Myers (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 256.

have the time to become ingrained in Italian society before people like Pico della Mirandola created the Christian Kabbalah.

This increase in the association between Jews and dark magic did not decrease as Jews were forced to convert to Christianity. In fifteenth-century Spain, Christian polemicists actively wrote texts connecting *conversos* to illicit magical practices.<sup>302</sup> These polemical treatises were not the works of random religious zealots seeking to glorify their own religions while attacking all other religions, but rather the works of the monarchy. King John II of Castile ordered the creation of three different works on magic by Bishop Lope de Barrientos that also attacked crypto-Jews. Therefore, even converting to Christianity did not save the Jews from connections to suspicious magic in the eyes of the general populace. Additionally, Spanish Christians added to the corpus of work surrounding blood libel by creating their own myths of Jewish blood sacrifices.<sup>303</sup> Although they were not centered in reality, accusations of ritualistic murders on the part of the Jews brought more scrutiny onto Jewish magical and mystical practices than had existed before.

### **Pico della Mirandola and the Rise of Christian Kabbalah**

By the time Christian Kabbalah was created by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, relations between Christians and Jews in Spain had already begun to collapse in a way previously unseen in Spain. Pico della Mirandola died at the young age of thirty-one in 1494; only two years after the Alhambra Decree forced all non-converted Jews of Spain

---

<sup>302</sup> Constanza Cavallero, “Supersticiosos y marranos, el discurso anti-mágico de Lope Barrientos a la luz de la ‘Cuestión Conversa’,” *Cuadernos de historia de España* 84 (2008): 62.

<sup>303</sup> Espí Forcén, “El Corista de ‘Engraterra’: ¿San Guillermo de Norwich, San Hugo de Lincoln o Santo Dominguito de Val de Zaragoza?,” 56.

off the peninsula. One of his main purposes for creating Christian Kabbalah was the conversion of the Jews of Italy.<sup>304</sup> In this way, Pico della Mirandola's goals for exploring the Jewish Kabbalah were similar to those used by Friar Paul while exploiting the Talmud and the Haggadah. However, due to the persecution of Jews around Europe, there would not have been much time in which Pico della Mirandola's methodology would have had much purpose in Spain, so it is not surprising that Christian Kabbalah did not appear in Spain in the same way that it had in Italy.

Italian Kabbalah was especially suited for exploitation by Christian scholars. Two concurrent issues within Italian Kabbalah led to the potential for Christians to use it. Firstly, the Italian Kabbalah, created by Abraham Abulafia, was not unified in the way Sephardic Kabbalah was.<sup>305</sup> There were many different strands of Kabbalah with many different myths and ideas flowing back and forth. This allowed Christians to choose which aspects of Kabbalah they would take, and which they would leave without being accused of doing that which they did. Secondly, the rise of Christian Kabbalah coincided with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Many Sephardic Jews fled to Italy and Sicily after being forcibly removed from their homes. This expulsion led to a new influx of Kabbalist ideas to appropriate. The chaos allowed Christian scholars in Italy to learn many different aspects and views on Kabbalah.

---

<sup>304</sup> Gershom Scholem, "The Beginnings of the Christian Kabbalah," trans. Debra Prager, in *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters*, ed. Joseph Dan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Library, 1997), 20.

<sup>305</sup> Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy*, 37.

Throughout the medieval period, highly devoted converts from Judaism focused on the justification of Christianity through Jewish texts.<sup>306</sup> These medieval scholars such as Mosen Diego de Valera created these arguments, not to convince wavering Christians to remain strong in their faith, but rather as a method of converting Jews to Christianity. These scholarly converts, who came mostly from Spain, primarily used the Talmud as evidence for Christianity. They claimed that the Talmud was secretly a Christian text that pointed people to Christianity.<sup>307</sup> The former Jews who participated in these tracts became known in Spain for their disputations against Jewish intellectuals. These *converso* missionaries, such as Mosen Diego de Valera and Friar Paul, failed in their missionizing efforts. However, the key to their attempts was that they had a background in Judaism.

The humanists of the late medieval and early modern periods attempted to follow the failed missionizing methods of the *converso* friars. Unlike the *conversos* who used the Talmud to convert their former co-religionists, the humanists made use of the Jewish mystical tradition. Since the beginning of the Scholastic Movement, magic had become increasingly marginalized as a field of study. Because most Europeans had converted to Christianity centuries before, the Church stopped finding ways to adapt and adopt various pagan practices. Therefore, divination and sorcery slowly became banned by secular and ecclesiastical courts.<sup>308</sup> Those who continued to practice the ancient arts could no longer rely on the protection of the people. Therefore, they needed to develop their own

---

<sup>306</sup> Joseph Dan, "The Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin and Its Historical Significance," in *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and their Christian Interpreters*, ed. Joseph Dan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 55.

<sup>307</sup> Nahmanides, *The Disputation at Barcelona*, 667.

<sup>308</sup> Kieckheffer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 180-1.

justification for their magical practices. One magical text speaks of demons leading the church hierarchy to persecute magicians. This document reveals the polemical structure in which magicians worked. However, the argument that the pope had been led astray by demons could not be told in public, so it remained hidden inside magical texts. The humanists, who maintained a strong connection to magic, found a connection to Jewish texts like those of the Kabbalah, for they were marginalized by the populace.

By the time the early Christian Kabbalists created their version of Kabbalah, Italy was ripe for the development of such an alternate version of Christianity to appear. The late fifteenth century saw an increased expulsion of Jews from Spain. This Sephardic diaspora brought increased secular knowledge to Italy, but it also brought increased occult knowledge.<sup>309</sup> Christian Kabbalists believed that the seeds of Christianity could be found in Kabbalist literature.<sup>310</sup> As explained earlier, Metatron and messianic imagery led to similar ideas between Kabbalists and Christians. However, the magical and mystical side of Kabbalah turned powerful Christians in the Church away from the idea of using Kabbalah as a form of conversion.<sup>311</sup> Fortunately for Christians interested in Kabbalah, early modern Italy saw the rise of the Renaissance mages and the Hermetic Corpus.

Many of the humanist mages of the early modern period had connections to the magical tradition of the Middle Ages. Looking for archaic origins to medieval magic, they stumbled across the Jewish Kabbalah and created their own variation on it. Christian magic has always been tied to Judaism. Christian magicians traced their magical lineage

---

<sup>309</sup> Dan, *The Heart and the Foundation*, 32.

<sup>310</sup> Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy*, 212.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

down to Jewish Biblical figures such as Adam, Noah, and Solomon.<sup>312</sup> Likewise, Jewish texts found their mythical origins in the same set of figures. The Jewish spell book *Sepher ha-Razim* claims at the very beginning of its text that the spells contained therein came to Noah, son of Lamech, who survived the flood, from the angel Raziel.<sup>313</sup> *Sepher ha-Razim* makes no attempt to hide its magical properties, as Noah is stated to have written the original magical text on an emerald, which was seen to be magical in nature. Therefore, in the eyes of Christian magicians, Judaism was the key to magic, as the most powerful mages of the past were all Jews.

Therefore, the Christian Kabbalists were not doing anything out of the ordinary for the late medieval or early modern periods. The marginalized groups of these periods sought some way in which to justify their existence to the majority group that had a tendency to persecute minorities. Both *conversos* and magicians fell into this large umbrella of marginalized groups for their religious beliefs. As seen above, both these groups found their justification in the Old Testament. The *conversos* found themselves Jewish heroes who were also heroes of the Christian faith.<sup>314</sup> Magicians found those same heroes in a magical context. Therefore, the magicians were creating a space for themselves in this unfriendly environment using the same methods other marginalized groups used in the same time period.

Even before the early modern period, magicians had been reclaiming magical practices from the pits of condemnation. In the early medieval period, definitions of what forms of magic were acceptable or unacceptable were fluid. During this period, the

---

<sup>312</sup> Klaassen, *Transformations of Magic*, 214.

<sup>313</sup> *Sepher ha-Razim*, 15.

<sup>314</sup> Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths*, 162.

Church reclaimed pagan holy sites by building churches over their shrines.<sup>315</sup> The Church also reclaimed several parts of pagan religion by mixing the old gods with demons. Also, several forms of magic, such as astrology, were reclaimed and placed into a good light by the Church. While this was not a reclamation of pagan religion by making those old beliefs good, the people were still willing to take pagan religious activities and place them in a wider Christian context.

The one individual who crossed both magical and Jewish lines to create an acceptable space for himself was Flavius Mithradates. He was a Jewish convert to Christianity. In addition to being a convert, Flavius Mithradates also held deep ties to the Jewish Kabbalah and the Christian Renaissance mages. Therefore, he was the individual who brought the Jewish Kabbalah to Christianity and attempted to reclaim it for his new religion.<sup>316</sup> He did this through a series of sermons delivered before the pope. Because of his connection with the Jews and Christian magicians, it is no surprise that he would use a method in which he justified his Christianity through the use of Jewish texts, which had long been used by Jews, only this time with a magical addition to it.

Amongst the magics of the Renaissance mages, one of the most prominent of their practices was astrology. Astrology was used for divinatory and medical purposes by these scholars. Paracelsus, a Renaissance mage and practitioner of the Christian Kabbalah, refers to astrology as “an indispensable art.”<sup>317</sup> According to him, astrology reveals the condition of a man’s heart, soul, and thoughts. Despite the power the stars were prescribed to hold over humans, Paracelsus makes it clear that the stars did not rule

---

<sup>315</sup> Flint, *Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, 254.

<sup>316</sup> Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola’s Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, 106.

<sup>317</sup> Paracelsus, *Selected Writings*, ed. Jolande Jacobi, trans. Norbert Guterman, Bollingen Series 28 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 151.

humanity, but rather were created by God to be used by humans.<sup>318</sup> Because of the power ascribed to astrology, it became a primary focus amongst Renaissance mages. One of the strongest connections medieval Jews had to magic was through astrology. Jewish tales state that it was the Jews who brought astrology to the West at the behest of the first caliph of the Abbasid Caliphate.<sup>319</sup>

The Renaissance mages took their justification of magic from the Jews. As stated earlier, Jewish Kabbalists argued that their magic was just as it came from the will of God. Paracelsus created a very similar argument for his justification for magical practices. He argued that all knowledge and art comes from God; therefore, using magic is within God's will as long as it is not misused.<sup>320</sup> Paracelsus, like Rabbi Loew and other Jewish Kabbalists, believed that magic was one of the highest forms of faith. He does break from the Kabbalist tradition by claiming that magic is natural in origin rather than preternatural.

Despite the deep connection between Judaism and magic, the earliest writings of the Christian Kabbalists show that they did not have much access to the original Jewish Kabbalist texts.<sup>321</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was one of the earliest humanist scholars to enmesh himself with Jewish Kabbalah. However, despite his fascination with the works of the Kabbalah, when he began his studies he had no knowledge of Hebrew. Pico della Mirandola's desire to explore Kabbalist writings led him to the study of Hebrew and other Middle Eastern languages.

---

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>319</sup> Alejandro García Avilés, "Los judíos y la ciencia de las estrellas," in *Memoria de Sefarad*, ed. Isidro Gonzalo Bango Torviso (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Acción Cultural Exterior, 2002), 335.

<sup>320</sup> Paracelsus, *Selected Writings*, 139.

<sup>321</sup> Wirszubiski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, 4.

His first forays into Kabbalist texts came in the form of the translations of Flavius Mithradates.<sup>322</sup> Pico della Mirandola was not the only humanist writer who relied on translations of Hebrew texts. It is questionable how much access he had to the *Bahir* and *Zohar* while writing his first treatise on Kabbalah. Several of his arguments appear to originate not from either of those sources, but rather commentaries contemporaneous to his own.<sup>323</sup> However, Flavius Mithradates developed the previously mentioned Latin translation of the *Bahir*. It was not until Pico della Mirandola's later writings that his knowledge of the original documents of the Jewish Kabbalah becomes clear.

Flavius Mithradates, Pico della Mirandola's Hebrew tutor, was a Jewish convert to Christianity in the same vein as Mosen Diego de Valero. Much like his Iberian counterparts, Mithradates and other Italian Jewish converts were deeply invested in seeing their former coreligionists convert to their new religion.<sup>324</sup> Pico della Mirandola, while not a convert from Judaism, worked under a similar sphere of desires and goals. Therefore, the entirety of Pico della Mirandola's first attempts at understanding and translating Jewish Kabbalist texts served the wider goals of converting the Jews to Christianity. He cemented this goal within his texts by delivering his work on Jewish magic and mysticism to the Pope for the purpose of showing how they could be used to convert Jews to Christianity.<sup>325</sup> These early works of the Christian Kabbalah were filled with irregular translations and unorthodox extrapolations that pointed to the Kabbalist texts found in Italy as being secretly Christian in nature.<sup>326</sup> Pico della Mirandola's

---

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>324</sup> Scholem, "The Beginnings of the Christian Kabbalah," 24-7.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 24.

questionable translations of Hebrew texts may not be entirely his fault, as Flavius Mithradates is notorious for his questionable translations into Latin.<sup>327</sup> However, Flavius Mithradates may have been more familiar with Hebrew than Arabic as he was a convert from Judaism, not Islam.

Another reason why Christian Kabbalah may have strayed from direct translation of Jewish Kabbalah comes from the purpose of each of the Kabbalahs. Unlike Abraham Abulafia and other Jewish scholars, Christian Kabbalists were looking for magic. Joseph Dan notes in one of his works on Kabbalah that the majority of Jewish Kabbalist texts were not magical in nature.<sup>328</sup> Rather, they fit into a pseudo-mystical and esoteric tradition that sometimes fit neatly within the larger rabbinical Jewish tradition. Christian Kabbalists were mages and magicians. When they explored these possibly ancient esoteric texts, they expected to find information similar to that of the writings of Hermes Trismegistus. Therefore, they were predisposed to interpret Kabbalist texts in a magical fashion.

Christian Kabbalists, due to the closeness with which they occasionally worked with Jewish Kabbalists, twisted the Jewish Kabbalah into a form that was somewhat more similar to Christian Kabbalah. Pico della Mirandola did not just comment on and translate Kabbalist texts; he also supervised the creation of new texts.<sup>329</sup> One of these texts was

---

<sup>327</sup> Burman *Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom*, 137-8. Flavius Mithradates wrote one of the few extant Latin translations of the Quran. Most of the other translations either attempt word for word translation or attempted to translate for clarity of meaning. Flavius Mithradates' translation, despite only surviving in two suras, managed to do neither of those things. Rather, what remains of his translation is full of errors and unclear statements. Therefore, his ability as a translator must be called into question.

<sup>328</sup> Dan, *The Heart and the Fountain*, 28-9.

<sup>329</sup> Harvey J. Hames, "Between the March of Ancona and Florence: Jewish Magic and a Christian Text," in *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to*

*The Ascent of Solomon*, written by an itinerant Jewish scholar named Yohanan Alemanno. *The Ascent of Solomon* was created as a way in which Jewish scholars could reclaim their magical tradition from Hermes Trismegistus by revealing the ways in which Solomon was the keeper and progenitor of all branches of knowledge, including magic.

Other authors besides Pico della Mirandola addressed and struggled with Kabbalist ideas. Around the same time Pico della Mirandola was investigating the Jewish Kabbalah, Ramón Llull's magical text, *Ars brevis*, was translated into Hebrew.<sup>330</sup> The Hebrew translation of Llull's work took on Kabbalist characteristics due in part to the preexisting flow of knowledge from Jewish Kabbalist texts to the works of the Renaissance mages. *Ars brevis* made strides through the Kabbalist schools through Yohanan Alemanno.<sup>331</sup> Despite the closeness between the two branches of Kabbalah, the Christian Kabbalah did not draw Jews into Christianity. Alemanno's translation of Llull's work replaces the importance of Jesus with the importance of Solomon, the perfect holder of the Jewish magical tradition.<sup>332</sup> By doing so, Alemanno displays the difference between the Jewish and Christian Kabbalist understanding of the messiah. As stated above, the major texts of the Jewish Kabbalah had a heavy messianic theme. Likewise, Christianity also has a heavy messianic message. However, those two messages are not the same despite the best efforts of Christian Kabbalists to argue otherwise.

## **Conclusion**

---

*Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. Claire Franger (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2012), 301.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

The Christian Kabbalah clearly developed from the Jewish Kabbalah. There is little doubt in the scholarly corpus regarding that fact. However, the form in which Christian Kabbalah emerged is somewhat surprising. Although mysticism and magic are often mistaken for each other by those outside of the study of magical practices, they are not the same. Therefore, the creation of a magical corpus through a non-magical tradition reveals a lack of understanding the Christian Kabbalists had for their Jewish counterparts. However, because Jewish Kabbalah was varied in its teachings, Christian interlopers could pull the parts they needed out of the Jewish works. Since the Christian Kabbalah also served an evangelistic purpose, Christians relied upon aspects of the Kabbalah, such as messianic overtones, to make a connection between Christianity and the Jewish mystical tradition.

## Conclusion

Medieval Jewish-Christian interactions occurred regardless of whether or not both parties were present. They occurred despite Judaism being condemned by the Catholic Church. These interactions were not predicated upon any purposeful desires on the part of either side to create new subcultures or intellectual identities. As the medieval period drew to a close, there was continuity in how Christians used Judaism for their own purposes.

The scholarship of Pico della Mirandola and the Christian Kabbalists can be seen as a mirrored image of the scholarship of Bede, Friar Paul, and other non-magical scholars. The scholars of the early and high medieval periods slowly abandoned openly using of Jewish exegesis until they only used it as a way to attack Judaism. This change can best be seen by comparing Bede and Paul Christian's scholarship. Bede's scholarship used Jewish sources to further his, and the reader's, understanding of Christianity. The Hebrew Truth was reputable enough that Bede used it to defend himself against attacks from his intellectual rivals. This is not to say that Bede was particularly fond of Jews. He found contemporary Jews to be detestable despite likely not personally knowing any.<sup>333</sup>

Friar Paul, while not the intellectual powerhouse that Bede was, reveals what initially appears to be the end of Christian use of Jewish intellectualism. He attacked Jews through their exegesis. He saw Jews as enemies of Christianity who needed to be converted.<sup>334</sup> Even his contemporaries such as Thomas Aquinas, who held the more conservative and less overtly anti-Jewish position created by St. Augustine of Hippo,

---

<sup>333</sup> Andrew P. Scheil, *The Footsteps of Israel: Understanding Jews in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 32-3.

<sup>334</sup> J Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 340.

moved away from openly discussing Judaism in positive terms. Jewish exegesis served only to advance the expansion of Christianity at the expense of Judaism.

In between the thirteenth century and the late fifteenth century, Judaism became too taboo to be used to connect new converts to Christianity.<sup>335</sup> *Conversos* still attempted to use Judaism as a way to gain favor amongst their new Christian peers, but it often led to increased persecution rather than acceptance. Whereas Friar Paul could use his connections to Judaism to gain political favor from the king of Aragon for his mission, later Jews found themselves accused of Judaizing after using similar tactics. However, chapter three revealed how this downward trend changed.

The opposite trajectory appears to have occurred in the occult and esoteric branches of intellectualism. The first people to use Jewish magic and mysticism in the late medieval period did so in order to convert Jews to Christianity. They followed the same tricks and methods perfected by Paul Christian. Instead of focusing on the Talmud as proof of Christianity, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Flavius Mithradates sought to prove that Judaism pointed to Christianity by exploring Jewish esoteric texts.<sup>336</sup> However, the means and methods of the pioneers of the Christian Kabbalah failed to gain traction amongst their Christian peers. However, Kabbalah peaked the interests of magicians and those enamored by the Hermetic Corpus. They began looking to esoteric Judaism as a means for acquiring knowledge, much like Bede and Aquinas' methods of exploring Jewish theological and philosophical tracts.

The rise of the Christian Kabbalah can almost be seen as a reversal of the path taken by Christian scholars from Bede to Paul Christian. Early modern scholars such as

---

<sup>335</sup> Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths*, 161.

<sup>336</sup> Gershom Scholem, "The Beginnings of the Christian Kabbalah," 21-2.

Paracelsus used Jewish mystical texts in much the same way as Bede and Thomas Aquinas. Bede and Aquinas believed they could find answers in Jewish texts that would help develop their understanding of the world. The Renaissance mages and Christian Kabbalists saw esoteric Jewish texts in the same light. However, instead of exploring Jewish exegesis, these scholars looked to more secretive texts for their answers.

The use of Jewish texts for evangelistic purposes seems to appear in places in which Jews and Christians have a high degree of interaction. Friar Paul Christian's infamous debate against Nahmanides at occurred in thirteenth century Spain. A few years later, he entered another debate with Jews, this time in Paris. Both Spain and Paris were places of heightened interactions between Jews and Christians.<sup>337</sup> Unsurprisingly, fifteenth century Italy also saw an increase in interactions between Christians and Jews. When the Spanish Crown expelled the Jews in 1492, many of them fled to the Italian city-states of Venice and Naples.<sup>338</sup> Additionally, Christians became increasingly interested in learning Hebrew as more Jews fled to the Italian Peninsula.<sup>339</sup> These Italian Hebraists became the forerunners to the Christian Kabbalists. When Giovanni Pico della Mirandola attempted to use Kabbalist texts for religious purposes, he was following the lead of Friar Paul.

Two differences can be found in the way the traditional scholars discussed in chapter one and the Christian Kabbalists discussed in chapter three explored Jewish texts. The first, already stated, difference is that Christian Kabbalists became more open in their

---

<sup>337</sup> Ari Geiger, "*Historia Judaica*: Petrus Comestor and His Jewish Sources," 129-30.

<sup>338</sup> Cecil Roth, *History of the Jews in Venice* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 63.

<sup>339</sup> Daniel Stein Kokin, "Isaac ha-Kohen's Letter to Marco Lippomano: Jewish-Christian Exchange and Arabic Learning in Renaissance Italy," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 102, no. 2 (Spring 2014), 204-6.

interpretations and uses of Jewish texts whereas the more traditional scholars became less open and more restrictive in how they used Jewish texts. The second difference has to do with the relationship Christianity had with Judaism while these scholars explored Jewish texts. Clerical scholars such as Bede, and to a lesser extent Aquinas, operated during times in which Judaism had not been completely regulated to a condemned and marginalized space by the Christian majority. Bede could openly engage with Judaism without fear of accusations of Judaizing. Aquinas could not engage with Judaism with the ease Bede could, but he still occasionally openly engaged with Judaism. The Christian Kabbalists operated in a more esoteric space than their clerical predecessors.

The first and second chapters revealed the results of Christian-Jewish interaction. When the two societies come in increasing contact with each other, they merge to create new societies. However, this increased interaction often comes with a pushback from those who disapprove of the merging of societies. As Jews and Christians came into increasingly close contact in the thirteenth century, Christian scholars became increasingly reluctant to use Jewish scholarship in their work outside of attempts to convert the Jews. Outside of the intellectual world, Christians pushed against Jewish influences by attacking the increasingly public homosexual culture in the Iberian Peninsula and France.

Each of the three chapters reveals a different way in which Christians both used and rejected aspects of Jewish culture. Religiously, each of the scholars in the first chapter rejected parts of Judaism while accommodating others to fit their needs. Bede rejected the Jews as enemies of God while seeing their knowledge of Hebrew as vital to understanding his own religion. Thomas Aquinas publically rejected the intellectual

scholarship of the Jews while privately borrowing aspects of their philosophy for his own works. Friar Paul personally rejected Judaism when he converted to Christianity and attacked Judaism. However, he used the scholarship of Jews in his attacks on Judaism.

Chapter two's focus on the rejection of homosexuality by thirteenth century Christians revealed how parts of the Christian population reacted positively to the more open sexuality of contemporary Jews. As Jews and Christians came together to translate Islamic texts, their cultures naturally came together to form a syncretic culture. The creation of this hybrid culture created a backlash by those in power such as Friar Paul. However, a similar set of circumstances led to the creation of the Christian Kabbalah as increased interactions between Jews and Christians in fifth century Italy made Pico della Mirandola seek to convert the Jews using Kabbalah.

Each of these chapters reveals a different area in which Christians interacted with Jewish culture. This interaction traveled beyond time or circumstance. It came about through purposeful dialogue, invective, and accident. Regardless of the purpose, Christian appropriation of Judaism rarely came as peaceful tolerance for the Jews. Bede and Aquinas both rejected Jews as their equals despite not writing in order to condemn the Jews. The intolerance of the thirteenth century caused the Jews to be persecuted by the Christians. The Christian Kabbalah lacked the overt power dynamics of the earlier appropriations of Judaism. However, it still used Judaism to advance the understanding of Christian magicians. Therefore, Christian use of Jewish culture was a consistent theme throughout the medieval period.

## Works Cited

### Primary Sources

- Alcuin. "To Arno of Salsburg." In *Medieval Latin Poems of Male Love and Friendship*, translated by Thomas Stehling, 15. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984.
- Apuleius. *The Golden Ass*. Translated by P.G. Walsh. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1994.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3. Translated by Herbert McCabe. Manchester: Blackfriars, 1964.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4. Translated by Herbert McCabe. Manchester: Blackfriars, 1964.
- Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Translated by Joe Sachs. Santa Fe: Green Lion Press, 2002.
- Bahir*. Translated by Aryeh Kaplan. York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1979.
- Bede. *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Translated by Leo Shirley-Price. London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Bede. *On Genesis*. Translated by Calvin B. Kendall. Translated Texts for Historians 48. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008.
- Bede. *On the Temple*. Translated by Seán Connolly. Translated Texts for Historians 21. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995.
- Ben Bezalel, Loew. "On Magic." In *The Great Rabbi Loew of Prague: His Life and Work and the Legend of the Golem, with Extracts from His Writings and a Collection of the Old Legends*, edited by Fredrick Thieberger, 107-8. London: Horovitz, 1995. Originally in Fredrick Thieberger, trans., *Be'er Hagolah*.

- Catullus. "Catullus 16." In *Catullus*. Edited by Elmer Truesdell Merrill. College Classical Series. 36. New Rochelle, New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1983.
- Eleazer of Worms. "Making a Golem." In *The Book of Magic: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, edited by Brian Copenhaver, 279-80. London: Penguin Books, 2015. Originally in Brian Copenhaver, trans., *Commentary on the Book of Formation*.
- Gersonides, Levi. *On God's Knowledge*. Translated by Norbert Max Samuelson. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1977.
- Ibn Mar Sha'ul, Yitzhaq. "A Faun Sought in Spain." In *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain, 950-1492*, translated and edited by Peter Cole, 28-9. The Lockert Library of Poetry in Translation. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Maimonides, Moses. *The Code of Maimonides Book X: The Book of Cleanness*. Translation by Herbert Danby. Yale Judaica Series Vol. 8. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954.
- Maimonides, Moses. *The Guide for the Perplexed*. Translated by M. Friedländer. New York: Dover Publications, 1956.
- Mishnah*. Translation by Herbert Danby. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933.
- Nahmanides, Moses. *Discourse on a Wedding*. Translated by Charles B. Chevel. In *Ramban: Writings and Discourses*, 5-23. New York: Shilo Publishing, 1978.
- Nahmanides, Moses. *The Disputation at Barcelona*. Translated by Charles B. Chevel. In *Ramban: Writings and Discourses*, 656-696. New York: Shilo Publishing, 1978.

Paracelsus. *Selected Writings*. Edited by Jolande Jacobi and translated by Norbert Guterman. Bollingen Series 28. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951.

“Quam pravus mos est.” In *Medieval Latin Poems of Male Love and Friendship*, translated by Thomas Stehling, 137-8. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984.

*Sepher ha-Razim: The Book of the Mysteries*. Translated by Michael A. Morgan. Chico, CA: Scholar Press, 1983.

Strabo, Walafrid. “To the Cleric Liutger.” In *Medieval Latin Poems of Male Love and Friendship*, translated by Thomas Stehling, 17. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984.

“Two Letters from a French Treatise on Composition.” In *Medieval Latin Poems of Male Love and Friendship*, translated by Thomas Stehling, 91-2. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984.

Weisel, L., “The Golem.” In *The Great Rabbi Loew of Prague: His Life and Work and the Legend of the Golem, with Extracts from His Writings and a Collection of the Old Legends*, edited by Fredrick Thieberger, 107-8. London: Horovitz, 1995.  
Originally in Fredrick Thieberger, trans., *Sippurim I*.

*Zohar*. Translated by Daniel C. Matt. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

#### Secondary Sources

Baer, Yitzhak. *History of the Jews in Christian Spain, Volume I*. Translated by Louis Schoffman. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961.

Blackmore, Josiah. “The Poets of Sodom.” In *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, edited by Josiah Blackmore

- and Gregory S. Hutcheson, 195-221. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Boone, Marc. "State Power and Illicit Sexuality: the Persecution of Sodomy in Late Medieval Bruges." *Journal of Medieval History* 22, no. 2 (1996): 135-53.
- Boswell, John. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Boyarin, Daniel. *Unheroic Conduct: the Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Boyd, David Lorenzo and Ruth Mazo Karras, "The Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth-Century London," *GLQ: A Journal for Gay and Lesbian Studies* 1 (1995): 479-85.
- Brock, Stephen Louis. *The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas: A Sketch*. Cambridge: James Clark and Co., 2016.
- Brown, George Hardin. *A Companion to Bede*. Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2009.
- Brown, Judith. *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Brundage, James A. *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Burman, Thomas. *Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom: 1140-1560*. Material Texts. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.
- Caputo, Nina. *Nahmanides in Medieval Catalonia: History, Community, and Messianism*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

- Carlebach, Elisheva. "Perception of Attribution of Secrecy and Perceptions of Jewry." *Jewish Social Studies* 2 (1998): 115-36.
- Castro, Américo. *The Spaniards: An Introduction to Their History*. Translated by Willard F. King and Selma Margaretten. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
- Cavallero, Constanza. "Supersticiosos y marranos, el discurso anti-mágico de Lope Barrientos a la luz de la 'cuestión conversa'." *Cuadernos de historia de España* 84 (2008): 61-90.
- Chabás, José. "Interactions between Jewish and Christian Astronomers in the Iberian Peninsula." In *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*. Edited by Gad Freudenthal, 147-54. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Cohen, Jeremy. *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Cohen, Mark. *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Cuffel, Alexandra. *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.
- Dan, Joseph. *The Heart and the Fountain: An Anthology of Jewish Mystical Experiences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Dan, Joseph. "The Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin and Its Historical Significance." In *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and their Christian Interpreters*, edited by Joseph Dan, 55-83. Cambridge, MA: Harvard College Library, 1997.
- De Visscher, Eva. "An *Ave Maria* in Hebrew: the Transmission of Hebrew Learning from Jewish to Christian Scholars in Medieval England." In *Christians and Jews*

- in Angevin England: the York Massacre of 1190, Narratives and Contexts*. Edited by Sarah Rees Jones and Sethina Watson. 174-83. Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2013.
- Dector, Jonathan. "A Hebrew 'Sodomite' Tale from Thirteenth-Century Toledo: Jacob Ben El'azar's Story of Sapir, Shapir, and Birsha." *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 3, no. 2 (2001): 187-202.
- DeGregorio, Scott. "Bede and the Old Testament." In *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, edited by Scott DeGregorio, 127-41. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Einbinder, Susan L. *Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- El-Rouayheb, Khaled. *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Espí Forcén, Carlos. "El Corista de 'Engraterra': ¿San Guillermo de Norwich, San Hugo de Lincoln o Santo Dominguito de Val de Zaragoza?" *Miscelánea Medieval Muciana* 32 (2008): 51-64.
- Fleming, Damian. "Jesus, that is Haeland: Hebrew Names and the Vernacular Savior in Anglo-Saxon England." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 112, no. 1 (2013): 26-47.
- Flint, Valerie. *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Friedländer, M. Introduction to *The Guide for the Perplexed* by Moses Maimonides, translated by M. Friedländer. New York: Dover Publications, 1956.

- Funk, Robert W. et alia. Introduction to *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*, translated by Robert W. Funk et alia. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993.
- García Avilés, Alejandro. “Los judíos y la ciencia de las estrellas.” In *Memoria de Sefarad*, edited by Isidro Gonzalo Bango Torviso, 335-43. Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Acción Cultural Exterior, 2002.
- Geiger, Ari. “*Historia Judaica: Petrus Comestor and His Jewish Sources.*” In *Pierre le Mangeur ou Pierre de Troyes, Maître du XII<sup>e</sup> Siècle*. Edited by Gilbert Dahan, 125-45. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013.
- Golb, Norman. *The Jews in Medieval Normandy: A Social and Intellectual History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Hall, Christopher A. “Moses and the Church Fathers,” in *Illuminating Moses: A History of Reception from Exodus to the Renaissance*. Edited by Jane Beal. 81-101. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- Hames, Harvey J. “Between the March of Ancona and Florence: Jewish Magic and a Christian Text.” In *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, edited by Claire Franger, 294-311. The Magic in History Series. University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2012.
- Hinojosa Montalvo, José. “Brujería y satanismo entre los judíos valencianos.” In *Castilla y el mundo feudal: Homenaje al profesor Julio Valdeón*, edited by María Isabel del Val Valdivieso, Pascual Martínez Sopena and Diana Pelaz Florez, 251-63. Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 2009.

- Holder, Arthur G. "Bede and the New Testament." In *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, edited by Scott DeGregorio, 142-55. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Hsia, R. Po-Chia. *Myth of Ritual Murder*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
- Idel, Moshe. *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.
- Idel, Moshe. *Kabbalah in Italy, 1280-1510: A Survey*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.
- Idel, Moshe. "Métatron à Paris." *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen Age* 114, no. 1 (2004): 701-16.
- Irish, Maya Soifer. *Jews and Christians in Medieval Castile: Tradition Coexistence, and Change*. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016.
- Isbicki, Thomas M. "Circumcision in Early Dominican Sentence Commentaries." In *Dominicans and Jews: Personalities, Conflicts, and Perspectives from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Edited by Elias H. Füllenbach OP and Gianfranco Miletto. 231-50. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015.
- Kaplan, Aryeh. Introduction to *The Bahir*, translated by Aryeh Kaplan. York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1979.
- Karras, Ruth Mazo. "The Aerial Battle in the *Toledot Yeshu* and Sodomy in the Late Middle Ages." *Medieval Encounters* 19, (2013): 493-533.
- Kendall, Calvin B. Introduction to *On Genesis* by Bede. Translated by Calvin B. Kendall. Translated Texts for Historians 48. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008.

- Kieckhefer, Richard. *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century*. Magic in History Series. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press: 1997.
- Kieckhefer, Richard. *Magic in the Middle Ages* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Klaassen, Frank. *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. The Magic in History Series. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013.
- Kokin, Daniel Stein. "Isaac ha-Kohen's Letter to Marco Lippomano: Jewish-Christian Exchange and Arabic Learning in Renaissance Italy," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 102, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 192-233.
- Koren, Shannon Faye. "The Menstruant as the 'Other' in Medieval Judaism and Christianity." *Nashim: a Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 17, (Spring 2009): 33-59.
- Kristeller, Paul Oskar. "The Alleged Ritual Murder of Simon of Trent (1475) and its Literary Repercussions: A Bibliographical Study." *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 59 (1993): 103-35.
- Lapidge, Michael. "The Career of Archbishop Theodore." In *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on His Life and Influences*, edited by Michael Lapidge, 1-29. Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 11. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Luzzati, Michele. "'Satis est quod tecum dormivit' Vero, verosimile e falso nelle incriminazioni di ebrei un caso di presunta sodomia (Lucca, 1471-1472)." In *Una*

- Manna Buona per Mantova = Man Tov le-Man Tovah: Studi in Onore di Vittore Colorni per il Suo 92*, edited by Mauro Perani, 261-80. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2004.
- Martin, Dale B. "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32." In *The Boswell Thesis*, edited by Mathew Kuefler, 130-151. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Martin, Lawrence T. "Bede and Preaching." In *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, edited by Scott DeGregorio, 156-69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- McCulloh, John M. "Jewish Ritual Murder: William of Norwich, Thomas of Monmouth, and the Early Dissemination of the Myth." *Speculum* 72, no. 3 (Jul., 1997): 698-740.
- Moore, R.I. *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Netanyahu, Benzion. *The Marranos of Spain: From the Late 14<sup>th</sup> to the Early 16<sup>th</sup> Century* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- Newman, William R. *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.
- Nirenberg, David. *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Nirenberg, David. *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

- O'Reilly, Jennifer. Introduction to *On the Temple* by Bede, translated by Seán Connolly. Translated Tests for Historians 21. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995.
- Pagels, Elaine. *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Vantage Books, 1989.
- Puff, Helmut. "Female Sodomy: The Trial of Katherina Hetzeldorfer (1477)." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30, no. 1 (2000): 41-61.
- Ray, Roger. "Who did Bede Think He Was?" In *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of The Venerable Bede*, edited by Scott DeGregorio, 11-35. Medieval European Studies VII. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2006.
- Roos, Lena. "Rhetoric and Religious Heritage: Paul Christian Preaching to Jews and Christians at the Barcelona Disputation." In *Dominicans and Jews: Personalities, Conflicts, and Perspectives from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Edited by Elias H. Füllenbach OP and Gianfranco Miletto. 115-33. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015.
- Rousseau, George. "Policing the Anus: Stuprum and Sodomy According to Paolo Zacchia's Forensic Medicine." In *Sciences of Homosexuality*, edited by Kenneth Borris and George Rousseau, 75-91. London: Routledge, 2008.
- Roth, Cecil. *History of the Jews in Venice*. New York: Schocken Books, 1975.
- Roth, Norman. "'Fawn of My Delights': Boy-Love in Hebrew and Arabic Verse." In *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, edited by Joyce E. Salisbury, 157-72. Garland Medieval Casebooks 3. New York: Garland, 1991.
- Samuelson, Norbert Max. Introduction to *On God's Knowledge* by Levi Gersonides, translated by Norbert Max Samuelson. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1977.

- Scheil, Andrew P. *The Footsteps of Israel: Understanding Jews in Anglo-Saxon England*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2004.
- Scholem, Gershom. "The Beginnings of the Christian Kabbalah." Translated by Debra Prager. In *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters*, edited by Joseph Dan, 17-39. Cambridge, MA: Harvard College Library, 1997.
- Schultz, James. "Heterosexuality as a Threat to Medieval Studies." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15, no. 1 (2006): 14-29.
- Smith, Timothy L. *Thomas Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology: A Study of Theological Method*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003.
- Stone, Marilyn. *Marriage and Friendship in Medieval Spain: Social Relations According to the Fourth Partida of Alfonso X*. American University Studies, Series 2, Romance Languages and Literature, 131. New York: Peter Lang, 1990.
- Stow, Kenneth R. "Papal Mendicants or Mendicant Popes: Continuity and Change in Papal Policies Toward the Jews at the End of the Fifteenth Century." In *Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, edited by S.J. McMichael and S.E. Myers, 255-71. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Swain, Larry J. "Moses: A Central Figure in the New Testament." In *Illuminating Moses: A History of Reception from Exodus to the Renaissance*. Edited by Jane Beal. 59-80. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- Sweeny, Eileen C. "Abelard and the Jews." In *Rethinking Abelard: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Edited by Babette S. Hellemans. Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 229. 37-59. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

- Thacker, Alan. "Bede and History." In *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, edited by Scott DeGregorio, 170-89. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Tobi, Joseph. *Between Hebrew and Arabic Poetry: Studies in Spanish Medieval Hebrew Poetry*. Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Wallis, Faith. "Bede and Science." In *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, edited by Scott DeGregorio, 113-26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Weed, Jennifer Hart. "Maimonides and Aquinas: A Medieval Misunderstanding?" *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 64, no. 1 (2008): 379-96.
- White, Richard. *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Wirszubski, Chaim. *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Kabbalah*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.