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IMMANUEL ROMANO, DANTE, AND A MAN ON THE CROSS

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The study of Jewish-Italian culture in the Middle Ages still poses significant challenges due to historical and linguistic reasons. On the one hand, the fragmentation of the many communities across the peninsula and the demographic and cultural weight of Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewries have made comparative studies difficult. On the other, Hebrew is still a relatively rare skill among Italianists, and only a few reliable editions (and translations) are available for Hebrew texts produced in medieval Italy. In this context, the work of Immanuel Romano is an exception. A bilingual and prolific intellectual of Dante's generation, Immanuel is the author of *Makhberet ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden* (Composition on Hell and Paradise), a rhymed prose telling the story of the narrator's journey to the Netherworld that many believe to be modeled after the *Commedia*. After presenting a general overview of Immanuel's work and its reception, this article offers a comparative reading of an episode in the *Makhberet* likely mocking Jesus Christ with Dante's representation of Caiaphas in *Inferno* 23 among the hypocrites. In doing so, the article attempts to problematize traditional views of intercultural dialogue in the Middle Ages between the Jewish minority and the Christian majority between the 13th and the 14th centuries.

Keywords: Immanuel of Rome; Jewish-Christian Relations; Italian Jewish Literature; Italian Jewish History; Jews in Medieval Italy; *Inferno* 23

The study of Italian-Jewish culture is paved with obstacles.[1] As Robert Chazan states: "The importance of medieval Jewry in Italy has tended to be somewhat overshadowed by the larger Iberian (Sephardic) Jewish community and the yet larger amalgam of northern European (Ashkenazic) Jewries" (127). It is the fragmented history of the peninsula that proves particularly challenging: Mark Cohen excludes Italy from his *Under Crescent and Cross* – a major study on Jews living under Islam and Christianity – precisely for the ethnic and cultural idiosyncrasies that make Italian Jewry unfit for comparative purposes.

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In the domain of letters, as linguists and philologists have shown, Italy was never a monolinguistic space. Surveys of "letteratura italiana delle origini" include texts in Latin, Provençal, French, a myriad of regional and hybrid languages, from Sicilian to Umbrian, from Tuscan to Franco-Provençal. Mallette 2005 pushed the boundaries beyond the realm of Romance languages, studying Sicily in its Latin, Italian, and Arabic artistic expression, while Tomasin recently investigated the phenomenon of plurilingualism in merchant writings in a fascinating study that reiterates the primacy of multi-cultural spaces. As far as the Jewish communities are concerned, however, only a select number of texts are available in translation and very few systematic surveys have been produced over the years: Güdemann, Rhine, and Morais date back to the late 1800s and the beginning of the twentieth century; more recently we owe much to Umberto Fortis, whose work has been published by a small press that specializes in Italian Judaism.[2] Admittedly, the field of Italian-Jewish studies, at least for the medieval period, is still a hyper-specialized niche that has not fully engaged in fruitful dialogue with Italian Studies at large (and language training has played a significant role in this deficiency, Alfie 324).[3]

Immanuel Romano represents a most welcome exception. Looking at his small body of Italian sonnets almost thirty years ago, Fabian Alfie located Immanuel's art in the *poesia comico-realista*, noting that his Jewish heritage was for the most part dismissed by critics, despite its thematic prominence. Giulio Busi characterizes Immanuel as:

[2] Looking solely at poetry produced in Hebrew (and not in other Jewish languages such as Yiddish), only Chaim Schirmann, *Anthologie der Hebräischen Dichtung in Italien* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1934) is specifically devoted to Italy; his anthology has not been translated to this day; two major *thesauri* of Hebrew poetry also contain ample sections of Italian poetry: Charney Carmi, *The Penguin book of Hebrew verse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2006), with English translation, and Israel Davidson, *Otsar ha-shirah veha-piyut. Thesaurus of medieval Hebrew Poetry* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1970), in Hebrew only.

[3] There are, of course, exceptions: over the last century, historians have produced a significant number of works on Italian Jews in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period. One is reminded of the fundamental monographs of Cecil Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 5706-1946), Attilio Milano, *Storia degli Ebrei in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992) and *Gli ebrei in Italia. Storia d'Italia. Annali 11*, Corrado Vivanti, ed., (Turin: Einaudi, 1996-1997); more recently, Giacomo Todeschini, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia medievale* (Rome: Carocci, 2018) and Anna Foà, *Andare per ghetti e giudecche* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2014), this latter in a series addressed to a wide, non-specialized readership. The University of Naples and the University of Pisa have been particularly active in these efforts of recovery, along with long-standing publications such as *Mensile di Israel*, and *Italia/איטליה*.

> A seasoned poet, a literatus of refined talent with a distinct ironic vein, who could boast a vast culture and countless readings. [...] His vernacular poems show his skills as a versifier and grant him a place in the Italian literature of his time. An unmatched master in the use of Hebrew, he knew how to skillfully play with the subtlest nuances of biblical language.[4]

Immanuel is best known for his *Makhberet Ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden* (often rendered as "composition/tale of Hell[5] and Paradise"), a 1000-line rhymed prose that recounts a journey to the underworld which has drawn comparisons with Dante's *Commedia*. As Fumagalli effectively puts it, Immanuel's proximity with Dante has been the "felix culpa" that made him an exception in the field of Jewish-Italian studies, regardless of how firmly this proximity has been rejected over time.[6]

This essay briefly surveys Immanuel's life and works before considering one episode in *Ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden* in parallel with Dante's Canto 23 of *Inferno*. The article outlines the use of a shared iconography (a man on the cross) as a way for both poets to reflect on their respective communities, rather than a tool to attack the religiously affiliated Other. The figure of a crucified man thus becomes a transcultural sememe suitable for localized adaptations for the Jewish (Immanuel) as well as for the Christian side (Dante). My goal is two-fold: first, to shed light on a still relatively understudied figure of potential interest for students of Dante; second, to address the issue of cross-cultural encounters in medieval and early modern Italy from a different angle that stresses

[4] Giulio Busi, *Libri e scrittori nella Roma ebraica del medioevo* (Rimini: Luisé Editore, 1990, 29).

[5] In Hebrew, Tophet is either "spittle" (and, from here, something that is spit upon) or a valley near Jerusalem where human sacrifices were performed (Gesenius, ad vocem). Translators have mostly referred to it as the equivalent of the Christian Inferno/Hell.

[6] Stefano Fumagalli, "Prefazione," in *Immanuel Romano. Mahberet Prima (Il destino)*, Stefano Fumagalli and M. Tiziana Mayer, eds., (Milan: Aquilegia, 2002), 7-18. The *felix culpa* is the supposed friendship between Dante and Immanuel Romano, which we discuss in the second section of the article. Giorgio Battistoni, "Introduzione" in *L'Inferno e il Paradiso di Immanuel Romano*, preface by Amos Luzzatto, edition by Giorgio Battistoni; translation by Emanuele Weiss Levi (Florence: Giuntina 2000), xi-xiv, recounts how the myth came about and the role German scholar Avraham Geiger played in it. Another influential connection between the Christian and the Jewish poet was advanced by Asín Palacios in his famous *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*, where he maintained that Immanuel was the *trait d'union* link between the *Commedia* and previous visions of Hell conceived of in the Islamic world. See Umberto Cassuto, *Dante e Manoello.* Florence: Israel, 1921), 28-34.

coexistence over tension. In doing so, the work of historians like Robert Chazan and Roberto Bonfil (both influenced by social sciences and anthropology) can help us approach Italian-Jewish letters as the hermeneutical space of intersectionality rather than a buffer zone between two competing sides.[7]

1. The man, his work, his reception

It is often the fate of artists who choose to express themselves in a comedic vein to see their larger body of work dismissed or quickly rubricated under labels that do little justice to the complexity and versatility of their enterprises. Immanuel is no exception in this respect. In his case, critical assessments are further vexed by the sheer lack of reliable editions in print (especially the numerous biblical commentaries that he penned in his lifetime) and the limited number of translations that could facilitate the circulation of his work outside the narrow circle of Hebraists and readers of Hebrew.[8]

The textual dearth is lamentably paired with flimsy biographical information. We know very little about where Immanuel Romano lived and roamed, or how he was educated. Traditionally, scholars believe that he was born in Rome around 1261 and that he died around 1328 somewhere in Northern Italy, but this timeline has recently been contested.[9] Immanuel was a

[7] In chapter six of *Tra due mondi. Cultura ebraica e cultura cristiana nel Medioevo* (Naples: Liguori, 1996), Bonfil calls for a rejection of old paradigms of Jewish history informed by a "lachrymose" narrative. Looking at the tools of anthropology, Bonfil juxtaposes an inherently and endogenously Jewish perspective to one that pertains to the Christian majority. Robert Chazan [*The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom, 1000-1500*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)] prefers to speak of "legacy" and posits a triangulation between the Islamic, the Jewish, and the Christian legacies as the shaping forces of Jewish history in medieval Europe. In my view, although this essay does not touch upon Immanuel's Islamic and Arab-speaking connections (another major point of contention among critics), Chazan's proposal is more convincingly plural than Bonfil's, and thus less exposed to the limits of a dualism that is easily mistakable with attrition.

[8] For an updated list of texts available in both manuscript and printed format, see Dana W. Fishkin, *Bridging Worlds. Poetry and Philosophy in the Works of Immanuel of* Rome, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2023), 247-9.

[9] In light of new philological discoveries, Fishkin, *Bridging Worlds*, argues that Immanuel squarely belongs in the fourteenth century. Fishkin's reassessment has yet to be received by critics and carries minor bearing on this article. From the standpoint of Italian studies, Fishkin acknowledges that the updated chronology could explain Immanuel's thematic affinity with Boccaccio. It would also show Immanuel's debt to Petrarch in the stabilization of the sonnet form. On this matter the issue becomes particularly intricate and is part of a larger debate that involves not only Petrarch but also the *Detto d'amore* whose authorship is customarily ascribed to Dante, and more

polygraph whose extensive body of work includes: four sonnets and a frottola in Italian (*Bisbidis*); a formidable number of commentaries on individual books of the Bible (and also a popular commentary of a commentary, namely Ibn Ezra's exegesis of a passage in Exodus); a collection of homilies; two works on the Hebrew language; twenty-eight rhymed proses collectively entitled *Makhbarot*[10], the last one of which is the aforementioned *Makhberet Ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden*.[11] The first twenty-seven compositions of the *Makhbarot* are in fact prosimetra, as they are interspersed with a total of thirty-eight sonnets: this was the first time that the new form was recreated in another language.[12]

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recently to Immanuel himself by Remo Fasani, *Il Fiore e il Detto d'amore attribuiti a Immanuel Romano* (Ravenna: Longo, 2008), an expert in metrics, although his attribution has not proved successful among scholars.

[10] Makhberet (also transliterated Maḥberet) is the singular form, Makhbarot the plural; when Immanuel's work is referred collectively as "Makhberot Immanuel" Hebrew grammar requires a minor adjustment in the vocalization of the word sequence thus created (the so-called "construct state"). As for the poet, there are several variants for his name in primary and secondary literature: Immanuel Romano, Immanuel di Roma, Emanuel Romano, Manoello Giudeo, Emanuele di Salomon, Immanuel ben Solomon Romi, Immanuel ha'Romi.

[11] On Immanuel's life, see Cecil Roth, "Lo sfondo storico della poesia di Immanuel Romano," *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel,* 17.10 (1951): 424-46; Joseph Adler, "Immanuel of Rome," *Midstream* 48 (2002); Guy Shaked, "Immanuel Romano. Una nuova biografia," in *Immanuel Romano Mahberet Prima (Il destino)*, 163-78 (whose chronology significantly different from other interpreters), and Fishkin, *Bridging Worlds*, 21-37; for his work in Italian, see Fabian Alfie, "Immanuel of Rome, Alias Manoello Giudeo: The Poetics of Jewish Identity in Fourteenth-Century Italy," *Italica* 75 (1998): 307-29 and Isabelle Levy, "Immanuel of Rome and Dante," in *Digital Dante*, (New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2017), https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/history/immanuel-of-rome-and-dante-levy/;
Ead., "Immanuel of Rome's Bisbidis: An Italian Maqāma?,"*Medieval Encounters* 27 (2021): 78-115. For his Hebrew sonnets, see Devorah Bregman, "I sonetti di Immanuel Romano," *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* 61 (1995): 42-86. For the Biblical Commentaries, Fishkin *Bridging Worlds,* uses texts that were otherwise available only in manuscript form. For the *Makhbarot*, Dov Yarden offers the standard edition in Hebrew (*Maḥberot 'Imanu'el ha-Romi: mutḳanot 'al-pi kitve-yad u-defusim rishonim 'im mavo, perush, meḳorot, nispaḥot u-mafteḥot* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1957), which Battistoni has in the appendix of his 2000 Italian edition. The full text of the *Makhbarot* is available on the website of the Ben Yehuda Project (https://benyehuda.org/read/466#ch29110), which reports an earlier version edited by Haberman in 1950. To the list of works, Fishkin adds a group of fragmentary comments that have been attributed to Immanuel: for an application of one of these texts as a tool to frame the ethical component of *Ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden*, see Fishkin, *Bridging Worlds,* 59-82.

[12] On Immanuel's contribution to the sonnet form in Hebrew, see Bismuth and Bregman. Fishkin's new chronology for Immanuel Romano's life would have significant ramifications on this topic (Fishkin, *Bridging Worlds*, 2023, 25).

Scholars have tried to piece together the intricate network of literary, philosophical, and cultural liaisons that put Immanuel in dialogue with the Jewish tradition, and the Arabic-speaking world, although in this case in translation, as there seems to be agreement that Immanuel did not know Arabic. As a speaker of Italian vernacular(s) and a poet of his own right in the *lingua del sì*, Immanuel participated also in the Romance literary system. As Isabelle Levy aptly points out, Immanuel is a fascinating case study for comparatists:

> Immanuel's Hebrew and Italian writings add additional layers to the already complex linguistic reality of Andalusian Jewry: maintain the biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew, remove the spoken Arabic, but conserve the Classical Arabic poetic forms, meters, and themes, along with the Andalusi culture of intellectualism; and add spoken and written dialects of medieval Italy, with their host of hermeneutic intricacies.[13]

Both from his Gentile friendships and Jewish acquaintances, Immanuel was exposed to Dante's work. By family ties, he was probably related to Judah Romano, an important figure in medieval Jewish philosophy who, among other things, delved into the study of psychology and prophecy from a Maimonidean prospective. This interest percolated in a selection of episodes from Dante's *Paradiso* transcribed in Hebrew script studied by Sermoneta. Among non-Jewish intellectuals, Immanuel was friends with Cino da Pistoia and Bosone da Gubbio, author of a collection of stories entitled *Il ciciliano coraggioso* and of a curious "capitolo" in terza rima that summary of the whole *Commedia* in less than two hundred lines.

In at least two instances in his collection *Makhbarot*, Immanuel thematizes the diverse roots of his literary upbringing. In the eighth composition, he tells the story of a theft of precious books coming from al-Andalus. The halo of jealousy and secrecy that surrounds the manuscripts becomes a transparent metaphor for the *translatio studiorum* that was unfolding at the time and that Immanuel contributed to.[14] Elsewhere, in an ideal trajectory from the Iberian Peninsula to Italy, Immanuel stages (Makb. 6) a feud

[13] Levy, "Immanuel of Rome's Bisbidis," 82.

[14] On this *Makhberet*, see David Malkiel's study ("The Inheritance Tale in Immanuel of Rome's Mahbarot," *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History* 16 (1996): 169-73 and the interesting remarks by Umberto Fortis, *Immagini dell'ebreo nella letteratura italiana: un excursus tra narrativa e teatro (sec. 14-19*) (Livorno: Belforte, 2021), 20-2, and Todeschini, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia medievale*, 133-7.

between a group of poets from Provence who bragged about the superiority of their art in front of a delegation of fellow artists from Rome. As a proud representative of the Italian team, Immanuel challenges and swiftly humiliates his competitors in an easy win. Commenting on the episode, Schippers maintains that Immanuel "chose to parody not only Siculo-Tuscan poetry, but also the Hispano-Arabic tradition, which had become too conformist in his eyes".[15] Behind the character's actions one is once again tempted to see a cultural statement, i.e., the recognition of the crucial role Provence played in the transmission of Jewish and Islamic culture and in the establishment of Romance poetry.

Originally from Spain, but also sojourning in Provence was Al-Harizi, a prolific poet and translator who had a lasting impact on Immanuel. Al-Harizi authored the *Takhkemoni*, a collection of prosimetra that brought the Arabic maqama into Hebrew, which Immanuel formally and thematically reproduced in his *Makhbarot*.[16] Critics have highlighted the comedic and irreverent nature of the work, which tellingly opens during the celebrations of Purim in the Italian city of Fermo. Early on, Steinschneider expressed a rather negative view of the results the operation: in his opinion, compared to al-Harizi, Immanuel's *Makhbarot* were "a slavish imitation of *Takhkemoni*" (301). He continued maintaining that:

> If his opulence and frivolity can be called un-Jewish, it is too much to call him the "Jewish Aretino" or that his *Mechaberot* form a sort of

[15] Arie Schippers, "Les troubadours et la tradition poétique hébraïque en Italie et en Provence. Le cas de Abraham ha-Bedarshi & Immanuel ha-Romi," in Anton H. Touber, ed., *Le rayonnement des troubadours: actes de colloque de l'AEIO, Association Internationale d'Etudes Occitanes. Amsterdam, 16-18 Octobre 1995* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 133-42: 139; see also Jacqueline Genot-Bismuth, "La révolution prosodique d'Immanuel de Rome: signification de l'introduction du sonnet," *Israel Oriental Studies* 11 (1991): 161-86: 164-5.

[16] As a genre, maqama was first created by al-Hamadhani in present-day Iran in the tenth century, although its wide-spread success came with Hariri, who wrote fifty maqams later translated by Al-Harizi himself; besides the formal requirement of alternating prose and verses, maqama typically features an anti-heroic protagonist (Levy, "Immanuel of Rome's Bisbidis," 82-6). With the exception of the last text, Immanuel's *Makhbarot* also alternate prose and poetry, as "customary in all Arabic and Hebrew maqamas" (Levy). For a general introduction to maqama as a genre in Hebrew medieval letters, see *Rabbinic Fantasies. Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature*, David Stern and Mark J. Mirsky, eds., (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society 5750/1990), 25-7 and Jonathan P. Decter, "Belles-Lettres," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism. The Middle Ages: The Christian World,* Robert Chazan, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 787-812: 796-800.

> pendant with *Tristan and Isolde*; one would rather allow a comparison with the *Decameron* of Bocaccio [sic].[17]

The moralistic tone shows a different era in literary criticism. The parallel with Boccaccio, presented here in disparaging terms, is also suggested by Dov Yarden, but in more neutral terms: "many of the stories sound as if Boccaccio had written them" (31). Still, coming from an authority like Steinschneider, such a harsh assessment carried significant weight. The insistence on the thematic aspects of Immanuel's collection and the dominant key of his register has effaced the luxurious style and wide intertextual reach, which barely survive in translation or without the support of a thorough scholarly apparatus (which Yarden, Battistoni, and Fishkin in her dissertation make available). Suffice for us to say that Immanuel's linguistic virtuosos are capable of welding together an astonishing number of biblical passages in a technique known as *shibbutz*; with regards to Scripture, Dan Pagis quantifies this phenomenon in the vicinity of seventeen thousand instances, to which he adds seven hundred from Talmudic literature and six hundred from medieval authors.[18] Immanuel's poetic virtuoso also unrolls an endless series of puns, some of which we will later exemplify. Shaul Tchernichovski (1875-1943), a Jewish poet writing in Hebrew and author of an important study on Immanuel, rightfully gave Immanuel the title of "balshan", a master of language.[19]

As we mentioned earlier, *Ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden* stands alone in the larger collection: not only in its topic (a tour of the Netherworld), but also in terms of style: it is the only one out of twenty-eight compositions that does not have a poetic intermission, thus consisting of prose only. The history of reception also sets *Ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden* aside: it enjoyed major circulation with a significant number of manuscripts and print editions[20]. If it

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[17] *Gesammelte Schriften von Mortiz Steinschneider*, Heinrich Malter and Alexander Marx, eds. (Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1925), 308.

[18] Dan Pagis, "Caratteri generali della poesia ebraica italiana" (trans. Ruth Garibba). *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 60 (1994):17.

[19] Harry S. Lewis, "Immanuel of Rome," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 6 (1934-5): 277-308: 278.

[20] Wout Jac Bekkum ("The Emperor of Poets. Immanuel of Rome (1261-1332*)." Studies in Hebrew Literature and Jewish Culture Presented to Albert van der Heide on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday,* Dordrecht, Springer, 2007, 203-12) lists six printed editions of *Tophet ve' ha-Eden* only, respectively: Prague 1613, Frankfurt 1713, Berlin 1768, 1778, 1922, and 1926. The author also provides a list of manuscripts, as does Fishkin, *Bridging Worlds,* 247-9). Before the critical edition of Yarden in 1957, the entire *Makhbarot* corpus had been published five times: Brescia 1491, Constantinople 1535, Berlin 1796, Lviv 1870, and Tel Aviv 1950.

is true that we should locate the last *Makhberet* in the larger ecosystem of which it is part, it is evident that *libelli habent* indeed *sua fata* and that reading *Tophet ve' ha-Eden* as an individual yet not isolated text is a historically and methodologically viable option.[21]

A full understanding of Immanuel's intellectual identity would however be incomplete without Maimonides: a watershed in the history of Judaism, Rambam (as he is also known in the Jewish world) was at the center of many disputes concerning a variety of topics, from the eternity of the world to the nature of the human soul, from biblical interpretation to the institution of prophecy. Building on her previous work and in line with other interpreters (most notably, Sermoneta and Veltri), in her recent monograph Fishkin argues that *Ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden* was in fact an early vehicle in matters of Maimonidean psychology, thus showing the theoretical depth of Immanuel's work.[22] Serendipitously, one of the translators into Hebrew of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides' philosophical masterpiece, was al-Harizi (Immanuel will see both him and Rambam himself as he enters Eden).[23] For readers of Dante, encounters of this kind bring to mind the emotionally and intellectually intense exchanges between the Tuscan pilgrim and Virgil, Cavalcante Cavalcanti, Pier delle Vigne, Sordello, Bonagiunta, Arnaut Daniel, Cacciaguida. Immanuel simply registers their presence, adding just a few words for "*the* rabbi" par excellence: שָׁם רִבִּי יְהוּדָה הַלֵּוִי וְרִבִּי יְהוּדָה חֲרִיזִי שָׁם הָרַב רַבֵּנוּ מֹשֶׁה בֶּן מַיְמוֹן עֶבֶד אֲדֹנָי ("and there there was Rav Yehuda Halevi and Rav Yehuda Harizi and there there was the rabbi, our teacher Moshe ben Maimonides, the servant of the Lord" (680-1).[24]

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[21] For an alternative approach, still focused on the same *Makhberet*, see who explicitly calls for "a complete reading of Immanuel's entire oeuvre" (Fishkin, *Bridging Worlds*, 2).

[22] On Maimonidean debates at the time and Immanuel's involvement, see Dana W. Fishkin, "A Lifetime in Letters: New Evidence Concerning Immanuel of Rome's Timeline," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 112-3 (2022): 406-22.

[23] *The Guide* was Maimonides' philosophical masterpiece, originally written in Judeo-Arabic and later translated into Hebrew and from Hebrew into Latin, with numerous commentaries to assist the reader in navigating the *opus magnum*. Shmuel Ibn Tibbon authored the first professional and literal translation into Hebrew, which became the standard edition for the Hebrew-reading world; a second version was made by al-Harizi. It was this second edition that was later translated into Latin, thus making Maimonides available in the West. See the edition by Mauro Zonta, Maimonides, *La guida dei perplessi* (Turin: UTET, 2005). 114-28.

[24] Here and throughout the article, quotations are taken from Dov Yarden's edition.

In the past, critics stressed the role of the year 1321 as a major setback in Immanuel's life. In fact, Roth in "Lo sfondo storico della poesia" built his interpretation *Ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden* mostly around the alleged expulsion of Jews from Rome following a papal decree that Kolonymos ben Kolonymos, a famous translator and envoy to the Avignon court, was not able to call off in time. Sources are cryptic and inconsistent: there were probably arrests and casualties (Immanuel's father-in-law was among the victims, according to both Roth and Genot-Bismuth, who in "La révolution prosodique" speaks of "pogrom", 167n), and copies of the Talmud were burnt. However, there is little evidence for a full-scale expulsion of Jews from the Holy See.[25] Steinschneider and Milano do however point out that the memory of those gloomy days was later celebrated in Roman liturgy (respectively in *Gesammelte Schriften,* 291; and *Storia degli Ebrei*, 148-9). With many fellow Jews, Immanuel probably repaired to Umbria, sojourning in Orvieto, Perugia, and Gubbio. In this last city he lived under the protection of a generous patron named Daniel; it is also in Gubbio that Immanuel became friends with Bosone da Gubbio and Cino da Pistoia. Soon afterwards, both Daniel and Immanuel's wife are believed to have passed away in the same year of Dante's demise (1321). A *tenzone* between Immanuel and Bosone echoes the terrible events of this *annus horribilis*:

> Duo lumi son di novo spenti al mondo,
> in cui virtù e bellezza si vedea:
> piange la mente mia, che già ridea,
> di quel che di saper toccava il fondo.
>
> Pianga la tua del bel viso giocondo,
> di cui tua lingua tanto ben dicea;
> omè dolente, che pianger devea
> ogni uomo che sta dentro a questo tondo.
>
> E pianga dunque Manoel Giudeo:
> e pianga prima il suo proprio danno,
> poi pianga 'l mal di questo mondo reo;
>
> ché sotto 'l sol non fu mai peggior anno.
> Ma mi conforta ch'i credo che Deo
> Dante abbia posto 'n glorioso scanno.[26]

[25] Joseph Shatzmiller, "The Papal Monarchy as Viewed by Medieval Jews," in *Italia Judaica: Gli Ebrei nello Stato Pontificio fino al Ghetto (1555)* (Rome: Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, 1998), 30-42.

[26] Mario Marti, *Poeti giocosi del tempo di Dante* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1956), 321.

> Two lights are suddenly extinguished in the world; / in them one could see virtue and beauty: / my mind once used to smile, and now it weeps at / what it has finally found out. / Let your mind cry the woman with joyful beautiful face, of whom your tongue so aptly sang; / alas, I suffer, as every man who lives in this round world has to grieve. / Let Manoel Giudeo weep: / first, over his loss, / and then for the woes of this evil world; / for under the sun, there has never been a worse year. / But it comforts me to think that God / has placed Dante in a glorious seat.

Bosone laments that two lights have disappeared from Earth, causing twice the pain for Immanuel (*il suo proprio danno*; *'l mal di questo mondo*). Besides the mourning of Dante, which the text makes explicit, the other source of despair is not stated: Marti believes it was Immanuel's wife (as the mention of "bel viso giocondo" seems to suggest); Roth (in "Lo sfondo storico della poesia") believes it was Immanuel's benefactor (an important man in Gubbio, therefore Bosone's own suffering); Alfie sees it as pertaining to a larger scale of grief ("sotto 'l sol non fu mai peggior anno"), possibly the entire Jewish community, following the hazy events in Rome. Immanuel gives a heartfelt reply to his friend. In the final tercet, he does not eschew a bitter, quasi-blasphemous invective which Alfie leads back to the comedic cord of his poetry:

> Io, che trassi le lagrime del fondo
> de l'abisso del cor, che 'n su le 'nvea,
> piango: che'l foco del dolor m'ardea,
> se non fosser le lagrime in che abbondo.
>
> Ché la lor piova ammorta lo profondo
> ardor, che del mio mal fuor mi traea;
> per non morir per tener altra vea,
> al percoter sto forte e non affondo.
>
> E ben può pianger cristiano e giudeo,
> e ciaschedun sedere 'n tristo scanno:
> pianto perpetüal m'è fatto reo.
>
> Per ch'io m'accorgo che quel fu il mal'anno;
> sconfortomi ben, ch'i' veggio che Deo
> per invidia del ben fece quel danno.[27]

> I drew tears from the depths / of the abyss of my heart, that sent them upwards / and I weep: for the fire of the pain would have consumed me, / had it not been for the tears of which I have plenty. / For their

[27] Ibid., 320.

> downpour quenches the deep/burning that drove me out from my misery; / to avoid dying and to follow another path / I stand strong to the attack and do not sink. / Both the Christian and the Jew may well weep, / and each take a sad seat / endless weeping has made me wretched. / Because I realize that was the ill-fated year / I am disheartened, for I see that God / caused that harm out of envy for what was good.

Eloquently, Dante's death represents a loss for both "cristiano e giudeo." It is easy then to understand how tempting it was to marshal these two sonnets[28] as evidence that Immanuel and Dante *had to* know each other:

> That a Jew could be "a friend of Dante" is something that could easily strike the imagination. For some, it appeared so flattering to Jewish self-love that, once announced, the news immediately and to no surprise spread widely, without anyone thinking of carefully examining the basis on which it rested, all the more so since it enjoyed the approval of S. D. Luzzatto, a distinguished name who was one of the first to support it; the same with D'Ancona or Carducci who echoed it, albeit in a purely incidental way.[29]

Writing on the occasion of the six-hundredth anniversary of Dante's death, Cassuto was here returning to a topic he had addressed more than a decade earlier, when he proved the untenability of a friendship between Dante and Immanuel. Myths, continues Cassuto, are often hard to dismantle, especially when they are culturally appealing and vouched for by academic powerhouses on both sides (Luzzatto and Carducci).

Translations of the *Ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden* helped reinforced the legend. In 1874, Sansone Seppilli[30] unabashedly "danticized" (a term we borrow from Salah) the opening lines of the text[31]:

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[28] To which we might add a second tenzone in which Bosone and Cino disagree as to whether Dante and Immanuel, now dead, are spending time together in Hell. The tenzone has been thoroughly studied by Luca Carlo Rossi, "Una ricomposta tenzone (autentica?) fra Cino da Pistoia e Bosone da Gubbio," *Italia Medievale e umanistica*, XXXI (1988): 45-80.

[29] Cassuto, *Dante e Manoello,* 11.

[30] Born in a Jewish household in Ancona, Sansone Seppilli (1802-1878) published his translation in 1874 as a tribute to his friend Eugenio Camerini (1811-1875), author of a discretely famous commentary of the *Commedia*. The translation was reprinted by Leonello Modona in 1904 in his study of Immanuel.

[31] Asher Salah, "A Matter of Quotation: Dante and the Literary Identity of Jews in Italy," in Shlomo Simonsohn, and Joseph Shaztmiller, eds., *The Italia Judaica Jubilee Conference* (Leiden: Brill 2012), 167-97: 185. Salah argues that Italian Jews were in general uninterested in or dismissive of Dante in the medieval and early modern

> Nel dodecimo lustro di mia vita,
> m'apparian l'orme di vecchiezza in viso,
> nunzi funesti all'anima smarrita,
> Quando la cruda morte m'ha diviso
> Dal dolce amico mio, in cui spledea,
> Ancora di giovinezza il dolce riso.
> Onde pieno di duol fra me dicea:
> Quanta gloria e sapienza in questa terra,
> Quanta virtù spense la morte rea![32]
>
> In the twelfth lustre of my life, / the traces of old age started to appear on my face, / woeful omen for my lost soul. / Death then mercilessly tore me away / from my sweet friend, in whom / the sweet laughter of youth still glowed. Therefore, full of sorrow, I would say to myself: / how great a glory and a wisdom on this Earth, / how great a virtue did evil Death take away!

The translation visibly shows Seppilli's goal to draw Immanuel and Dante as close as possible. Not only does the translator impose a Dantean *terza rima* onto a text in prose; he also saturates his version with lexical memories of Dante's text, such as *vita/smarrita* in rhyme position, as per Dante's iconic incipit. Seppilli does not shy away even from convoluted phrases to turn Immanuel into a servile imitator of Dante: in the original, the incipit simply reads "after sixty of my years had passed…" (אַחֲרֵי אֲשֶׁר עָבְרוּ מִשְּׁנוֹתַי שִׁישִּׁים), which Seppili clumsily converts into lustrum-units in a desperate attempt to mimic Dante's iconic first line.

A Danticizing agenda is also recognizable in the first English translation of the *Makhberet*, penned by Hermann Gollancz, professor of Hebrew at the University of London, in 1921. Unlike Seppilli, Gollancz opted for a prose rendition, but he took the liberty to parcel the text, a running text with no internal division, into thirty-eight *cantos* "for obvious reasons": another way to

period, with the only (and, in his view, partial) exceptions of Immanuel Romano and Moses of Rieti, strangely omitting Abraham Yagel, author of *Gei Hizzayon* and especially of Moshe Zacuto, author of *Tofteh Arukh*, both works with an evident Dantean subtext. When emancipation unfolded, the tide changed and Dante, a refugee in search of freedom, became a viable "symbolic anticipation" of the fate of many Jews, a sort of Italian version of Heine and Marx, in Salah's words. In his opinion, authors like Immanuel Romano, by engaging with Dante's masterpiece, chipped in his greatness, showing that Jews, too, excelled in the cultural life of the peninsula from very early on. See Salah, "A Matter of Quotation," 196.

[32] Sansone Seppilli, *Inferno e Paradiso di Emanuele di Salomone; versione poetica dall'ebraico di S. Seppilli* (Ancona: Civelli, 1874), 23.

enforce a Dantean quality by means of the paratext.[33] In his version, Gollancz also tries to preserve the musicality of the original:

> Sixty years of my life had now passed, and the pains of mortal had come on me fast, when of a sudden a man full of life and deeds, of piety too he had sown the seeds, bade adieu to the world in its ways, he was junior to me in years and days, and as I dwelt on the sorrowful sight, I was seized with pain, horror, and fright.[34]

Whether unfamiliar or in disagreement with Cassuto's research, Gollancz endorses the friendship between Immanuel and Dante in blunt terms: "There is little doubt that Immanuel and Dante knew each other" (9). As for evidence, Gollancz believed that some generic parallels he could trace between the *Makhberet* and the *Commedia* would suffice (11-13), although he conveniently presents himself "not as an interpreter or literary critic and historian, but simply a translator" (5). Although more subtle than Seppilli, Gollancz's Dantean appropriation of Immanuel is just as loud and gratuitous. Still at the paratextual level, in the short span of the few lines in the colophon of his edition, Gollancz uses Dante to gain validation for Immanuel Romano's on the publishing market: the subtitle brazenly informs readers that the work was written "in imitation of Dante's Inferno and Paradiso" by a man who seems to have had no more relevant qualification than being "Dante's contemporary." As for the clarification of "Tophet and Eden" as the equivalent of "Hell and Paradise," it might well count as a perfectly valid strategy of compensation (probably necessary for Tophet), but it still adds an undeniable Dantean echo in this context.

Two recent translations of Immanuel's *Makhberet* commendably bring to the foreground the intimately Jewish character of *Ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden* and its thick network of quotations, allusions, and reuses of biblical and rabbinical material. Giorgio Battistoni for the Italian and Dana Fishkin for the English have cleared the way for a "Judaizing" reading of Immanuel (the term is once again an adaptation from Salah).[35] Battistoni clearly

[33] Hermann Golancz, *Tophet and Eden: Hell and Paradise. In imitation of Dante's Inferno and Paradiso from the Hebrew of Immanuel Ben Solomon Romi, Dante's* contemporary (London: University of London Press, 1921), 6.

[34] Ibid., 14.

[35] In Battistoni's edition, the translator was in fact Emanuele Weiss Levi (1927-2015), rabbi of Verona between 1952 and 1987. Fishkin's PhD dissertation (*Situating Hell & Heaven: Immanuel of Rome Mahberet Ha-Tophet v' Ha-Eden.* Doctoral Dissertation, New York University, Department of History, May 2011) also

states that his translation is only a first step toward a new understanding of Immanuel (Battistoni 2000 xxi); in his commentary, he gives a favorable portrait of Verona and the court of Cangrande della Scala where both Immanuel and Dante took refuge, the two poets thus coming closer in a vibrant milieu of intercultural exchange. Unlike Seppilli and Gollancz, Battistoni does not indulge in a danticizing translation, but rather an occasionally danticizing commentary: he identifies Dantean memories that imply the existence of an actual dialogue between the *Commedia* and the *Makhberet*, although these echoes are at times vague (e.g., the darkness and the cries of despair in the opening sequences).[36] Battistoni also employs Dantean categories of sin ("seminatore di discordie", 45; "lussuriosi", 51) when in fact distinctions among sinners are not clear-cut to begin with, as we are about to see. On her part, Fishkin – both in her dissertation and in her monograph – locates the *Makhberet* primarily in its Jewish milieu, teasing out parallels between *Ha-Tophet ve ha-Eden* and Immanuel's own biblical commentaries, many of which are still unpublished.

As has become evident, Immanuel Romano is one of those cases in literary history where the critical assessment of an author carries the double and contradictory burden of sheer lack of information and contentious, overcrowded, and often appropriative reception. In the words of Genot-Bismuth: "in the history of Jewish culture, Immanuel is without a doubt one of those personalities who created the most intricate webs of conflicting opinions" ("La révolution prosodique," 161).

2. A crowded tour of self-promotion

In the prologue to *Ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden* Immanuel bemoans the death of a friend; in a dream at night, prophet Daniel announces that he will show him things extraordinary; Immanuel asks to be taken to "the world to come", and Daniel grants the request. In its brevity, the prologue sets the narrative frame of the story and

accompanied the translation with a rich footnote apparatus; Fishkin, *Bridging the Worlds*, 163-208, offers a fully reviewed translation, this time keeping the footnote apparatus to a minimum.

[36] Sometimes allusions can be less generic. For instance, in an otherwise long list of biblical and postbiblical denizens of Eden, Immanuel dedicates one line to Raab (675), the prostitute that saved the Jewish people (Joshua 2:1-24). Dante too paid homage to the brave woman in the heaven of lovers (Pd 9, 115-26, Cassuto, *Dante e Manoello,* 54).

establishes the poet's authority as a prophet. It does so by tapping into the Mediterranean topos of poetic and prophetic investiture during a dream and by none other than Daniel, whose eponymous book envisions the Netherworld in the Hebrew Bible. Immanuel intimates that his *Makhberet* is a work of prophecy with key terms: his nocturnal vision is a "khazon" (16), a word frequently associated with prediction and divination. Daniel, who introduces himself with his biblical appellative "ish khamudot" to make sure that there is no ambiguity as to which Daniel we are dealing with (as both Battistoni and Fishkin in her dissertation point out) salutes Immanuel as follows:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי אָנֹכִי דָנִיֵּאל אִישׁ חֲמֻדוֹת אֲשֶׁר קְרָאתַנִי וְעֵינֶיךָ מַיִם יוֹרְדוֹת בִּתְחִלַּת תַּחֲנוּנֶיךָ יָצָא דָבָר לְהַרְאוֹתְךָ נוֹרָאוֹת וְחִידוֹת הַיּוֹם אַרְאֶךָ בְּצוּרוֹת וְסוֹדוֹת פְּקַח עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה וּבִין בַּדָּבָר וְהָבֵן בַּמַּרְאֶה כִּי לְמַעַנְךָ שֻׁלַּחְתִּי וְעַתָּה בָאתִי וּלְהַשְׂכִּילְךָ בִינָה יָצָאתִי (24-27)

> And he said to me: I am Daniel, the beloved man. You called me when water was coming down your eyes. When you started your supplications, a decree was issued to make you see terrifying things and today I will show you parables through figures[37] and secrets. Open your eyes, see and consider the thing and understand the vision, because I was sent here to educate you and now I have arrived to illuminate your intellect.

Immanuel is about to see terrifying things (*norot*), such as the graphic suffering of sinners, but also enigmas, and parables (*khidot*), another term that frequently appears in prophetic texts (e.g., Ezekiel, Gesenius, ad vocem). Daniel will show them as "forms and secrets", two expressions that stress the mystical and esoteric nature of the vision (*sodot*) and the mediation of images (*tzorot*). In medieval prophetology, concrete forms and shapes pertain to the lower levels of prophecy, where the intellect is not fully independent from sensorial limitations and still cannot comprehend pure abstraction. At the same time, this cognitive limitation is what makes prophecy intelligible to non-prophets.[38]

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[37] Ori Kinberg has brought to my attention that the original Hebrew allows for a double entendre of this passage, depending on the parsing of the syntagm בְּצוּרוֹת (betzurot). As a prepositional syntagm (the one that is reflected in our translation), it comprises the proclitic preposition *be* (sc. in, with, through), followed by the plural form of the noun *tzura* (sc. form, shape). Alternatively, the syntagm could consist of just one plural noun *betzurot* (sc. fortress, fortified place). Hebrew syntax allows for both alternatives, the former more straightforward in terms of meaning; the latter arguably more poetic, presenting riddles and metaphors as fortresses to besiege.

[38] Literature on the relation between poetry and prophecy is vast: Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1992, investigates the topic of investiture in a dream from a Christian perspective. For a

As the journey begins, Daniel and Immanuel enter Tophet and are first confronted with a long list of biblical characters punished for their misdeeds: the roster runs for thirty lines and quotes from all the three sections of the Hebrew Bible: Torah, Prophets, and especially Writings (historical books, such as Chronicles). The passage neatly exemplifies the often overcrowded and unfocused narrative that characterizes the *Makhberet*, as we freely move from Esau (Genesis) to Sisera (Judges) to go back to Cain (Genesis again) some forty names later, with no clear hierarchy distinguishable. After this first gathering, the *Makhberet* alternates extended one-on-one meetings with group interaction, as we encounter a vast array of lustful women (100-3), addicted gamblers (110-2), rich and spoiled young men who only pretended to care for the annual festivities (313-31) and clueless doctors (587-90). For the most part, Immanuel sketches sinners in generic terms, further contributing to a general sense of narrative confusion.[39] The plethora of charlatans, hypocrites, bigots, and petty criminals collapse into one amorphous ensemble that defies neater categorization. Interspersed in this amalgam are occasional moments of more detailed and accurate realism that show the cultural-situatedness of Tophet within Jewish coordinates, although Immanuel's taste for accumulation tends to conceal them. For example, Immanuel reprimands men who prevented women from safely visiting the ritual baths, spaces that were tightly connected to practices of cleanness and uncleanness (421-4). Also, a known fact was the Jewish involvement in the medical profession, with members of the community serving even at the papal court (Milano, *Storia degli Ebrei*, 626-35). It comes to no surprise, then, that Immanuel meets some representatives of the profession. Perhaps less known is that gambling was a social plague for many Jewish communities, as Toaff chronicles (110-7): we see them too in *Tophet*.[40]

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general introduction to the philosophical debate in the Middle Ages with a Mediterranean angle, see the volume edited by Anna Rodolfi and Alessandro Palazzo, *Prophecy and prophets in the Middle Ages* (Florence: SISMEL, 2020); specifically on Judaism, see Howard T. Kreisel, *Prophecy: the history of an idea in medieval Jewish philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001). Maimonides' second part of the *Guide to the Perplexed* is largely devoted to prophecy, with chapters 41 and 42 tackling vision and sensorial mediation in the prophetic experience.

[39] One exception is the long sequence about a friend of Immanuel's from Ancona and his wife (115-93).

[40] Ariel Toaff, *Love, work, and death: Jewish life in medieval Umbria*. Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1996.

Immanuel employs formulaic transitions to segment his narrative, repeating the expression "and from there we moved" (מִשָּׁם נָסַעְנוּ) approximately twenty times. And yet, he falls short in establishing a crescendo or a transparent ordaining principle underpinning his vision of Tophet. In this sense, punishments are also unhelpful: Immanuel frequently replicates tortures and piles them on top of each other without any evident symbolic connection to what is being punished.[41] What Barolini laments in many pre-Dantean representations of Hell applies to Immanuel's *Makhberet* as well: they "suffer from lack of difference: all the sinners seem the same, all the punishments merge into one sadistic blur".[42]

For the most part, the much shorter portion of Eden (368 lines as opposed to the 625 of Tophet) celebrates Immanuel's achievements as a biblical exegete, with the closing sequence of *Tophet* already signaling a sharp departure in tone, whereby Daniel informs Immanuel (and the readers) that the poet's hermeneutical merits have granted him salvation in the World-to-come. In fact, Immanuel will share his extraordinary journey in the very *Makhberet* that we are reading:

וְאֶת יָדִי לִכְתֹּב מַה שֶׁשָּׁמַעְתִּי וְרָאִיתִי הֲרִיצוֹתִי לֹא חִסַּרְתִּי וְלֹא הוֹתַרְתִּי בְּכָל כֹּחִי

> and I woke up and rushed my hand to write down what I had heard and seen, and I did not lack nor exceed in all my strength (1020-1).

In Eden, biblical prophets rush to congratulate him as the best interpreter history has ever seen. King David himself invites other illustrious commentators (only David Kimchi is named explicitly) to honor the poet, which they do, writes Immanuel: " וּכְאִלּוּ הָיִיתִי מַלְכָּם וּמְשִׁיחָם כֵּן עֲבָדוּנִי וַיְכַבְּדוּנִי" ("as if I were their king and their Messiah, giving me praise) (850). Jeremiah, Isaiah, Salomon, Moses, and Joseph also share lofty appraisals of this ilk.

Immanuel's healthy ego did not go unnoticed, but it was the goriness of Tophet that was more immediately censored: as Fishkin chronicles in her dissertation (35-6), in the 15th century, Moses of Rieti banned the *Mahkberet* from his own version of Paradise; others tweaked Immanuel's name to deny any etymological familiarity between the medieval poet might and God (from

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[41] Ezer Kahanov, "ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden by Immanuel Romano, as interpreted in Dante's Divine Comedy", 31-45: 36-9.

[42] Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante*. Princeton University Press, 1992, 46.

immanu-El, literealy God is with us to ein-imo-El: God is not with him). In the sixteenth century *Shulkhan Arukh*, a major code of Jewish law, prohibited reading the text altogether. As we know, however, the ban was far from successful.

3. A man, old and great to look at

Immediately after the long sequence of biblical sinners at the beginning of *Tophet*, Immanuel encounters a group of Gentile philosophers and men of science (90-7):

שָׁם אֲרִיסְטוֹטָלוֹס בּוֹשׁ וְנֶאֱלָם עַל אֲשֶׁר הֶאֱמִין קַדְמוּת הָעוֹלָם שָׁם גַּלְאנוּס רֹאשׁ הָרוֹפְאִים עַל אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח יַד לְשׁוֹנוֹ לְדַבֵּר בְּמֹשֶׁה אֲדוֹן הַנְּבִיאִים שָׁם אַבּוּנָצֶּר יוֹמוֹ רָד יַעַן אָמַר כִּי הִתְאַחֲדוּת הַשֵּׂכֶל הָאֱנוֹשִׁי עִם הַשֵּׂכֶל הַנִּפְרָד הוּא מֵהַבְלֵי הַזְּקֵנוֹת
[…]
שָׁם אַפְלָטוֹן רֹאשׁ לַמְּבִינִים יַעַן אֲשֶׁר אָמַר כִּי לַיְחָשִׁים וְלַמִּינִים יֵשׁ חוּץ לַשֵּׂכֶל מְצִיאוּת וְחָשַׁב דְּבָרָיו דִּבְרֵי נְבִיאוּת שָׁם אִפּוֹקְרָט יַעַן אֲשֶׁר הָיָה כִּילַי מֵחָכְמָתוֹ וְהֶעֱלִים סִפְרֵי רְפוּאָתוֹ שָׁם אִבְּן סִינָא הָיָה לְלַעַג וּשְׂחוֹק יַעַן אֲשֶׁר אָמַר כִּי הוּלַד אָדָם לֹא מֵאָדָם

> There was Aristotle, shamed and dumbfounded, for he believed in the pre-existence of the universe; there was Galen, first among the physicians, because he raised objections against Moses, lord of the prophets; there was Alfarabi, his day had come down because he said that the union of the human intellect with the separated intellect was foolishness of old women […]. There was Plato, chief of those who understand, because he said that relations and species have existence outside the intellect, and he believed that his words were words of prophecy. There was Hippocrates, because he was deceitful in his wisdom and hid his medicine books; there was Ibn Sina who was an object of mockery and a joke because he said that it was possible to generate a person not from a person.

The accusations are manifold and echo the delicate negotiations that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam had to undertake with Greek metaphysics and psychology regarding the eternity of the universe, the nature of the intellect, and the destiny of the human soul. Although the tone is far from temperate, Immanuel is exercising some restraint here; compared to other passages in the *Makhberet*, he is not giving free rein to his vivid and cruel imagination in terms of punishments. Coming at the end of the long roster of biblical figures now in *Tophet*, these philosophers are "only" plunged in flames, just like all the many Jews listed before them. In fact, at a closer inspection, Immanuel takes issue with their attack against Jewish beliefs and not with their non-Jewishness: a tamed

censorship toward the Other, already indicative of intra-ethnic Jewish concern rather than intercultural hostility.

The impression is confirmed in Eden, where we meet the "the pious among the nations" (חֲסִידֵי אֻמּוֹת הָעוֹלָם, hasidei Umot ha-holam).[43] Like the group of philosophers, this section also comes at the end of a long list of individuals from all epochs of Jewish history, symmetrically opposed to the infernal roster that opened *Tophet*. Among the pious, Immanuel cannot name any specific man or woman, earnestly admitting that he cannot recognize a single one of them (715-31). He does however explain their merits: strong in their wisdom and thirst for knowledge, the pious among the nations investigated the faith of their fathers and also the faiths of other people. By doing so, they were able to identify a set of beliefs on which all wise people could agree, such as the fundamental unfathomability of the Creator and the loving care that God has for humanity. Irrespective of their religious affiliation, the hasidei Umot ha-holam receive salvation as a reward for their intellectual pursuits, in a pithy statement of interconfessional openness.[44]

Strategically located at the beginning of each section of the *Makhberet* immediately after a long list of names, the two passages of the philosophers in Tophet and the pious in Eden provide hermeneutical support when dealing with a contentious episode (203-32) that critics before Fishkin have glossed over.

מִשָּׁם נָסַעְנוּ וְהִנֵּה אִישׁ זָקֵן גָּדוֹל לְמַרְאֶה הִצִּיבוּהוּ לְמַטָּרָה וְעַל רֹאשׁוֹ מֵחֲרֻלִּים וְקִמְּשׁוֹנִים עֲטָרָה
וּמִגֶּלְלֵי צֵאת הָאָדָם יָשִׂימוּ בְּאַפּוֹ קְטוֹרָה

> From there we went on, and here's a man, old and great to look at, placed like a signpost and on his head a crown of thorns and brambles, and incense of dung out of man put on his nose. (203-4)

[43] The expression comes from the Talmud (Bava Batra 1, 15b) and is also discussed in Tosefta 13:2.

[44] The two episodes inevitably bring to memory Dante's visit to Limbo in Inferno 4, where similar issues are under scrutiny in a comparably liminal location within the system of his Netherworld. A striking reoccurrence of the same names (Aristotle, Galen, Plato, Hippocrates, and Ibn Sina) also connects the *Commedia* and the *Makhberet*. In Judaism, salvation is admissible for now-Jews already in the Bible (according to the Noachite laws of Genesis 9) as well as in later authorities (for instance, in Maimonides). Christianity had a different take that Dante reacted against, according to Barolini, "Il Limbo di Dante e l'equità di accesso: non-cristiani, bambini, e i criteri di inclusione ed esclusione da If. 4 e Pd. 32," *Italianistica* 50 (2021): 49-64. According to the official doctrine of the church, Limbo hosted unbaptized children; in Dante it is also the house of pagan and non-Christian adults (the "spiriti magni").

The episode has a strong, graphic start and despite the cautious anonymity protecting the sinner's identity (a courtesy the poet is prone to grant often in the *Makhberet*), the iconography of the scene is uncanny. We might not be used to considering him old or particularly "imposing in size", but one has the distinct sense that the sinner in question is no other than Jesus Christ, suspended from a higher position (the cross), with a caricature of a regal sign (a crown of thorns). In fact, the odd detail of the size is consistent with the standpoint of an onlooker seeing from below, as the original Hebrew suggests: the old, imposing man "hitzibuhu le'matara" (lit. "is made prominent like a target"). After the initial shock, Immanuel ironically does not recognize the man, which in turns leaves Daniel speechless: "you really do not know who this is?", he emphatically asks (213). With this protracted aposiopesis, the author is playing with his readers who could not miss the obvious implications. The unnamed man is made subject to a string of dreadful tortures: he is lashed with whips and scorpions and wounded by men that spill his bile; he is tormented by a snake in the genital area and thrown from a high tower and crashed onto rocks where wolves and fire devour him; he is stabbed with a copper arrow and a river of sulfur and tar submerges him; the horns of a bull pierce through him and his neck is repeatedly broken like the neck of a donkey.

This frightful sample of violence is a good example of how intertextual density and a taste for accumulation can override the readability of the infernal choreography being assembled.[45] Looking at this network, Fishkin has abundantly corroborated that the individual at stake is indeed Christ.[46] In particular, she highlights two puns that in the Ashkenazi world frequently (and secretly) referred to Jesus: Christ is precipitated onto a rock like the "firstborn of a donkey". The unexpected qualification is due to a reference encrypted in the original Hebrew, whereby "firstborn" reads "peter", phonetically close to the Italian "Pietro", the name of the apostle on whom Christ built his church. Additionally, the old man imposing in size not only sinned in his own merit, but he also caused others to sin ("the sin of many depended on him"): the verb "depend" in the Hebrew (*talui*), just like in its equivalent Latin root, implies the idea of hanging from above in a vertical sense, just

[45] For a thorough exploration of biblical references, see Battistoni, "Introduzione," in *L'Inferno e il Paradiso*, and Fishkin, *Situating Hell & Heaven.*

[46] Dana W. Fishkin, "The Sting of Satire: The Jesus Figure in Immanuel of Rome's Hell," *Prooftexts* 36 (2018): 355-82.

like Christ from the Cross. As a matter of fact, "talui", is a key word in Jewish anti-Christian literature indicating Jesus. Word plays of this kind are common in Immanuel's work (see Lewis 290 and Landau 17) and stem from the biblical practice to mock religious opponents by distorting their names, as Dal Bo and Fidora remind us (219-21).

As for the punishments inflicted upon the man, Immanuel is arguably merging biblical and extrabiblical material: the excrement stuffed in the sinner's nose, while a literal quotation from Ezekiel 4:12, (where we read that during the besiege of Jerusalem the prophet envisions food being cooked on human dung) also reflects a passage in the Talmud (tractate Gittin) that describes Christ in Hell.[47] The stoning and the crucifixion of Christ also originate in a famous passage in the Talmud (tractate Sanhedrin, in this case) at the center of a controversy with the Christian world in the trials in 13th-century Paris.[48] One could even see a reference to the Gospel narrative both in the flagellation (albeit not with scorpions), in the detail of the poor man pierced with an arrow or spilling his bile (reminiscent of John 19:34).

Interestingly enough, the reception of this passage has been suspiciously cagy. Translators and commentators have for the most part ignored the anti-Christian potential of this passage: Seppilli's loose translation makes it barely recognizable; Gollacz, while making it more transparent ("upon his head of thorns and thistles they formed his crown of grace", 28) does not expand on it in his commentary; Battistoni circumvents the subject, maintaining that the sinner in question is a more generic rebel against God, just like

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[47] The intertextual web beneath this passage is intricated: the Talmudic passage Fishkin mentions (Gittin 57a, supplemented by Schäfer with an excerpt from Tosefta; Fishkin, "The Sting of Satire," 362-3) describes boiling excrement in which the culprit is plunged. The name of Jesus Christ was later omitted from the page, although Schäfer has tracked several manuscripts with the original version. Fishkin speculates that one of those uncensored texts might have been known to Immanuel. Boiling excrement is also present in Dante's canto 18 (the unfortunate bathers being the flatterers). We have to bear in mind, however, that in the episode, we are commenting on excrement pouring down the nose of Christ; it is not boiling in a tub.

[48] For a general overview of the two Talmudic passages and their reception (and translation) in the Christian, Latin-reading world, see Federico Dal Bo, "Jesus' Punishment in Hell in the Latin Translation of the Babylonian Talmud. A passage from Tractate Gittin in the Extractiones de Talmud," *Henoch. Historical and Textual Studies in Ancient and Medieval Judaism and Christianity* 40 (2018):165-95; Id., Jesus' Trial in the Latin Talmud. Tractate Sanhedrin and its Translations in the Extractiones de Talmud," *Henoch. Historical and Textual Studies in Ancient and Medieval Judaism and Christianity* 41 (2019): 140-76.

Satan or the serpent in Eden, located in a post-Edenic world "because it follows the destruction of the Temple and the loss of the Promised Land".

But what exactly are the accusations against Christ? Daniel summarizes them upfront at the beginning of the passage:

וְנִקְרָא בְּשֶׁכְּבָר שְׁמוֹ רַבָּן לֹא נִרְאָה רָשָׁע כָּמוֹהוּ מִיּוֹם הַחֻרְבָּן עָסַק בַּתּוֹרָה שֶׁלֹּא
לִשְׁמָהּ הוּא אָמוֹן הִרְבָּה אַשְׁמָה לֹא יָדַע מִן הַנִּאוּף שָׂבְעָה קָרַב אֶל כָּל בְּהֵמָה לְרִבְעָהּ עַל כֵּן
הִדְבִּיקַתְהוּ הָרָעָה זֶה הָאִישׁ בְּיַיִן תּוֹעָה שָׁכָר וְתוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה בְּתוֹעֲבוֹתָיו עָכָר וְלַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי
אֲדֹנָי הִתְמַכָּר חִלֵּל אֶת קֹדֶשׁ אֲדֹנָי אֲשֶׁר אָהֵב וּבָעַל בַּת אֵל נֵכָר שָׂגָה בְזָרָה וְחִבֵּק חֵיק נָכְרִיָּה

> His name was Rabban. You have not seen a wicked man like him since the day of destruction [of the Temple]. He busied himself with the Torah but not in its name. He was like Ammon and he multiplied shame; he did not know his limit with adultery; he approached every animal to lie with it and that is why evil clung onto him. This man became drunk from the cup of error and upended the law of Moses with his abominations, he sold out to commit evil in the sight of God, soiled the sanctity of God because he loved and possessed the daughter of the foreign God, prospered with the foreigner, and embraced the waist of the foreign woman. (214-18)

Despite a proclivity for defiance and disobedience, the "old man imposing in size" was able to secure privilege and power in his community, hence the honorific title of Rabban. As for the accusation of leading a promiscuous sex life, Immanuel is on his turf, as he splurges in accumulation, listing the partners the Jesus-figure has slept with: the Ammonite, the Moabite, the Jewess, the Christian, the Egyptian, the menstruant, the impure, the leper, the scaly, the prostitute, the physically impaired, the pregnant woman, and even a pig and a donkey. One may swiftly dismiss the list as a divertissement of a *poeta comico-realista*, but both the language and the references employed in the passage are indicative of an intrinsically Jewish *j'accuse* in matters of legitimate intercourse.[49] For example, the Ammonite and the Moabite woman are synonymous with impurity in the Bible, the people of Moab ultimately originating from the incestuous relation between Lot and his daughters (Genesis 19). An attention to impurity is distinguishable early on in the segment, where we read that the man is being tortured by a snake in his genital area: the original

[49] Fishkin, "The Sting of Satire," 357-8, argues that the connection between sexual deviance and defiance of the law was relatively unusual in Jewish culture. It was however made in Immanuel's commentary on *Proverbs*, possibly drawing from a similar line of interpretation that the Talmud applies to Ammon in the book of *2 Chronicles*, who is significantly mentioned in this passage.

reads "ervatò", a term that also indicates unlawful sexual contact; similarly, the word used to describe penetration (nirbaat, "being mounted"), extremely derogatory, is taken from Leviticus (that is, a legal text), as is the definition of a menstruated woman. In fact, the episode in general showcases Immanuel's acquaintance with legal matters. Rather than having stones thrown at the victim, he is left to fall onto rocks, in line with rabbinic practices (*Mishah Sanhedrin* 6.1); the killing of the firstborn donkey which Fishkin reads as a pun concealing the name of the apostle Peter is also in line with the ritual killing of animals after Egypt (Exodus 34:20). Indeed, as Immanuel sums up, this Rabban "turned the alliance upside down", using the key word "berit", the pact between God and the Chosen People.

Seen from up close, the episode reads like an inherently Jewish conversation more than an attack on Christianity. The prophet Daniel highlights this when he insists that "old man imposing in size" is being punished for his lack of respect for Jewish law; furthermore, the fact that he caused others to sin also focuses on the rifts that Jesus's behavior brought about within the Jewish world, as Maimonides himself stated in his *Mishneh Torah* (Fishkin 2018, 366-7). In *Ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden* there is little to no trace of a polemic targeting the religiously affiliated Other. First and foremost, the Jesus-figure seen here is punished as a Jew who broke Jewish laws and caused other Jews to do the same: the focus rests solely on the people of Israel, thus putting aside any external influence on a primarily Jewish story. Provokingly, one is reminded of Marc Chagall's *White Crucifixion* (now at Art Institute in Chicago), where the man on the Cross is wearing a *tallit*, the traditional Jewish prayer shawl.

The intramural nature of the debate is also confirmed if we zoom out to locate the episode in the larger economy of the *Makhberet*. Christ is devoid of any special treatment that would signal a different status or an inter-confessional magnitude, as he is only one in a seemingly endless list of hypocrites who took advantage of their social credibility, unabashedly going against the laws they were expected to protect and abide by. Cast against this ensemble, Christ is one among many rabbis, teachers, community-leaders, men of social renown that deceived and misled the community they were supposed to serve. That is consistent with the general demeanor of the *Makhberet* and its insistence both on intellectual sins (the philosophers) as well as intellectual virtues (the pious among the nations).

By looking at this passage and by tying it to anti-Christian Jewish literature, Fishkin ("The Sting of Satire") tries to dispel the myth of peaceful coexistence between Jews and Christians in Italy in the Middle Ages, as opposed to the trauma and violence that the minority was experiencing only "elsewhere" in Europe. From a historical perspective, she is right: Italian Jews were gradually forced to move from the South to the North following a number of expulsion decrees that were now and again reversed and reinstated. Narratively speaking, however, both in isolation and in context, the episode of the "old man imposing in size" does not read as an attack against a religious competitor that also represented the majority responsible for the traumas of a vexed minority. What this episode carries out is a conversation for and within the Jewish community. If it holds true that the scarcity of Jewish polemical treatises against Christians cannot stand as a strong argument *in absentia* to prove an Italian exception in the ways Jews were treated in the Middle Ages, this episode in Immanuel's *Makhberet* should not count as an *in vice* proof either.[50] The presence of an anti-Christian code – the iconography, the puns, the intertextual references that Fishkin 2018 so attentively brings to light – does not turn the episode nor the *Makhberet* into a *cahier de doléance* against Christian oppression, or a literary alternative to those polemic pamphlets that are not as frequently found in the Italian peninsula as in other parts of Europe.[51] Rather, the passage revendicates the Jewishness of this unnamed Jesus-figure who, from a Jewish perspective, is only one of several messianic bouts that punctuate Jewish history. The anti-Christian sentiment that Immanuel might inevitably conjure with the iconography of the old man is not the predominant key of *Ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden* and its provoking character is geared inwards and not outwards. In

[50] On Jewish polemical treatises in Italy, see Daniel J. Lasker, "Jewish polemics against Christianity in thirteenth-century Italy," in Yaakov Elman and Jeffrey S. Gurock, eds., *Hazon Nahum. Studies in Jewish Law, Thought, and History Presented to Dr. Norman Lamm on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, (New York: The Michael Sharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University Press, 1997), 251-63.

[51] We do find occasional references to previous persecutions against Jewish people (e.g., 910-4) but they tend to be rather brief and more concerned with commemorating the victims rather than blaming the perpetrators. Roth, "Lo sfondo storico della poesia," offers a significantly different reading, claiming that the events of 1321 (the alleged expulsion of the Jews from Rome) inform the *Makhberet* the way the fights between the White and the Black Guelf shape Dante's *Commedia*. Such an interpretation seems excessive, in that few passages unmistakably refer to persecutions against the Chosen People.

fact, the same iconography of a man on a cross is prone to become a prolific sememe for internal debates also for Christians.

4. Un, crucifisso in terra

In the depths of Malebolge, down in the seventh circle of Hell, the sight of a man nailed to the ground suddenly horrifies Dante:

> Io cominciai: «O frati, i vostri mali…»;
> ma più non dissi, ch'a l'occhio mi corse
> un, crucifisso in terra con tre pali.
>
> Quando mi vide, tutto si distorse,
> soffiando ne la barba con sospiri;
> e 'l frate Catalan, ch'a ciò s'accorse,
>
> mi disse: «Quel confitto che tu miri,
> consigliò i Farisei che convenia
> porre un uom per lo popolo a' martìri.
>
> Attraversato è, nudo, ne la via,
> come tu vedi, ed è mestier ch'el senta
> qualunque passa, come pesa, pria.
>
> E a tal modo il socero si stenta
> in questa fossa, e li altri dal concilio
> che fu per li Giudei mala sementa». (23. 109-23)

The sudden interruption, the strong caesura separating the unnamed individual ("un") from the key qualification ("crucifisso"), the graphic reaction running through the sinner's body all contribute to a powerful, show-stopping moment. The man that advised the Pharisees to deliver a sentence of consequential import for the entire Jewish people is Caiaphas. The identity of the man he wanted executed (Jesus) is so obvious and so eloquently distorted in Caiaphas' own punishment that it does require a name. In an ironic and almost literal reversal of the punishment inflicted on the Christ, it is now Caiaphas's lot to lie forever crucified on the ground, the other hypocrites of the *bolgia* treading on him for eternity. Critics have highlighted the parodic nature Caiaphas's position on the ground, stretched horizontally as opposed to the vertical suffering of Jesus.[52] Bausi pushes this reading further and maintains that Caiaphas is crushed under the burden of

[52] Erminia Ardissino, *Tempo liturgico e tempo storico della "Commedia" di Dante* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009), 40-8.

the sins of others whereas Christ rose to the cross to carry those sins on his shoulders to grant salvation for humankind.[53]

Canto 23 enlists two sets of sinners: the first group comprises hypocrites walking under heavy leaden gowns, the appearance of which is reminiscent of the Cluny uniform; the second consists of the members of the Sanhedrin responsible for the death of Christ. The *bolgia* is thus divided into a Christian and a Jewish sector, suggesting that the sins of each group are equally grave. The specularity of the tortures inflicted corroborates the impression that, when it comes to hypocrisy, Jews and Christians are guilty to the same degree: on the one hand we have individuals crushed under the weight of their excessive garments, endlessly and painfully marching together; on the other, naked men, unable to move, stepped on by those who walk around. Unlike Immanuel, Dante does not try to conceal the identity of the soul under punishment, bringing the reference to Christ and his crucifixion in plain sight. But just like Immanuel, Dante does not use the strongly charged iconography to attack the religiously affiliated Other. Instead, he uses it for a primarily internal critique of Christian and, even more specifically, Italian moral shortcomings. Looking at the text, there is little to suggest that Dante indulges in the old anti-Judaic trope of deicide. As Mineo poignantly puts it, Caiaphas could very well fit into Lucifer's mouth given the role he played in a pivotal moment of history. After all, Judas might have started the chain of events that led to the death of Christ, but it was only the legal seal of Caiaphas and the council he presided over that brought it to completion. Rather than following this line of argument, Dante decides to keep the conversation within legal and worldly boundaries, avoiding any projection onto a plane "of meta-historical and transcendent order".[54]

Indication of a narrower scope in the treatment of the second group of (Jewish) hypocrites comes from the location of the episode in this canto and in *Malebolge* in general, starting from the transition between canto 22 and 23: after frantically running away from the devils, Dante and Virgil are now walking "taciti, soli, sanza compagnia" (23.1), still trying to escape the devils' vendetta

[53] Francesco Bausi, "Lettura e interpretazione del canto XXIII," in Zygmunt Baranski and Maria Antonietta Terzoli, eds., *Voci sull'Inferno di Dante. Una nuova lettura della prima cantica* (Rome: Carocci, 2021), 602-22: 616.

[54] Nicolò Mineo, "Lettura di 'Inferno' XXIII," in Sergio Cristaldi and Carmelo Tramontana, eds., *L'opera di Dante fra Antichità, Medioevo ed epoca moderna* (Catania: Cooperativa Universitaria Editrice catanese di Magistero, 2008), 11-69: 62.

after the Novarrese's "novo ludo" (22.118).[55] The narrative continuity is also a political and personal one: the previous canto hit close to home for Dante, who met the *barattieri*, an umbrella term for several forms of corruption and the official charge that banned the poet from Florence after the trials of 1302.[56] An early anticipation of the political nature of canto 23 is recognizable in the ecclesiastical imagery of the sinners wearing leaded cloaks ("fatte de la taglia /che in Clugnì per li monaci fassi", 62-3) that Dante swiftly reconnects to the secular world, reminding readers that Frederik II would also concoct cruel punishments of the same sort, albeit not as taxing: "ma dentro tutte piombo, e gravi tanto, / che Federigo le mettea di paglia", 65-6).

Most prominently, the two sinners Dante encounters in this pouch bring him back to the Florence of his childhood: Catalano and Loderingo degli Andalò were both members of the Frati Gaudenti fraternity of Bologna and served as podesta in 1266. Even the allocution "O, Tosco" that Catalano uses to summon the poet echoes Farinata degli Uberti's call to Dante in Inferno 10.[57] From Giovanni Villani, we gather that Catalano and Loderingo were not able to quiet down the tensions between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines, with both parties expelled in less than twelve months.[58] Although Dante's response is cut short by the sight of Caiaphas, the Florentine taste of the passage is difficult to miss.

It is not only through narrative strategies that Dante keeps his focus on the Christian court. The same word "farisei", used here to name those responsible for the killing of Christ, reappears only once more in the *Commedia* as a derogatory term thrown at Boniface VIII, Dante's ultimate foe:

> Lo principe d'i novi Farisei,
> avendo guerra presso a Laterano,

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[55] On the opening lines see Luca Serianni, "Dante tra aggressione dei diavoli e ambiguità degli ipocriti. Lettura di Inferno XXIII," *Studi Danteschi* LXXXVI (2021): 103-16.

[56] Alessandro Barbero, *Dante* (Bari: Laterza, 2020), 155-6.

[57] Sebastiano Valerio, "Il collegio degli ipocriti e la verità della parola (*Inf.* XXIII)," *Dante. Rivista internazionale di studi su Dante Alighieri*, XI (2014): 47-54: 50.

[58] Lucia Battaglia Ricci, "Canto XXIII. 'Imagini di fuor/ imagini d'entro': nel mondo della menzogna," in Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi, eds., *Lectura Dantis Romana. Cento canti per cento anni.* I. Inferno. 1.Canti I-XVII. 2. Canti XVIII-XXXIV, Salerno, 2013, pp. 740-69: 761-2 acknowledges that historians today have a less pessimistic view opinion of the two podestà. See also Mirko Tavoni, *Inferno XXIII. Il canto degli ipocriti, Bologna nell'aldilà, la visione come meccanismo narrativo, Lectura Dantis Bononensis, vol. IV* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2014), 47-78: 51-66.

> e non con Saracin né con Giudei,
>
> ché ciascun suo nimico era cristiano,
> e nessun era stato a vincer Acri
> né mercatante in terra di Soldano
>
> né sommo officio né ordini sacri
> guardò in sé, né in me quel capestro
> che solea fare i suoi cinti più macri. (27, 85-93)

Just like the episode in canto 23, this passage puts *giudei/farisei* in rhyme position; in this case, however, "fariseo" more clearly holds a social rather than ethnic meaning or religious affiliation ("giudei" juxtaposed with "saracini").[59] As Battistoni puts it:

> If, for Dante, the highest office of his own religion (the Pontiff) can turn out to be the worst example for Christians, we are not forcing his hand assuming that the similarities between Boniface VIII and Caiaphas are meant to suggest the same accusation with respect to the highest office of the Jewish religion. Thus, the question has nothing to do with the quality of each religion (one inherently better and capable of saving mankind, the other not). Instead, the problem rests with the authority representing the highest power in each faith, and that Dante brings here as examples of equal indignity.[60]

Running parallel to the political subtext of the canto is Dante's rejection of interconfessional aggression against the Jews, which the poet signals precisely with the distinction between "farisei" and "giudei." The first group indicates the actual enablers of a wrong sentence; the second, the countless individuals that had to pay for that mistake: only the *farisei* were advised, but all the *giudei* suffered. The two words were not synonymous at Dante's time, with the Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini registering only one out of seven instances where they were used interchangeably. At the end of the 15th century, Cristoforo Landino clarified and expanded on the distinction with lexicographical and ethnographical attention, citing Joseph Flavius as his main authority. Landino introduces the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes as the main social groups that comprised the Jewish world.

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[59] Something similar can be said about "per li Giudei mala sementa", which Dante uses with slight variatio ("fu mal seme per la gente tosca") in Inferno 28, dealing with the schismatics (see Barolini, "*Inferno* 23: Imaginary – or Real?," https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-23/, par.43).

[60] Giorgio Battistoni, *Dante, Verona e la cultura ebraica* (Florence: Giuntina, 2004), 104.

He presents the Pharisees as staunch defenders of tradition, leading a frugal life of devotion, which granted them the esteem of the community.[61]

Perhaps ironically and yet consequentially, commentary tradition as early as the 14th century, downplayed the distinction that Dante was drawing. Looking at the Neotestamentarian sources that recount Caiaphas's deeds and misdeeds, many interpreters preferred to stress the very favorable *quid pro quo* that saved an entire people (i.e., the Jews) in exchange for the execution of one single person (i.e., Jesus Christ) whose miracles and radical predication were irritating the Roman rulers.[62] Only Iacopo della Lana addressed the apparent gap between *farisei* and *giudei*, trying to limit the repercussions of the wrong sentencing only to the priests that issued it: "Cioè tutti li altri giudei sacerdoti, li quali crucifissero Cristo, della quale morte caddeno in maledizione" (that is to say, the other Jewish priests who crucified Christ and for whose depth they were cursed); the rest of the commentators do not take this into account.

There is significant agreement among commentators regarding the actual consequences of Jesus's death: according to the official doctrine of the Church, Jews were to be punished with their geographical dispersion and loss of political power.[63] The idea that

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[61] "E pharisei viveano sobriamente, et sanza alchuna dilicateza; et in ogni chosa sequitavono el giudicio della ragione. Et in nessun modo ripugnavono a quegli a' quali hanno a ubbidire; honoravono molto e vecchi. Credono che ogni chosa sia recta dal fato. Et nientedimeno non tolgono el libero arbitrio dell'huomo. Credono che sarà el divino giudicio, et ciaschuno sarà giudicato secondo e meriti. Pongono l'anime immortali, et che haranno nell'inferno convenienti habitationi secondo le virtù et el vitio. Et alchune rimarranno in perpetue carcere. Alchune haranno potestà di tornare in vita. Et per questo vogliono che dobbiamo fare tempii et orationi. Il perchè erono in somma veneratione nel popolo, et haveano gran concorso." All quotations from the commentators are taken from the Dartmouth Project.

[62] The story is told in John 11, 45-53, where Caiaphas voices concerns that the Romans could use Jesus as an excuse to use violence against the Jews. Among the commentators that cross-referenced Dante's words with this passage we have: Jacopo Alighieri ("Caifas […] a martoriare un uomo per [la] salute del popolo produsse"); Graziolo Bambaglioli ("unus homo, idest Dominus Iesus Christus, pro populo morietur"); Jacopo della Lana, Pietro Alighieri, Guglielmo Maramauro, Benvenuto da Imola all reiterate that "expedit unum mori pro populo"); L'Ottimo Commento ("che costui morisse per la salute del popolo d'Isdrael"); the Anonimo Selmiano ("uno morisse per lo popolo, e Cristo fosse esso"); Francesco da Buti ("convenia che uno uomo morisse per lo popolo"), the Chiose Vernon ("i[l] reo Chaifasso il quale diede per consiglio a' Giudei che Christo fosse morto volendo potersi salvare tutta la giente de' Giudei"); the Anonimo Fiorentino ("egli è di necessità, disse Caifas, che uno sia morto per lo popolo, acciò che tutta la gente non perisca").

[63] Guido da Pisa concisely says that Jews "funditus sunt deleti"; the Ottimo Commento elaborates that Caiaphas and his team are responsible for the entire

the diaspora (which the Jews refer to as "*galut*") was an almost immediate response to the death of the Christ initiated by the Jews of Roman Palestine had been mainstream since Augustine. Commenting on a line of Psalm 59 ("slay them not, lest my people forget"), Augustine thought that Jews were not to be killed but "only" dispersed for two main reasons: first, because they too believed in the prophets; second, because God would still be willing to forgive their "stubbornness" once they accepted the Christian truth (i.e., by converting).[64]

With Canto 23 Dante could have easily addressed the role of Jews in Christian history, but he chooses not to, nor to project the episode of Caiaphas onto a providential plane. Instead, he drew a line between the priestly elite that reached a wrong verdict and the entire people who had to suffer for it. Even when in *Paradiso* he more explicitly revisits the conundrum of the Jewish diaspora as a righteous punishment ("come giusta vendetta giustamente/punita fosse", Pd. 7, 20-1), Dante requires further explanation from Beatrice, which she provides with an excursus on human history from Adam to Christ and Jesus's both divine and human nature. Even after demonstrating that "a Dio e a' Giudei piacque una morte" (Pd. 7, 47), Beatrice is not able to fully convince Dante. Faced with resistance, Beatrice can only appeal to the inaccessible

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diaspora ("furono sì dispersi come ancora appare che non anno cittade, né villa, regimento, collegio o universitade"); Maramauro locates the dispersion in time ("[the Jews], chè foron tuti morti, venduti e caciati del loro proprio sito da Tito quando prese Ierusalem: e non se ne trova citate"); Benvenuto da Imola is torn in his response to the tragedy "illud excidium tam miserabile quam memorabile Judeae et Hierusalem", Francesco da Buti more aggressively notes that the Jews paid their dues because "non si vollono o non vogliono o non si vorranno convertire: imperò che darà loro frutto di morte eterna; ma per coloro che si vollono convertire e verranno alla fede di Cristo fu buona sementa: imperò che a tutti farà frutto di salute eterna." A century later, also Landino's excursus on Jewish society ends in a rather peremptory fashion: "Questo concilio fu mala sementa pe' Giudei: perochè produxe la destructione di Hyerusalem, et la dispersione di tutta quella natione".

[64] See Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom,* 36-8. The accusation of deicide lasted for centuries and caused resentment and violence against European Jews. Riccardo Di Segni, *Il Vangelo del Ghetto* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1985), 185n reminds us that still in 1965 Pope Paul VI had to clarify that in his *Nostra Aetate*: "True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ" (https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_lt.html).

mysteries of God's will: "Questo decreto, frate, sta sepulto / a li occhi di ciascuno il cui ingegno / ne la fiamma d'amore non è adulto" (Pd. 7, 58-60). But Dante did have an answer to that question, and precisely in Augustine: in this sense, his silence is bold and loud. Inferno 23 and Paradiso 7 do not endorse tropes of anti-Judaism whereby Jews were permitted to stay alive only because they were witnesses to biblical truths and because they could still be converted. Dante steers away from this path and keeps the focus on a local and centripetal conversation among Christians and their own hypocrisy.[65]

Conclusions

The stress on sins of intellectual nature in *Ha-Tophet ve' ha-Eden*, the piling of punishments that won't let Christ stand out among other sinners, the use of biblical and legal imagery and vocabulary to describe his misdeeds all attest to the internal approach that Immanuel Romano adopts in his critique of only one of many Messiahs of Jewish history. Likewise, Dante's use of crucifixion as a fit punishment for Caiaphas and those more immediately responsible for the death of Christ, once seen in the larger economy of the canto and Malebolge, similarly validates the intramural nature of the episode within the political entanglements of medieval Italy. Lexical symmetries further confirm that what is under scrutiny is not the entire Jewish people, but rather an influential priestly elite.

While unmistakably summoning a consequential moment in Jewish and Christian history, both Immanuel's "old man imposing in size" and Dante's "un, crucifisso in terra" represent adaptable sememes bereft of exclusively interconfessional underpinnings. Neither is Immanuel Romano's primary intent to mock Christianity, nor is Dante concerned with a cheap shot at Judaism. Narratively speaking, the two suffering men are malleable signifiers for an internal critique of one's own religion and community rather than a stab the religiously affiliated Other.

[65] For a different take, see Rachel Jacoff, "Dante and the Jewish Question," (New York: Binghamton, 2004).