Poetry, Myth, and Kabbala: Jewish and Christian Intellectual Encounters in Late Medieval Italy

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The nature of a diasporic culture—such as the Jewish Italian one—should be understood as an ongoing process of merging and sharing various intellectual materials derived from both the Jewish and the non-Jewish past and present. Throughout the areas where they settled in the Italian peninsula, Jews have both elaborated their own traditional authorities and borrowed non-native elements from the surrounding cultures, influencing the latter in their turn.

In Italy, where Jews had established thriving communities since Roman times, the intellectual cooperation with the non-Jewish society was always especially strong throughout the centuries, in part due to the fact that the Jewish population never became numerically significant, therefore being largely exposed to the cultural influence of the majority.

The small Italian communities kept in constant contact with one another and with major centers of Jewish knowledge outside of Italy—especially when they had to solve juridical or religious questions, which often derived from the merging of non-indigenous Jewish groups into the local ones. Italian Jews moved around, for commercial and educational purposes: often in the double identity of traders and scholars, sometimes as talented physicians or renowned philosophers. By wandering about the whole peninsula—and sometimes reaching to farther destinations—they circulated the products of their variegated formation, becoming cultural mediators among Jews and between Jews and non-Jews. They

could influence their interlocutors orally or address them with letters or treatises, written in Hebrew, Latin, or the local vernacular languages.

Such a circulation of knowledge was partly responsible for the intellectual cohesion of the Jewish population in the Italian Diaspora: By making themselves stronger, thanks to the cultures of others, they could awaken a deeper awareness of the risks caused by a too-close contact with the majority. However, being in a position of thoroughly understanding the major intellectual trends of the time, they could show their coreligionists how to adapt them to their canonized heritage without losing their religious identity. Although sometimes provoking disputes, the acceptance of cultural elements derived from “foreign” traditions never triggered in Italy the harsh polemics that characterized the intellectual life of Near-Eastern, Spanish, or German communities. In any case, Jewish scholars could ultimately demonstrate that what they were borrowing had originally been stolen from their own heritage.[1] Such an attempt to trace all traditions back to one cultural identity is very common among minorities. In the case of Jews, since everything could be referred to the Hebrew Scriptures, shared also by the Christians, their interpretation went beyond the communitarian borders and became appealing to their non-Jewish interlocutors. In such a framework, even pagan thought, reread according to the Medieval Islamic philosophers, could be referred to remote Jewish sources. As a matter of fact, what Muslim and Christian theologians had done in the previous centuries in order to allow contemporary scholars to merge religious authorities and rational thinkers into a theological system, had already been experienced by the Jewish scholars working in the Near East in the first centuries of the Common Era, as well as by the Church Fathers. Medieval Jewish mediators were following in the footsteps of their predecessors, who aimed to foster a common intellectual wisdom rooted in a uniquely inspired religious tradition.[2]

Thus, during the Middle Ages, Jewish communities in Italy, mostly in the South and in Rome, while continuing to view the Land of Israel and Babylon as the main spiritual centers of their religious tradition, developed their own rituals, their own distinctive culture, and their own academies, where they offered new interpretations of biblical and rabbinic literature—and also grounding them in non-Jewish speculation.[3] Although they followed trends that were common in the Jewish communities in the East and the Byzantine empire, at least from the ninth century, Jews in Apulia (at the heel of the Italian peninsula), commented upon the Scripture and the Talmud by making use of Hellenistic exegetical methods, which, although rooted in the rabbinic tradition, could leave room to allegorical interpretations based also on Islamic and Byzantine thought.[4]

The age of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (1194–1250), Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, best known by the title of King of Sicily, should be viewed as the first period when closer intellectual contacts between Jews and Christians were made possible in Italy. This celebrated monarch, who was both admired for his political skill and feared by the Pope for suspicions of heresy, showed a sharp interest in science and philosophy and a multiform cultural curiosity (he could express himself in Latin, Greek, and Arabic, as well as in other vernacular languages spoken in his kingdom). He eagerly invited Jewish scholars to his court, some from distant regions, requesting their services in translating philosophical and scientific manuscripts from Arabic and Hebrew into the Romance languages. Jews were sought both for their competence in biblical interpretation, which obviously represented one of their most important skills, and for their ability to introduce Christians to the most recent achievements

of Eastern thought and science, thanks to their knowledge of Arabic. Moreover, since Jews frequently practiced medicine, they were often hired to translate Arabic medical works unknown in Western Europe.

Under the protection of Frederick II Jewish scholars were entitled to share their knowledge with their non-Jewish colleagues.[5] The best-documented episode of such an intellectual exchange is represented by the encounter of the Provencal scholar Jacob Anatoli (first half of the thirteenth century) with the Christian philosopher Michael Scot (d. 1235).[6] Anatoli, who had been invited to Naples by the king, and at whose request translated several Averroistic works, related in his collection of sermons entitled *Malmad haTalmidim* (*Goad to Scholars*) that king Frederick possessed a thorough knowledge of *Moreh Nevukhim* (*Guide of the Perplexed*), the controversial masterwork of the Andalusian Jewish thinker Moses Maimonides (ca. 1138–1204),[7] whose work and thought were a common subject of debate among the scholars of the court only a few decades after the philosopher's death. Moreover, Anatoli's sermons inform us of the various subjects, ranging from the allegorical interpretation of the Bible to the discussion of complex philosophical issues, pertaining to deep theological problems, which were dealt with in meetings of philosophers of different faiths in Frederick's court. It was not uncommon at that time for a Jewish scholar to support the philosophical interests of a clergyman who was deeply interested in the study of the Scripture—but the opposite case was also frequent. For instance, Moses ben Solomon of Salerno (d. 1279), who had studied in Rome, collaborated with the Dominican Apulian friar Niccolò of Giovinazzo. Moses wrote a commentary on the two first books of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, relying on both the Latin and the Hebrew translations of the text (originally composed in Arabic), and often compared Hebrew technical terms with their Latin equivalents. In his Hebrew-Latin philosophical lexicon, Moses resorted to Niccolò of Giovinazzo, and quoted the latter's explanations on some chapters of the first book of the *Guide* in his own commentary.[8] The death of Frederick II (1250) and of his son Manfredi (1266), and the events which led Southern Italy to fall into the hands of the Angevins, were probably among the major factors that induced some Jews to leave the Kingdom of Naples, in search of better conditions in the communal freer cities in Northern and Central Italy. Still, the court of Robert of Anjou (d. 1343) in Naples continued to attract Jewish scholars during the first half of the fourteenth century.[9] Among the most outstanding intellectuals of the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century, was Judah ben Moses Romano, a former disciple of Zerahyah Hen from Barcelona. Judah spent many years in Rome, his birthplace, and translated several Hebrew works from Hebrew into Latin for the King of Naples, such as the *Liber de Causis* (*Book on Causes*), which had been attributed to Aristotle, but was effectively a Neoplatonic[10] text, as well as Averroes's *De Substantia Orbis* (*On World's Substance*). At the same time Judah translated into Hebrew Latin works composed by Aegidius Romanus, Albertus Magnus and Alexander of Hales, in addition to writings by Thomas Aquinas. In so doing, Judah was following the tradition of Jewish scholars of previous generations, such as Hillel ben Shmuel of Verona (ca. 1220–1295), who, beside translating Thomas Aquinas's *De Unitate Intellectus* (*On the Unity of the Intellect*), had propagated Maimonidean and Scholastic teachings both in Hebrew and in Latin all around Italy, especially in a school he founded in Capua (near Naples), which was attended, among others, by the famous Spanish kabbalist Avraham ben Shmuel Abulafia (1240–ca. 1291). Even in his biblical interpretation, Judah Romano, like his

predecessor Hillel, never hesitated to resort to rationalistic thought. Judah, as well as his cousin Immanuel ben Solomon Romano (ca. 1261–ca. 1328), exerted a substantial influence on Italian Jewish philosophers of later centuries.[11]

Jewish scholars who flourished in late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth-century Rome and Southern Italy took an active part in the contemporary literary trends that were discussed among Italian non-Jewish literati. If Plato and Aristotle, the highest intellectual authorities of the past, denounced the use of poetry as a vehicle for conveying untruthful information to a naïve audience, how could Jewish scholars explain the use of poetry in the Bible, a corpus of writings that had been revealed by God? By founding themselves on the Hebrew Scripture, they could demonstrate that there were different kinds of poetic discourse and that the biblical one was the highest and the truest of all. Following in the steps of the Aristotelian logical tradition, they maintained that, like any other poetic genre, biblical poetry contained metaphors, although these conceived hidden mysteries, whose perfect knowledge would allow scholars to understand the secrets of the Godhead. After all, the ancient prophets were nothing but poets, who had received by God the gift to foresee the events and to express the future in poetic terms.[12] The revival of poetry as prophecy was very significant in the Middle Ages. The later rediscovery, through Byzantium, of ancient Greek prophetic texts, thought to be more ancient than what they really were, made Western scholars more eager to hold discussions with Jews about biblical poetry and prophecy. Therefore, throughout the Middle Ages, the poetic interpretation of the Bible became common and Jews helped their Christian colleagues to reveal the mysteries of the Jewish interpretation of biblical poetry in order to better understand its profound meanings. What Christians did not know (nor possibly Jews) was that the poetic texts by which Jews meant to reveal religious mysteries were not very old but were the result of late-antique pagan speculative sources, which sounded familiar to non-Jewish intellectuals. By holding that the Hebrew texts were more ancient than their Greek sources, both Jews and Christians could prove that pagan authors had been influenced by Jewish traditions in the antiquity. Moreover, the Platonic attack against mythology as related to poetry could be explained against the background of the allegorical reading of biblical poetry. In the case of a prophetic poetry, myth was no longer a danger. That is why Byzantine Christian authors on the Eastern side of the Mediterranean and Spanish Jewish kabbalists on its Western side reintroduced a poetic discourse in their religious traditions that could take myth into account.

It was not by mere chance that in the same generation of Dante Alighieri, the author of the prophetic poem known by later generations as *The Divine Comedy*, Jewish Italian scholars turned biblical poetry into a prophetic discourse which reread Jewish themes in a philosophic and sometimes mythical perspective. The first known Jewish poet to be involved in this project was Immanuel ben Solomon of Rome, whom some scholars believe to have been on friendly terms with Dante. Immanuel may be seen as the best representative of late Medieval Jewish Italian culture. Born in Rome in the same generation that witnessed the contemporary presence in the city of Jewish scholars coming from the most important centers of the Diaspora, he belonged to a wealthy family of traders and, being a banker himself, wandered around several cities for his commercial activities. At the same time he was a very skilled philosopher, well versed in the Scholastic interpretation of the Scripture, especially knowledgeable in the Maimonidean tradition. Among his exegetic works, his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* is of special renown. In it he draws upon the homonymous work by the Provencal author

Moses ibn Tibbon (flourished in the second half of the thirteenth century), in order to demonstrate the higher status of biblical poetry. His poems, written in elegant Tuscan Italian or biblical Hebrew, followed both the contemporary Italian and Spanish traditions. It is assumed that it was in Immanuel's generation, and especially in the Roman intellectual environment, that the newly produced or reorganized kabbalistic material was brought from Spain to Italy. Although it is very hard to demonstrate that Dante's *Comedy* was influenced by Kabbala, it is likely that this author might have come across some Hebrew mystical interpretations that widely circulated around Italy in the early decades of the fourteenth century. For instance, the role of the *Shekhinah*, the female aspect of God, who could be identified with the Shulamite of the *Song of Songs* according to Jewish Medieval interpreters, corresponds to the angelic lady on which the poetry of Dante and his Tuscan contemporaries mainly focused.[13] Like the latter, Immanuel praises women as manifestations of the higher divine world.

Let us examine, for instance, Immanuel's sixteenth *Mahberet* (*Composition*), a chapter from his major literary work entitled *Mahbarot* (*Compositions*), which focuses on the nature of the angel-like woman. When Immanuel and his fictitious friend, the "Prince," meet her first, the mysterious lady looks so beautiful that "everyone who sees her, praises her for her beauty, wisdom and skills"; "her eyes throw arrows that are dipped in the blood of those who passionately long for her" and she is "perfectly aware that by her light she rules over any other light." She is very modest, though, because she knows fairly well that "were she prouder, when walking in the city streets the angels would not dare meet her…." [14]

All these features attributed by Immanuel to his "Madonna" are clearly reminiscent of the virtues attributed to Beatrix by Dante. [15] Moreover, Immanuel's *Mahbarot*, which stylistically originate from the Arabic *maqama* genre in its mixture of poetry and prose, look similar to Dante's *Vita nova*, a *prosimetrum*, which is a literary work made up of both verse and prose, dealing with the beatific influence of Beatrix's love.

If the topic of Platonic love known in a Islamicate Aristotelian garb was influential in late-thirteenth and fourteenth-century Italy, it became one of the major issues that were discussed between the first half of the fifteenth century and mid-sixteenth century, when Italian intellectual circles were heavily influenced by Byzantine Neoplatonic theologies introduced into the peninsula—especially during and after the 1439 Council of Florence. This was a political and religious endeavor, aiming to reunite the Western and the Eastern Churches, and was made possible due to the diplomatic and financial activities of the powerful Medici family. The trend to read Christianity in the light of pagan myth thanks to the rediscovery of Greek texts brought to Italy by the Byzantines opened the path to a thorough search of all the mysteries conceived in different religious thoughts. Among those mysteries, hidden in sacred poetry, Jewish Kabbala could become a major tool for a reappraisal of ancient prophetic sources.

Beside Judah and Immanuel Romano, who also made use of kabbalistic motifs associated with Neoplatonic and Aristotelian concepts, the Roman scholar Menahem ben Benjamin of Recanati (active in the first half of the fourteenth century) was among the most important and influential Italian Rabbis of his time, whose work became the most commonly studied among the Italian-Jewish students of the esoteric tradition. In his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, composed at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Menahem selected and quoted passages from the most outstanding authorities of Medieval

Spanish and Provencal Kabbala, mainly from *Sefer haZohar* (*Book of Splendor*)[16] and *Sefer haBahir* (*Bright Book*), while concomitantly relying on Maimonides' rationalistic thought, which—as stated—was widely known and appreciated by both Christian and Jewish scholars in Italy. Menahem was but the first of a long tradition of Italian scholars who demonstrated the possible connections of Jewish Aristotelian thought with the kabbalistic tradition.[17] Another outstanding kabbalistic figure was Abraham Abulafia (1240– ca. 1291), who, though born in Spain, spent a long time in Rome and Southern Italy, where he decided to merge the most deeply mystical traditions of Judaism with Maimonidean thought, thus creating a trend of Kabbala, which has been called ecstatic or prophetic, that was to develop in Sicily, where Abulafia founded a school in the final years of his life.[18] Unlike philosophical texts, Jewish kabbalistic works were known only within the Jewish communities until the fifteenth century, when this esoteric doctrine became an important object of interest for Christian secular humanists, as well as for Christian clergymen, in the context of the reappraisal of ancient sources coming from the East and allegedly related to prophetic revelations from High. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) was a Christian scholar who spent the last years of his brief life in Florence. Inspired by the Greek revival that had taken place in the environment of the Medici family, he studied Platonic and Neoplatonic sources and elaborated on the ancient view according to which an allegorical reading of pagan myths could explain the most hidden mysteries of Christian theology. However, besides merging Plato, Pythagoras, Hermes Trismegistus, and Orpheus according to the Florentine tradition (which had been fostered by the Latin translations of the Greek texts reintroduced in Italy by the Byzantines), Pico decided to include kabbalistic texts in his all-comprehensive analysis of pagan myth. By the end of 1486 he wrote his Latin oration *De hominis dignitate* (*On Man's Dignity*), in which he affirmed that, in order to ascend to God, man needs a *medium*, which Pico identified as a cherub: his assumption was based on a kabbalistic rereading of Pseudo-Dyonisian angelology.[19] One of Pico's Jewish assistants, Yohanan ben Yizhaq Alemanno (ca. 1435–ca. 1506), affirmed in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, dedicated to Pico, that angels are the only *medium* that allow man's soul to ascend to God.[20] As a matter of fact, a few years before composing his oration, Pico, who was deeply fascinated with Tuscan poetry of the previous centuries, wrote a commentary on one of his friend Girolamo Benivieni's love poems.[21] The latter had been composed in the Tuscan thirteenth/fourteenth-century style, though they more clearly expressed Platonic and Neoplatonic themes cherished by the scholars of the humanist Florentine environment. Let us take the following of Benivieni's verses into account:[22]

From supernal love derives
the fire by whose virtue
all living creatures exist.
When such fire burns in ourselves,
our heart grows, while dying.

Pico wrote that in these words "astonishing and secret mysteries of love"[23] are concealed. The profound sense of Benivieni's verses ought to be sought in the ability of man's soul to turn totally to the object of her desire and die by virtue of such passionate love. Those who completely annihilate themselves into intellectual contemplation at exactly the same time when they miss their rational

activities, lose their rationality, by acquiring the intellectual level of angels, and, he continues,

> [the mystic] dies in the world of the senses, being restored to a better life in the world of the intelligibles [...] this is what the wise kabbalists affirm, when they say that Enoch or Metatron, the angel of the Godhead, or any other man can be turned into angels. [24]

In the system of thought elaborated by the *princeps concordiae*, that is, the "prince of the agreement" between the various religious and philosophic doctrines, as Pico della Mirandola was named by his contemporaneous, we can clearly observe his resorting to the most common motifs of Jewish "rational mysticism": the man who wishes to attain the union with the Active Intellect will encounter the man Enoch, who was turned into the angel Metatron; he will then annihilate his soul in God, by purifying her through the consuming fire of divine love, as affirmed by Benivieni by the words "When such fire burns in ourselves, our heart grows, while dying." Pico commented on the latter words:

> That is why, if we assume, following the author's [Benivieni] words, that divine heavenly love is an intellectual desire [...] which cannot be attained by man before the corporeal part of his soul has not been removed, the poet is totally right when he argues that while the human heart, that is man's soul who dwells in man's heart, burns in the fire of love, dies by that fire, and its death is not a diminution, but a growth, since when the soul has been completely burnt off by that flaming ardour, as if offered in the holiest holocaust, as if offered in sacrifice to the first Father, the source of all beauty, she is led, by ineffable [divine] grace to the Temple of Solomon, which is adorned with all spiritual good, the true dwelling of God. This priceless gift of love which makes men equal to angels, is an admirable virtue which gives us life, by bringing us to death.[25]

Pico's conception of divine love considered as an intellectual love, which can be attained solely by freeing one's soul from corporeal ties and by leading her through the fire of a consuming sacrifice to the Temple of Solomon, "the true dwelling of God," is strongly reminiscent of analogous views explained, on biblical and kabbalistic bases, in the already mentioned Alemanno's *Commentary on* Solomon's *Song of Songs*.[26]

This Platonic-mythical-poetic reading of Kabbala, shared by both Jews and Christians, aroused problems in the small Jewish Italian communities. Judah Messer Leon, a fifteenth-century Ashkenazi scholar well versed in Aristotelian philosophy, sent a letter to the members of the Florentine community in which he warned them against any use of Kabbala according to Platonic speculation. He probably feared the possible misunderstandings of Jewish dogmas, when read according to a mythical interpretation. Among Italian Jewish intellectuals, the dogmatic reading of Judaism suggested by Spanish authorities such as Maimonides or the early fifteenth-century Joseph Albo was held in high esteem. This approach to faith allowed Italian Jews to read their faith in parallel terms as Christianity, as a religious system based on dogmas which could be interpreted rationally.

A trace of the polemics against the Florentine community aroused by Messer Leon can be seen in Elijah Hayyim of Genazzano's treatise *Iggeret hamudot* (*Epistle of Delight*), a work on philosophy and Kabbala written in the last decade of the fifteenth century in the form of both a letter and a formal speculative treatise.

Elijah Hayyim of Genazzano (1440 ca.–1510 ca.) was a member of the Jewish banking elite that from the end of the fourteenth century had been allowed to settle in Tuscan cities. Like the other Jewish banking families, the Genazzanos had originally come from Rome and they boasted to descend from the priestly families, which had been deported by Titus to Italy after the destruction of the Second Temple. Roman Jews stressed their distinctive character that made them unique in the Diaspora, thus highlighting the differences from Ashkenazi or Sephardic communities.

Elijah Hayyim wrote his *Iggeret hamudot* exactly in the period when refugees from the Iberian peninsula were arriving in large numbers to Italy. For many Italian (i.e. Roman) Jews, the presence of the Sephardim was a threat to the good but instable social conditions they had managed to create in the two previous centuries. This is the reason why in his *Epistle* Genazzano attacks contemporary Sephardic intellectuals, accusing them for their radical ideas whose only aim, according to him, was that of destroying the true Jewish tradition. With this goal in mind, Genazzano responded some intellectual questions addressed to him by his former yeshiva-fellow David, the son of Benjamin ben Joav of Montalcino. Benjamin of Montalcino, the head of a renowned Tuscan yeshiva, had been the target of Judah Messer Leon's criticisms some forty years earlier.[27]

Genazzano is also known for a poetic debate on woman's nature, composed in Dante's and Immanuel's garb.[28] He was very sensitive to the Neoplatonic atmosphere of Florence and in several passages of his treatise he reveals a thorough knowledge of some of the major trends of the Platonic interpretations of Kabbala, which were common among his Jewish contemporaries and which had been borrowed by Pico della Mirandola.

When dealing with a passage from the *Sefer haIqqarim* (*The Book of Principles*), a philosophical and apologetic treatise written by the Spanish Joseph Albo, a work that—as previously stated—had become very influential on fifteenth-century Italian Jewish speculation, Genazzano refutes the dogmatic interpretation of the Jewish faith presented by Albo.

Genazzano objects to the rational dogmatic understanding of Judaism, stressing that such a presentation of his faith has nothing to do with the traditional rabbinic and kabbalistic tradition, the only true tradition that allows Jews to deeply understand Judaism. In other words, Genazzano holds that the traditional kabbalistic reading of rabbinic and liturgical aspects of Judaism is the only way to adhere to the values of his faith, rooted in the Scripture and not in its rational interpretation. What is significant for our analysis is the relief the author gives to contemporary non-Jewish trends of thought in order to support his views rooted in Jewish tradition.

For instance, Genazzano follows the traditional kabbalistic interpretation of the levirate rules which could be read in the *Book of the Zohar* or in Recanati's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, which was much more popular than the *Zohar* in fifteenth-century Italy. Genazzano praises the rabbinical-kabbalistic tradition for being of higher value than the rational understanding of Judaism, fostered by Maimonides, Albo and other Spanish authors. He then continues:

> As a matter of fact, behold, I have found the following statement in an ancient book attributed to a wise man called Zoroaster: "The doctrine of the transmigration of the soul was received by the Indians from the Persians, and by the Persians from the Egyptians; by the Egyptians from the Chaldeans, and by the Chaldeans from Abraham. The Chaldeans expelled him from their land, since they hated him because he held that the soul is the source of movement and that she is the cause of the change in matter and that there are many souls and so on."

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In order to support rabbinic authority, Genazzano quotes the Persian Zoroaster, a major authority for the Florentine humanists who read Latin translations of the Greek treatises attributed to this semi-mythical ancient sage in order to find evidence for Christian traditions. The conception of the transmission of divine knowledge through a chain of initiates that had been common among late antique Neoplatonists and had been revived in the fifteenth century by Florentine intellectuals was influential on a Jewish Florentine scholar.[30] Now, in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Platonic Conclusions according to the Arab Adelandus*, written a few years before Genazzano's text, we read that: "All the Indian, Persian, Egyptian and Chaldean sages believed in the doctrine of the transmigration of the souls":[31] Pico's words parallel exactly Genazzano's statement, though the reference to Abraham should be sought in the views of the Byzantine scholar Georgios Gemistus Pletho, a philosopher who had taken part in the 1439 Council of Florence. In his *Treatise on the laws* Gemistus Pletho maintained in fact that Abraham believed in metempsychosis and attributed this view to Indians, Persians and Egyptians.[32]

Genazzano, who thus demonstrates that he is fully aware of contemporary non-Jewish speculation, resorts to the achievements of Florentine humanists both to demonstrate the higher antiquity of Jewish revelation and to argue against rational dogmatic views held by his coreligionists.

The impact of the local cultures, as well as the changes in the process of transmission of different materials within Jewish Italian communities, shaped the nature of the reception and of the subsequent interpretations of traditional lore, at least until the very end of the fifteenth century. As the revolutionary trends in Renaissance science and thought started to keep separated faith from reason, the modes of intellectual relations between Jews and non-Jews changed accordingly, as well as the official acknowledgement of the role of the Jews in Christian societies.[33]

[1] See N. Roth, "*The 'Theft* of *Philosophy*' by the Greeks from the *Jews*," Classical Folia 22 (1978), pp. 53–67.
[2] See F. Lelli, "*Prisca Philosophia* and *Docta Religio*: The Boundaries of Rational Knowledge in Jewish and Christian Humanist Thought," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 91 (2000), pp. 53–100.
[3] On the history of Italian Judaism see *The Jews of Italy: Memory and Identity*, ed. by B.D. Cooperman and B. Garvin, Maryland 2001.
[4] See R. Bonfil, *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle*, Leiden 2009.
[5] See G. Sermoneta, "Federico II e il pensiero ebraico nell'Italia del suo tempo," in *Federico II e l'arte del Duecento italiano*, Galatina 1980, pp. 183–197.
[6] See C. Sirat, "Les traducteurs juifs à la cour des rois de Sicile et de Naples," in *Traductions et traducteurs au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1989, pp.169–191.
[7] See M. Fox, *Interpreting Maimonides. Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy*, Chicago 1990.
[8] See G. Sermoneta, *Un glossario filosofico ebraico-italiano del XIII secolo*, Rome 1969.
[9] Neapolitan and Sicilian Jewish scholars continued to play a very important role in the diffusion of Jewish and Arabic texts into Christian culture still during the fifteenth century.
[10] Neoplatonism was a late Greek-Hellenistic philosophical school, dating from around 200–300 C.E. Its quintessential figure was Plotinus. Neoplatonists considered themselves Platonists, and their influence was considerable during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.
[11] See G. Sermoneta, "L'incontro culturale tra ebrei e cristiani nel Medioevo e nel Rinascimento," in *Ebrei e Cristiani nell'Italia medievale e moderna: conversioni, scambi, contrasti*. Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference of the

Italian Association for the Study of Judaism (AISG), ed. by M. Luzzati, M. Olivari, and A. Veronese, Rome 1988, pp. 183–207

[12] See F. Lelli, "Poetic Theology and Jewish Kabbala in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Speculation: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Elijah Hayyim ben Benjamin of Genazzano," *Studia Judaica* 16 (2008), pp.144–152.

[13] See F. Lelli, "Spuren jüdischer mystischer Motive in italienischer Dichtung des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Renaissance," *Im Gespräch*, 7 (2003), pp. 33–51.

[14] See *Mahbarot Immanuel haRomi*, ed. by D. Yarden, Jerusalem 1957, II, p. 275 (Hebrew).

[15] See, e.g., Dante's poem *Ladies who have intelligence of love*, in the nineteenth chapter of the *Vita Nova* (see https://halogen.georgetown.edu/mydante_test/vita/page/7).

[16] Due to the paucity of copies of Zoharic manuscripts circulating in Italy, Recanati's commentary soon became the only source for Italian Jews from which to draw passages from the *Zohar*.

[17] See M. Idel, *Rabbi. Menahem Recanati, The Kabbalist*, I vol., Jerusalem 1998 (Hebrew).

[18] See M. Idel, The Mystic Experience of R. Abraham Abulafia, Albany 1987; Id., Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia's Mystical Thought, New York 1989.

[19] See F. Lelli, "Yohanan Alemanno, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e la cultura ebraica italiana del XV secolo," in *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*. Convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte (1494–1994), ed. by G.C. Garfagnini, Florence 1997, pp. 317–320; Id., "Alemanno, Yohanan ben Isaac," in *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, ed. by P.F. Grendler, New York 1999, I, pp. 40–42.

[20] Alemanno's *Commentary* is entitled *Hesheq Shelomoh* (*Solomon's Desire*). The title hints at the passionate love of king Solomon for intellectual wisdom, which is the prerequisite, according to Alemanno, for the king's attainment of both rational and suprarational knowledge of God, which was to result in the mystical union of Solomon's soul with God.

[21] On Italian love poems written by Pico della Mirandola, see G. Pico della Mirandola, *Sonetti*, ed. by G. Dilemmi, Torino 1994; M. Martelli, "La poesia giovanile e le opere in volgare di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," in *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*. Convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte (1494–1994), ed. by G.C. Garfagnini, Florence 1997, pp. 531–541.

[22] G. Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e Scritti vari*, ed. by E. Garin, Florence 1942, p. 455, stanza IV, vv. 9–11.

[23] Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate*, p. 553. On p. 558 the same verses are interpreted according to the kabbalistic motif of the mystic union caused by God's kiss: on this issue see F. Lelli, "Un collaboratore ebreo di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Yohanan Alemanno," *Vivens Homo*, 5,2 (1994), pp. 401–430.

[24] Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate*, p. 554.

[25] For a full bibliography of English versions of Pico's works see http://www.mvdougherty.com/pico.htm

[26] See Lelli, "Yohanan Alemanno, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," pp. 319–320. On Alemanno's *Commentary*, see A. M. Lesley, *The 'Song of Solomon's Ascents' by Yohanan Alemanno. Love and Human Perfection according to a Jewish Associate of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Univ. of Berkeley, Calif., 1976.

[27] See F. Lelli, "Poetic Theology and Jewish Kabbalah in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Speculation: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Elijah Hayyim ben Benjamin of Genazzano."

[28] See A. Neubauer, "Zum Frauenliteratur," *Israelitische Letterbode* 10 (1892), pp. 97–105.

[29] Eliyyah Hayyim ben Binyamin da Genazzano, *La lettera preziosa (Iggeret hamudot)*, ed. by F. Lelli, Florence- Nîmes 2002, p. 152. An English version of Genazzano's treatise is forthcoming.

[30] See F. Lelli, "*Prisca Philosophia* and *Docta Religio*. The Boundaries of Rational Knowledge in Jewish and Christian Humanist Thought."

[31] See S. A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486): The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems*, Tempe, AZ, 1998.

[32] See M. Idel, "Differing Conceptions of Kabbalah in the Early 17th Century," in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. by I. Twersky and B. Septimus, Cambridge, Mass., 1986, pp. 137–200: par. D.

[33] See R. Bonfil, *Cultural Change among the Jews of Early Modern Italy*, Farnham, Surrey 2010.