Hybridity in the Fourteenth-Century Esther Poems of Israel Caslari

by

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Abstract

The Scroll of Esther, one of the quintessential texts of post-exilic Jewish salvation, was particularly beloved in the European Middle Ages, when the narrative served as a model for redemption from persecution and as a reminder of the threat of expulsion which was part of everyday Jewish life. Among its many medieval adaptations is a pair of texts written by Israel ben Joseph Caslari, a fourteenth-century Jewish physician, living in Papal-ruled Avignon. Israel’s retellings of the Purim story are expanded and heavily embellished with material from talmudic and apocryphal sources, medieval medicine and philosophy, and references to popular culture. He composed his first version composed in Judéo-Provençal, the southern French vernacular written in Hebrew characters; the second in Hebrew, not a translation, but an adaptation of its predecessor. As individual works, each is a rich intertextual landscape which offers a view into its socio-religious setting and reflects the meeting and melding of cultural influences. If one considers them together, this encounter becomes even more pronounced: the two versions come into conversation, embodying the tensions of their milieu, and of their author, a Jewish intellectual in a Christian-dominated society.
The texts are a tapestry of ancient religious legacy and medieval thought, woven from threads of Jewish tradition and secular learning, from medieval bellettristic conventions, midrashic literature and medical writings. This dissertation explores issues of biculturalism and religious identity through Israel’s compositional strategies and his modifications to the biblical story. It considers first the notion of hybridity in the works through the convergence of their author’s professional and religious concerns, in his treatment of gender and language as a representation of cultural boundaries and their transgression. It then examines the multiplicity of literary genres, both religious and secular, that inhabit and inform the texts, while engaging the question of their audiences as the Hebrew version prescribes.
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Introduction

The *Scroll of Esther* or *Megillat Esther*, one of the quintessential texts of post-exilic Jewish salvation, has seen many incarnations over the centuries. It was particularly beloved in the European Middle Ages, when the narrative served as a model for redemption from persecution and as a reminder of the threat of expulsion which were part of everyday Jewish life. Among the many medieval adaptations, and the focus of this thesis, is a pair of texts written by Israel ben Joseph Caslari, a 14th-century physician, living in Avignon, under the rule of the papacy. The texts are retellings of the Purim story, expanded and heavily embellished with material from talmudic and apocryphal sources, contemporary medieval medicine and philosophy, and references to popular culture. Although the object of relatively little attention, either in scholarly or in lay circles, these lengthy sister texts are something of a literary phenomenon. Israel fashioned the first version of these works in Judéo-Provençal, the Occitan vernacular written in Hebrew characters, and it is one of the rare examples of such a linguistic instance. He then went on to write a second version in Hebrew, not a translation, but an adaptation of its predecessor, thus heightening the uniqueness of this composition. As individual works, each is a rich textual landscape, offering a view into the socio-religious and cultural setting; each in its own right also reflects the meeting and melding of cultural influences. Taken as a unit, moreover, this encounter becomes even more pronounced, and the texts come into conversation with one another, embodying the tensions of their milieu, and of their author. The works are hybrids of ancient religious legacy and medieval thought, a tapestry delicately woven from threads of Jewish tradition and secular learning, from medieval belles-lettres conventions, midrashic literature and medical writings, as we will see, layered with history and innovation, and ultimately giving rise to the kinds of questions that are still relevant in today’s world.

Methodology

The methodological orientation of this project has for the most part been empirical, grounded in close reading of the texts. The theoretical questions with which I engage grew out of an extensive textual analysis. To some extent, my reading is informed by “new historicism” or
“cultural poetics,” where the texts are located in their social and cultural constellations and examined as documentary witnesses of the setting in which they were created.¹ The text, according to this approach, cannot be viewed as autonomous, nor can it be divorced from its external context. While my work does not strictly adhere to Stephen Greenblatt’s economic or political metaphor, as set out in his “Poetics of Culture,” it is indeed concerned with the notion that texts “contribute to [a] distribution of social energy,” and “the intensities of experience that give value and meaning to life and that are also indispensible to the construction of self awareness and identity.”² It is this notion of the text as an agent of ideology³ and an articulation of socio-cultural forces which motivates much of my interpretation of Israel’s Esther poems. I see them as representative of a negotiation and exchange between the text and its context, which in turn can teach us about both.

In undertaking the analysis of a medieval work, questions necessarily arise about the modern reader’s ability to receive the text as it might have been consumed by one of Israel’s contemporaries. The risk of anachronistic interpretation is ever-present. Here, too, I embrace the “New Historical” perspective whereby my objective in critical interpretation is “the recovery of the original ideology which gave birth to the text, and which the text in turn helped to disseminate throughout a culture.”⁴ Thus, while I cannot hope to reproduce the experience of one of the original audience members, I can indeed, attempt to re-create some understanding of its socio-cultural implications.

Indeed, this reasoning underlies much of what my study argues, at the same time accepting the fact that no literary artifact can be wholly mimetic of its milieu. Israel himself was not a commoner, but rather belonged to an elite class of intellectuals, and his composition


necessarily suggests a mind-set not shared by all the members of his community despite its relatively small size. His Esther texts, moreover, are in some respects rather eccentric, although in others, they conform quite naturally to contemporaneous exemplars. Thus while they cannot be read as an unerring testimonial of their time and place, they offer us some insight into the movement within and between cultures. The conversation engendered by the pair of texts is in its form an echo of some of their thematic concerns.

The underlying assumptions of “cultural poetics,” also take into account the “sloppiness” of individuals and societies, as D.G. Myers states, which is necessarily bound up with the problem of identity, as I discuss below, as well as the hybridity of the poems, both as literary objects and as representations of culture. For no individual or society, nor any product thereof, can be contained to finite boundaries.

Indeed, it is their hybridity, their very sloppiness and complexity, that initially prompted my interest in Israel’s compositions. The most potent - and the most patent - manifestation of this is, of course, in the two different language versions of the text. Yet, moving beyond the materiality of the works into their content, this becomes even more striking in an ongoing interplay of heterogeneous elements derived from religious and secular sources, literary, scientific, philosophical, scriptural and exegetical. Here I refer to hybridity as it applies specifically to the generic systems that populate the texts, and to which, in fact, a full chapter of this thesis is dedicated. Yet while Israel’s work is a vivid example of literary hybridity, this can of course, extend further into its cultural expression, as well.

My understanding of hybridity aligns closely with the term as it is constituted by Jeffery Jerome Cohen, who has written extensively about liminality and notions of “otherness” in the Middle Ages. While his early publications, wherein he uses the trope of monstrosity to explore these issues and to gain insight into the cultures that created monstrous figures, were

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5 According to the third principle of “New Historicism,” as outlined by Myers, “Like works of literature, man himself is a social construct, the sloppy composition of social and political forces…” “The New Historicism,” 29.

6 See Chapter Four, “A Poem by Many Other Names: On the Mixing of Genres.”

7 Jeffery Jerome Cohen, ed. Monster Theory: Reading Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
influenced by psychoanalytic approaches, his more recent work actively draws on the scholarship of postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhaba and Robert Young. Cohen applies their foundational models of hybridity to his discussions of the phenomenon in its various medieval embodiments, considering the “middle formed by the overlap among a multitude of genders, sexualities, spiritualities, ethnicities, races, cultures, languages.”

His 2006 study, *Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles*, offers compelling arguments about “middleground” identities, which he explains were not perfect wholes merged from disparate parts, or “some third term that synthesizes warring elements and renders them placid.” Instead, Cohen sees hybridity as imperfect, as “a fusion and a disjunction, a conjoining of difference that cannot simply harmonize.” The hybrid political identities that are the focus of Cohen’s work were forged from the collision of ethnic groups, - Britons, Saxons and Jews - many of which were demonized in an effort to establish borders after the conquest of Britain. However, as he asserts, these borders are imagined, artificial borders, represented so clearly in the chaotic instances of monstrosity and alterity that at once bring together and separate. Cohen also looks at marginalized bodies, for instance, circumcised Christians and baptized Jews and groups that are walled-off in some fashion, using the idea of “dependent differentiation,” where self-definition is achieved through comparison and differentiation from others, to describe the difficult intermediate state that exists between the dominant majority and the ruled minority.

Although Cohen is most directly concerned with medieval Britain, his constructions of hybridity certainly have parallels in other geo-cultural settings. And surely, his definition of hybridity finds expression in Israel’s own community of Avignonais Jews. For many of his methods for the location of hybridity in the “others” he studies, their physical representation

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9 Ibid., 86.


11 Ibid., 2.

of cultural hybridity, can apply to an examination of Israel’s community as well as his Esther texts.

These models offer an inroad to understanding Israel’s texts and their context. His community, quite literally “walled-off” from the larger Christian society in its separate quarter and required to wear a rota to distinguish its members from those outside, had little choice but to view themselves as marginalized. Yet while their alterity was imposed upon them, it also became a means of self-definition. Jewish identity is, for so many reasons which I will discuss further, bound up in its separateness, its “choseness,” and in its ability to overcome even in the face of persecution. Yet this community was not entirely barred from participation in the world beyond the walls and in fact, shared its language and adopted other aspects of its culture, as well as engaging in quotidian exchanges in business. In this way, it was both conjoined with the dominant society and distinct from it simultaneously.

Israel could be considered a “middleground” individual simply by dint of his membership in this community. Yet as a physician whose practice afforded him even greater contact with the larger Christian society, and who embraced secular learning, this classification becomes all the more germane. While he was undoubtedly a product of his Jewish ethnicity, steeped in its traditions and ethos, he adopted norms from outside those limits as well. His Esther texts, in turn, act as literary representations of this phenomenon, illustrating quite palpably their own brand of cross-pollination, not only across but even within cultural boundaries. They are, moreover, an example of the simultaneous fusion and separation which Cohen describes in his definition of hybridity, here embodied within the framework of a textual body. The “in-betweenness” of the works comes to light in the concurrent merging of and division between language and genre, sacred and profane scholarship, and in the underlying tensions and movements that cohabit within them as a pair. Their complexity in this regard is heightened when we consider how they communicate with one another as individual texts, where one, the Judéo-Provençal, exhibits affinities with the language and culture of the dominant society, while the other, the Hebrew, is more distinctly aligned with the norms of the “ruled” Jewish society. And consequent to their author’s prescriptions for a differentiated
audience, which is dependent not upon a cross-cultural discourse per se, but rather on gender, class and age within his own community, their hybridity speaks to an internal hegemony.

Israel’s apologetic remarks in the Hebrew poem set up some very clear distinctions in his intended audience for the two versions, raising questions not only about audience response and subjectivity, but about accessibility to language, to texts, and even to certain forms of knowledge and thought, as we shall see. At the very outset of his composition, after invoking and offering praises to God, our author interjects his vision - the vernacular version for women, children and ‘the rest;’ the Hebrew for the Jewish men.

(I succeeded to elucidate this epistle first and foremost in the vernacular for the speakers of the vernacular, children and women, grandchildren and great grandchildren, and the rest. This second is in the Hebrew for the Jewish men, the work of my hands, in which I glory. Keep silence and listen, Israel, on this very day.)

His commentary is quite brief, comprising only a single stanza of an otherwise lengthy work, yet it creates a point of entry into the Hebrew text or exclusion from it. And while it is written in a typical assemblage of biblical verses, the choice of his sources and the resultant statement they make are surely not without meaning. These lines establish a significant demarcation, not only of gender, but of religion, age and class as well, and they figure prominently in my reflections upon differentiation throughout my study of the texts.

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13 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 48r, ll. 9-12.
14 I discuss this style of composition, the shibbuts or “compilatio” at many points throughout this study, and deal with it in depth in the final chapter on genre, Chapter Four, “A Poem by Many Other Names.”
15 The passage breaks down as follows: "לכל דברי ברכה" (to such as speak a foreign tongue in their foreign tongue) - Mishnah Mo’ed, Tractate Megillah; "אשת ערביית ולבריה ממעשיה יד החריין" - Esther 3:13 & 8:11; "שאבה ערביית ולבריה" - Isaiah 14:22 ["שאבה ערביית ולבריה" - Isaiah 60:21]; "והтокם שיערא לרדיסם" - Babylonian Talmud Tractate Megillah - זעם רדיסם - Deuteronomy 27:8. I will revisit these verses as they pertain to my arguments in the individual chapters that follow.
Integral to an exploration of hybridity, indeed at its core, is the question of identity. In its broadest sense, the term might be defined as Kristen Fudeman does in her book *Vernacular Voices*, based largely on David Bell’s discussion in “Recent Works on Early Modern French National Identity:” “The consciousness of individuals that they exist in relation to communities, and the way in which objective characteristics of those communities contribute to the way individuals represent themselves and are represented by others.”\(^{16}\) In critical terms, identity is “necessarily relational.” When we apply this specifically to Jewish identity in the Middle Ages, as Carmen Caballero-Navas and Esperanza Alfonso argue in the introduction to their anthology, *Late Medieval Jewish Identities: Iberia and Beyond*, we must therefore consider questions that extend further than religious difference. Identity is a multilayered concept that is not restricted to religious ideals and practices, but equally bound up with class and gender, both intracommunally and extracommunally.\(^{17}\) Such a view of identity takes into account its many complexities, acknowledging that rather than something static, it can change according to any number of social variables.

My approach to the analysis of Israel’s Esther texts conforms in many respects to such an understanding of identity; for their author was a man whose own identity was surely not one-dimensional. Not only were many of his professional ideals informed by sources not particular to Judaism, but his practice as a physician also afforded him fluidity between worlds which was more limited for his coreligionists, thus positioning him within the collective, but to some degree, outside it as well. This is, as I reason throughout this study, reflected palpably in his compositions.

Yet as Aurora Salvatierra Ossorio asserts in her work on another physician, Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera:

“The author’s words are anchored in the values and perceptions that are shared between him/her and the plural and multilayered social, religious and cultural environment in which he lives. No writer can completely separate himself or herself from the basic coordinates of his time or from certain determining factors that act on

\(^{16}\) Kirsten Anne Fudeman, *Vernacular Voices: Language and Identity in Medieval French Jewish Communities* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 2 and 175 n. 3.

\(^{17}\) Carmen Caballero-Navas and Esperanza Alfonso, eds., introduction to *Late Medieval Jewish Identities: Iberia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1-2.
the collective mindset. In this respect, literary works contain values that are shared by all who live in the same place at the same time.”

In fact, some of the most difficult questions, and perhaps the most poignant, that arise from the Esther narratives are those of cultural translation and its relationship to identity. Being a physician, Israel probably had a greater degree of contact with the dominant culture, yet intercultural exchange was by no means uncommon for most Jews in the communities of southern France. There was a constant negotiation between acculturation, a term to which I will return, and preservation of religious and cultural identity. Thus, where the texts show evidence of a preoccupation with disseminating new knowledge, external to Jewish traditions, they are equally consumed with maintaining and teaching those religious traditions themselves. For even in an atmosphere of relative tolerance, where the Jewish community could engage with Christian society, its alterity, whether imposed or assumed, in discourse or in practice, was an undeniable part of life, making the need for self-definition vital.

Jewish identity, as David Auerbach conceives it in his book by the same title, might also be called “Jewish Cultural Nationalism,” with its potent attachment to nationhood as God’s “chosen people” and to the Hebrew Bible as its “national document.” Indeed the association with “text” is significant overall to the concept of Jewish self-representation. The Bible, prayer books, and other forms of literature evolved in the struggle for a minority culture to survive - at times in hostile conditions, at times in highly creative conditions - and often served as a response to a sense of powerlessness or defeat. Auerbach’s work traces Jewish national identity from the ancient world to the European Middle Ages, through the French Revolution into modern times, and “[i]n each case, literature - a book or books - defined the character of this nationalism.” Textuality, as such, lies at the core of Jewish identity, and the text becomes a means of both constructing and construing that identity vis-à-vis others, acting as a vehicle for negotiating national and cultural borders.

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18 Aurora Salvatierra Ossorio, “The Seri ha-Yagon (Balm for Assuaging Grief) by Ibn Falaquera, A Case of Literary Crossbreeding,” in Caballero-Navas and Alfonso, Late Medieval Jewish Identities, 187.
20 Ibid., 1.
21 Ibid., 3. Auerbach refers to “the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, medieval Hebrew poetry, the siddur (prayer book) and modern Hebrew literature.”
Yet text cannot exist without language, and it is in language that we come to one of the central premises in the concept of identity. It is generally accepted in modern scholarship - since J.G. Herder in the nineteenth century - that language is to be understood as “the essence of a nationality.” Drawing on Benedict Anderson’s seminal *Imagined Communities*, Esperanza Alfonso introduces the first chapter of her study *Islamic Culture through Jewish Eyes* with a compelling discussion on the role of language in shaping communal identity, then applying it specifically to medieval Iberia and the attitudes towards Hebrew and Arabic. As she explains, Anderson does not restrict the idea of an “imagined community” to nation-states, but opens it out to encompass other bodies, including large religious communities which “build their identities by means of a language and a script they hold to be sacred.” Language assumes a critical role, therefore, in establishing boundaries for inclusion and exclusion, and by extension in self-definition. In this way Jewish communities in medieval Europe, depended on the sacral nature of the Hebrew tongue to preserve religious and cultural identity, even when they used the vernacular language in their everyday activities. Kirsten Fudeman, in her treatment of language and identity as it pertains specifically to diglossia and code-switching in Franco-Jewish texts, refers to Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, who theorize that “linguistic behaviour is made up of deliberate ‘acts of identity,’ choices that individuals make about language so as to resemble or be unlike certain people or groups, depending on whether they wish to be identified with or distinguished from them.”

Given such an understanding of the force of language in constructing identity, and given the linguistic heterodoxy of the two versions of Israel’s Esther texts, my work necessarily considers these questions. The significance of Israel’s choice not only to compose his text in two different languages, but also to write the vernacular version in Hebrew script, points sharply to cultural translation, literally *translatio*, a movement across cultures, and offers us

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23 Ibid., 1-25.
24 Ibid., 1.
25 Ibid.
26 As quoted in Fudeman, *Vernacular Voices*, 44, and 187, n. 103.
insights into the interdependence and in-betweenness of language, text, author and community.27

Implicit in this, of course, is the question of acculturation. Here modern classifications of acculturation are, as Ivan Marcus explains in his *Rituals of Childhood*, anachronistic.28 He divides the theoretical term “acculturation” into two distinct categories, one more suitably applied to the modern world, and the other to the premodern. *Outward acculturation*, as he calls it, bears a closer relationship to assimilation, where there is a “blurring of individual and communal traditional Jewish identities and of the religious and cultural boundaries between Jews and modern societies.”29 *Inward acculturation* more accurately describes the phenomenon as it existed in medieval Europe, where Jews often “[internalized and transformed] various genres, motifs, terms, institutions or rituals of the majority culture in a polemical, parodic or neutralized manner,” but still maintained their Jewish identity.30 Marcus’ distinction is significant and his definition of Jewish “inward” acculturation is certainly the more relevant to the work of this study.

Returning to its relational model, however, moving beyond the intercultural determinants in defining identity, that is, beyond the boundaries of religion and ethnicity, are the intracultural considerations I discussed earlier. According to Eleazar Gutwirth, as quoted in Caballeros-Navas, “Orthodoxy and heterodoxy are, [thus], two poles of the same spectrum, and both create inclusivity and exclusivity within a given community.”31 This clearly applies to the question of language and its accessibility in Israel’s texts, and is striking in the case of gender, as he has laid out explicitly in his apologia.

Although little information is available to us about the role of the women in Israel’s specific Avignonais community, it would be safe to surmise that it was analogous to that of other

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27 For a detailed discussion of language in Israel’s texts, see Chapter Three, “We Are What We Speak: Language and Identity.”
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 11-12.
31 Eleazar Gutwirth as quoted in Caballeros-Navas and Alfonso, introduction to *Late Medieval Jewish Identities*, 2.
Jewish communities in the region. And while it is true that women did play an important part in business in the European communities, both internally and cross-culturally, in dealings with the larger Christian society, as well as having the essential responsibility of the household, they were, both in the Northern and Southern French regions as well as the Iberian, excluded from many spheres of public life.32 Women’s role, according to tradition and *halakah* (Jewish law) was to facilitate her husband’s and her son’s religious study and practice. And although there were exceptions to this, most women would not have formally learned Hebrew, which invariably meant that they did not have access to the same texts as the men in their community. Thus here again, language becomes a significant vehicle in shaping power structures - and in turn a demarcation of identity for both genders - within the community.

My reflections on matters of gender in the chapters that follow necessarily take into account Israel’s complex approach to language, which serves as a channel for the expression of religious and cultural solidarity vis-à-vis the dominant society, and at the same time also functions as a marginalizing force, particularly for the women. Thus as I argue, the paradigm that exists for Israel as a Jewish man and physician, the social and political strictures imposed upon those very aspects of his identity, might in some way be reflected in his own differentiated attitudes towards women.

Israel brings to his texts notions of sex difference as a physical category as well as gender as a social category, with influences from both Jewish tradition and contemporary medieval thought. In this way his vision and its performance enact a hybridity, which was, in many respects, not atypical in his time. Tova Rosen, whose invaluable research has introduced

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feminist criticism into the realm of medieval Jewish (Hebrew) literature, explains, “The inferiority of women based on metaphysical, biological or ascetic grounds was rehearsed by Jewish philosophers, doctors, and moralists. Women were identified with matter, body and defiled sexuality. Men were repeatedly warned against women’s threat to their well-being and were urged to exclude and silence them.”

Israel’s articulation of the prevailing discourses on sex difference - both Jewish and non-Jewish - is palpable in his treatment of women’s bodies, which I discuss at length in Chapter Two, “Esther’s Issues [or The Blood of Others].” And where this is influenced heavily by his involvement in the medical world, we also see gendered conventions drawn from contemporaneous literary models in his texts.

In her work on representations of women in the medieval Hebrew corpus, Rosen explores the depiction of the “good” woman and the “bad” as common topoi. Not only are these stereotypes present in Israel’s medievalized redaction of the Hebrew Bible’s Esther narrative, but his re-vision adds a religious dimension to them. Indeed he maximizes the images of two principal female figures of the Megillah by assigning the role of the “idealized” woman of Hebrew and vernacular poetry to his Esther, the Jewish woman, and the “demonized” to the non-Jewish Vashti.

Needless to say, we cannot ignore the occasion for which Israel composed his texts, nor the very trope upon which they are founded. The Purim theme, at the core of the works, lends itself so readily to polemical treatment in any age. The flavor of the festival, as well as the original biblical story built around its etiology, its bawdiness and the liberties it allows, make it rich with potential for elaboration. Caslari, like so many others before and after him, clearly recognized that potential, seeing his own world juxtaposed with that of Esther and Mordecai. His adaptations come with a poignant humor that is true to its time. They reveal both a marriage of cultures and an insistence on their separateness, and each chapter explores the articulation of these ideas through a particular lens.


I open in Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” with an exploration of Israel’s professional and religious concerns and their convergence in the two texts. In it I focus on the textual embellishments derived from exemplars of a scientific and devotional nature. Drawing on Susan Einbinder’s foundational study of Israel’s [Crescas']\(^35/36\) medical expansions, I look at the marriage between his occupation as a physician and his preoccupations as a Jewish man living in a Christian dominated society. The result is a poignant dialogue between these two worlds with which the author identifies. The chapter further argues implicit didactic motivations and elucidates socio-cultural commentary in both his medical and his religious elaborations of the original biblical narrative, some of which are made manifest in the physical layout of the text itself.

Chapter Two, “Esther’s Issues [or The Blood of Others]” considers the ways in which Israel engages issues of gender in the texts, again arguing for a bicultural posture anchored simultaneously in his professional and religious ideals. While the previous chapter concentrates primarily on the author’s inflation of the biblical narrative with embellishments both from medical and rabbinic literature, here I also discuss aspects of the texts that either suggest suppression or raise questions about his choice of additions and omissions, especially in relation to women and their bodies. The chapter looks first at notions of purity and the female body in Christian and Jewish discourse, ranging from medical to rabbinic sources, and how these in turn inform ideas about cultural boundaries and their transgression. It goes on to explore the ways in which these are borne out in Israel’s compositional strategies. Underlying this discussion is the ongoing theme of didacticism in the texts, and the distinction between the two language versions and the intended gender of their respective audience. I bring this into focus through the treatment of the two queens, addressing not only how the author positions Esther, the Jewish queen, as a model of righteousness, and Vashti, the non-Jewish, queen as her antithesis, but also how these motifs play out differently in each text.


\(^36\) See section on authorial identity below. Einbinder originally used the name Crescas in her article and chapter, “A Proper Diet.”
Taking up the theme of purity and its cultural articulation, Chapter Three, “We Are What We Speak,” examines issues of language and identity in the texts. That Israel composed his romance in Judéo-Provençal and followed this with a Hebrew language version bespeaks the centrality of language to these works. Their diglossic nature is discernable at a glance, yet it points simultaneously to far deeper issues of biculturalism. The romances are infused with socio-linguistic matter that reveals an authorial preoccupation with identity as it relates to language.

What becomes clear is that while the texts are meant to be complementary, each has a discrete set of functions. In the Hebrew version, for instance, Israel adopts medieval Hebrew bellettristic conventions, championing the purity and perfection of the language of the Torah, and garnishes it with religious didacticism, a reminder to his southern French coreligionists that Jewish exile is a consequence of the transgression of God’s laws. The Judéo-Provençal, on the other hand, has a less moralistic tenor, drawing rather on romance elements and the beloved Purim parody for entertainment purposes. It is, moreover, a medium for the expression of Israel’s professional identity as a physician profoundly engaged with contemporary rationalist medicine. Each text is an encounter with linguistic limitation; each can convey something that its counterpart cannot. The Hebrew imparts pious messages through its intertextual references. Its allusions to the Jewish canon are necessarily exclusive, establishing both ethno-religious and gendered parameters for accessibility – and power. The vernacular text allows for the use of medical terminologies without appropriate Hebrew equivalents and at the same time carries on the tradition of this quintessential story of Jewish salvation.

Finally, Chapter Four, “A Poem by Many Other Names,” is an in-depth study of the major genres that inhabit the texts as individual compositions and as a unit. As distinct works, each in its own right conforms to a set of conventions, locating it ostensibly in an identifiable genre: the Judéo-Provençal a romance, and the Hebrew a piyyut, or liturgical poem.

37 In the apologia to the Hebrew language text, Israel specifies his intended audience: the first in the vernacular for women and children; the second in Hebrew for the Jewish men.
However, both narratives draw heavily on a range of generic patterns, both religious and secular, which ultimately generate an intricate conversation between them. In the chapter, I discuss the specific genres that influence each of the texts, from the more patent scriptural citations to talmudic and aggadic sources, the beloved Purim parody and sacred poetic forms. I also consider how literary models not specifically tied to Jewish tradition, such as novas and martyr stories, local politics and folklore, inform the texts. As a natural extension of the discussion about genre, and in particular because of the author’s gender designation - the vernacular for women, children and the rest, and the Hebrew for the Jewish men - I do explore the problem of audience for the texts as well. Of necessity, the topical concerns of the chapter cannot ignore the deeper question of hybridity that underlies this work as a whole. Consequently, I bring to my treatment of genre the awareness of biculturalism and its expression through all of the intertextual devices and the mixing of formal elements that I discuss in the chapter.

**Historical Context**

**Geographical Notes**

The south of France was not a uniform region in the Middle Ages, comprised instead of ever-changing political divisions under the rulership of different authorities. There does not seem to be one definitive term used among scholars, who call the region by a variety of names. In general, the current term “Occitania” is used to refer to the whole of the Occitan-speaking region, which includes Provence (with the Comtat Venaissin), Languedoc, Roussillon, Aquitaine, Gascogne, Limousin and Auvergne. Both “Occitan” and “Provençal,” on the other hand, are used as linguistic identifiers.

In spite of the lack of political homogeneity, and though not called by one particular name, for medieval Jews, the region was culturally unified. Gregg Stern, in fact, offers a number of examples of notable Jewish figureheads who refer to it in their writings as “this land,” הארץ הזאת. In the present work, my preference has been to use “Southern France” when

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38Gregg Stern, *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Interpretation and Controversy in Medieval Languedoc* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 9 and 18, n. 1. Stern quotes the works of a number of notable Jewish figures in the region and refers to written documentation of this in Me’iri’s *Beit ha-Beḥirah* (*The House*
discussing the region in general since it was considered to be one cultural entity by the Jews who lived in it. And while the term does comprise all of “Occitania,” I am primarily concerned with the areas in the southern central and southeastern parts of Occitania where the most significant Jewish communities in the late 13th and early 14th centuries were located: Languedoc, with such important Jewish centres as Narbonne, Lunel and Montpellier; Provence, with Arles and Marseilles, for instance; Roussillon, with Perpignan; the Comtat Venaissin, Avignon and the Principality of Orange.

While the borderlines shifted over time, during the period of this study Provence, in the eastern portion of the region, was divided between the Roman Empire, which in theory possessed the parts to the east of the Rhone River, and the Kingdom of France. Part of Provence was actually ruled by the Counts of Provence of the Anjou dynasty who were the Kings of Sicily (i.e. Naples). Languedoc, in the centre of the region, was part of the Kingdom of France, and Roussillon, to the southwest, was part of the Crown of Aragon. The Comtat Venaissin, a cluster of small territories to the east side of the Rhône River, theoretically belonged to Roman Empire, but was considered a papal possession since it was under the authority of the Pope. The city of Avignon and the Principality of Orange were geographically included in the Comtat, but not politically. In the mid-13th century, Avignon was co-ruled by Charles of Anjou and Alphonse de Poitiers, as Count and Marquis of two parts of Provence. Following Alphonse’s death in 1271, the King of France, in his role as overlord of Alphonse as Count of Toulouse, took ownership of all of the possessions of Alphonse, including the Comtat Venaissin and his portion of Avignon. In a complex set of circumstances, the King then gave the territories of Alphonse which belonged to the Roman Empire to the Holy See, whose possession it became in 1274. The Popes took up residence in the city in 1305, but it was not until 1348 that Avignon was officially sold to the papacy. The Principality of Orange, which comprised only the city itself and its suburbs, was at this time a fiefdom of the Roman Empire.

of Choice) and Abba Mari’s Minhat Kena’ot (Offering of Jealousy) among others. See below for further discussion.


The following map, reproduced from Gregg Stern’s *Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Interpretation and Controversy in Medieval Languedoc*, illustrates “The self-conceived territory of the Languedocian Jewish community.” Stern bases it on a correspondence between two Jewish scholars in the early 14th-century, the Me’iri of Perpignan and Aba Mari of Montpellier, who will be referred to in the chapters that follow. While it does not illustrate the political complexity of the region as it existed, and while Stern is concerned principally with Languedoc, I include it as a generalized representation of the borders in the region at the turn of the 14th century and to position the Comtat Venaissin and Avignon, where the texts in this dissertation were composed.

![Map of Languedoc](image)

**Biographical Notes on the Author**

The existing scholarship on Caslari’s Esther texts has identified Israel ben Joseph Caslari and Crescas Caslari (or Crescas de Caylar) as one and the same man. However, in a presentation at the 44th Annual Association for Jewish Studies Conference in 2012, Susan Einbinder brought to our attention the hypothesis that this is in fact not an accurate supposition. Dr. Einbinder’s enlightening research led me to the source of this information, a comprehensive

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42 Stern quotes the Me’iri’s account of the exchange, in which Abba Mari called the region between Perpignan and Montpellier “This Land of ten-days’ walk.” Ibid., 8 and 151.
study of the Hebrew translations of Arnau of Villanova’s *Regimen Sanitatis* written by Eduard Feliu, “Las traduccions hebrees del *Regiment de Sanitat d’Arnau de Vilanova*.” In his article, Feliu lists and describes, with commentary, the manuscripts containing the full and abbreviated translations of Arnau’s *Regimen* as well as translations of the *Arnaudina*, a shorter compilation of medical texts also by Arnau of Villanova, as well as translations of Joan de Toledo’s *Llibre de conservació de sanitat*, erroneously identified as one of Arnau’s works. Of the 18 manuscripts discussed, two manuscripts contain abbreviated versions, some fragmentary, of Arnau’s *Regimen Sanitatis* with a prologue and signature of Israel ben Joseph Caslari as translator. Crescas de Caslar, on the other hand, was the translator of Joan de Toledo’s *Llibre de conservació de sanitat*, falsely attributed to Arnau, which is extant in four manuscripts, as well as the *Arnaudina*, also extant in four copies. According to Feliu, based on the documentary evidence, Israel ben Joseph Caslari and Crescas Caslari are indeed not the same person, although he does believe that they were probably of the same family. Feliu states, moreover, that the identification of Crescas de Caslar with Israel ben Joseph Caslari, the author of the Esther text written in Avignon, is gratuitous simply because it is in that location that the *Regimen Sanitatis* is believed to have been translated.

The amount of biographical information available to us on Crescas Caslari, that is, what has been brought to light in scholarly compendia, is very limited. Still, the discovery of

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44 I am grateful to Dr. Einbinder for this illuminating information and resource.
46 Ibid., 55-7, and n. 25.
47 Feliu suggests that while they probably share some familial ties, Israel ben Joseph Caslari and Crescas de Caslar were likely not the same individual, since in common practice, the same individual would not have used two different names in their translations. “Tot fa pensar que hi devia haver algun lligam de parentiu entre Israel ben Jucef Caslarí i Crescas des Caslar, però no és, en canvi, gens versemblant que fossin el mateix individu, car no hauria estat normal que la mateixa persona utilitzés dos noms hebrees diferents en les seves traduccions.” Interestingly, one manuscript (ms. Munic, BS, Cod. hebr. 288), actually contains translations signed by both men, one following the other. Ibid., 62, n. 34.
48 “D’altra banda, la identificació de Crescas des Caslar amb un Israel ben Jucef ha-Levi, autor d’una poesia per a la festa de Purim, escrita a Avinyó, és també gratuita, però ha fet que hom considerés aquesta localitat com el lloc on va ser traduït a l’hebreu el dit *Regiment de sanitat*.” He refers to the misidentification of the two authors in Renan’s *Les Écrivains Juifs Français du XIVe Siècles* and Gross’ *Gallia Judaica*. Ibid., 57, n. 28.
imprecision regarding his shared identity with Israel ben Joseph Caslari has significant implications. Naturally, we must question to whom these biographical details actually belong.

The distinction in the assumed authorship of the Esther text leads to a further question arising from the inscription on the Judéo-Provençal manuscript. On the top of the first folium of the text in the Jewish Theological Seminary manuscript we find an introductory statement: "אתחיל לכתוב הלעז עשאו מא' קרשקש I will begin to write the vernacular produced by Maestre Crescas." Given that this is not the original, but a later copy of the text, it is very probable that in between the composition of the text and this copy of it, a similar misidentification had occurred. It is safe to conclude that the Hebrew and the vernacular texts were indeed composed by the same author for several reasons. The apologia to the Hebrew text tells us in no uncertain terms that a vernacular version preceded it. Moreover, the textual parallels in the two language versions make it quite plain that they are intended to be complementary works.

Thus the biographical material on the author of the Esther texts culled to date in the secondary sources brings with it some uncertainty. Renan’s compendium of 14th-century Jewish writers in France contains an entry on “La Famille Caslari,” which includes a list of notable figures known by this name, although as Einbinder states, “whether these Caslari’s were related is unclear.”50 Many of them were also physicians, such as Abraham Caslari, originally from Narbonne, and who resettled in Besalu, Catalonia after the 1306 expulsion.51 Abraham Caslari’s son, David, according to Renan, was also a physician and translator into Hebrew of a text by Galen.52 His entry for Israel establishes him as the same individual as Crescas: “Israël Fils de Joseph Caslari or Crescas de Caslar,” citing him as well as both the translator of the various versions of Arnau’s medical works along with the Hebrew and vernacular Esther texts.

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51 Ibid., Einbinder; Renan, Les Écrivains Juifs Français, 298-300.
52 Ibid., Einbinder; Renan, Les Écrivains Juifs Français, 300-1.
In his volume on liturgical poetry of medieval Provence and Catalonia, Binyamin Bar-Tikvah, published for the first time a *piyyut* [liturgical poem] from Ms. Oxford 1142, which he has attributed to Rabbi Israel Caslari, whom he also cites as the author of the Esther texts. Bar-Tikvah was likely basing his biographical data on the earlier erroneous identification of Israel and Crescas since the poem is in fact signed by Crescas rather than Israel. There can be little question about the fact that Israel ben Joseph Caslari is the author of the Esther texts. It is in the colophon and the apologia of the Hebrew version that we learn this. In the acrostic colophon that appears at the end of the narrative, he states his name explicitly, along with his place of residence and his profession.

הוрошע הרופא משכון ירושלםABA
לבני י Eaaron קש לארוelaו עלי
"ז"עשת הרופא ע"ש יסדה בן יוסף, די קש לארו, לבני יצור השואם בעירו, אב אבינו\nישמרנו יצור אמן קש לארו"אל הירושא יאואר

(The physician called Israel ben Joseph {Caslari}, resident of the city {Avignon} did this for the sons of Yitshar; may the rock watch over us, the powerful master, the Lord, Saviour of Israel.)54

And as discussed above, he indicates in the apologia to the same version that he authored the earlier vernacular text as well.55

While there is more research to be done on this matter, for the purposes of this study of the two Esther romances which we know were composed by Israel ben Joseph Caslari, we can at the very least make several relevant assertions. The name Caslari indicates that he probably came from the village of Le Caylar,56 which scholars have located near the town of Lodève57 in the modern-day department of the Hérault of the Languedoc region. This would present

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54 See my detailed discussion about the colophon in Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles.”
55 See supra, 6.
57 Silberstein, Einbinder, ibid.
the likelihood of an association with the Caslari of Narbonne, and very possibly a familial relationship. It would also imply that he too, had been a victim of the 1306 expulsion, migrating then to Avignon, as has been speculated.\textsuperscript{58}

More than this we can only conjecture. Nevertheless, whether this information pertains specifically to Crescas or to Israel, it does at least give us some sense of the author’s lineage. In addition, both men were physicians, likely members of the same family living in Avignon, and therefore working in the same milieu. Consequently, the available data, which is not exceedingly detailed, could indeed apply - at least in their context - to both men equally.

**Historical Background**

Given the parameters of this thesis, I do not provide an exhaustive history of the Jews in the region. I offer instead some general background leading up to the time of the composition of Caslari’s texts as well as the situation in Avignon during his period to position them. In the individual chapters that follow, I bring in other relevant historical data in order to contextualize my discussion of them. Among the important historical studies on the region are the numerous works of Danièle and Carole Iancu-Agou; Twersky’s foundational “Aspects of Social and Cultural History of Provençal Jewry;” Gustave Saige’s *Les juifs de Languedoc antérieurement au X\textsuperscript{IVe} siècle*; Léon Bardinet’s research on the Jews of Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin, such as “Condition civile des Juifs du Comtat Venaissin pendant le séjour des papes à Avignon, 1309-1376,” “Les Juifs du Comtat Venaissin au moyen âge: leur rôle économique et intellectuel.” On the Jews of Spain, see, for instance, the voluminous study of Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*. On the Jews under the French Monarchy, see the works of William Chester Jordan, particularly, *The French Monarchy and the Jews*. A full list of the historical works consulted for this study can be found in my bibliography.

Most scholarship agrees that Jewish settlement in the South of Gaul (*Gallia Narbonensis*) began between 70 and 100 C.E. in the Second Century of the Roman Era.\textsuperscript{59} However, the

\textsuperscript{58} See, for instance, Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 84.
demographic was almost always in flux as a result of varying degrees of persecutions and intolerance which brought new settlement from other parts of the European continent. Until the 12th century, northern France had a heavy influence on Jewish intellectual life in the south and centres of religious learning thrived throughout the region, which became a hub for advances in biblical exegesis, halakhic literature and talmudic study.60

With the 12th-century Almohade Invasion in al-Andalus there was a wave of migrations from Muslim Spain, where there had previously been an atmosphere of *convivencia*, a relatively peaceful and fruitful co-existence between Jews, Christians and Muslims. During this period, the Golden Age of Hebrew poetry, Jewish poets adopted Arabic forms that would eventually become literary conventions among Jewish writers as they traveled to other parts of the world. It was also a time when access to philosophical and scientific learning through texts written in Arabic would become integral to Jewish thought. When the Jews were forced to leave Muslim Spain, many fled to southern France, bringing with them the knowledge garnered from their engagement with those branches of Arabic learning, and their new home became fertile ground for innovation in cultural and intellectual activity. This wave of immigration had a tremendous impact on the region. In the 13th century, Jewish scholars who resettled in Languedoc and Provence set up schools wherein they undertook the translation of many of the Arabic texts that migrated with them, introducing not only secular wisdom from classical Greek and Arabic sources, but also new religious texts, among the most important of these the Judeo-Arabic works of Maimonides.61

Some of the most significant contributions in this regard were made by the celebrated Kimhi family and the Ibn Tibbon dynasty, who nourished the already existing hunger for erudition among the scholars in the region. They were grammarians and exegetes who were heartily involved with translation, making available to southern French Jews the scientific and metaphysical works of Aristotle, Averroes and Hippocrates from the secular domain, and the

poetic and exegetical writings of renowned Jewish figures the likes of Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Judah ha-Levi, Abraham Ibn Ezra and Saadiah Gaon. The first translation into Hebrew of Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* was executed at the turn of the 13th century in Lunel by Samuel Ibn Tibbon.

The turmoil of the 13th and 14th centuries under the French crown also left a powerful mark on the southern French region beginning with Louis IX, the King of the France, who in conjunction with the Church, placed heavy restrictions upon the Jews in his domain after the Albigensian Crusade in the first third of the 13th century. Motivated not only by religious zeal but also by monetary concerns, the level of persecution deepened and led to repeated expulsions and recalls under Louis and the monarchs who followed him. The expulsion of 1306 by Philip the Fair brought about migration of many Jews from the northern regions as well as those in the southern dominions of France. Many sought refuge in the Roussillon, Dauphiné, the Comtat Venaissin and Avignon, where they were permitted a relatively peaceful existence.

Consequent to their various movements and resettlements, the 13th and 14th centuries saw great strides in scholarship for southern French Jewry. In the more traditional disciplines, the Sages (*Ge’onim* or *Hakhamim*) of Provence figure prominently in what Twersky calls “the development of a critico-conceptual approach to Talmud study.” And it is there that the second Maimonidean controversy over the study of philosophy was centred. In flurries of epistolary exchanges some of the most formidable Jewish leaders of the time, among them the Rashba (Rabbi Solomon ibn Adret of Barcelona), Abba Mari ben Moses of Montpellier and Menahem ha-Me’iri of Perpignan, fiercely debated Maimonides’ approach to biblical interpretation and his synthesis of philosophy with Jewish theological tradition.

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63 “Aspects of the Social and Cultural History of Provençal Jewry,” *Journal of World History* 11 (1968), 188. Cf. also the comprehensive study by Pinhas Roth, ibid.

Israel’s World

Israel, as mentioned earlier in the biographical notes, was probably among those who resettled in the Comtat Venaissin and Avignon region. During the 13th century and into the 14th century, this was a place whose political situation was highly complex with the transition to papal rule and Avignon as the seat of the papacy. The situation of the Jews in the region was equally complex, for they were very often used as pawns in the struggles for domination by the vying political forces. According to William Chester Jordan, there were approximately 20 settlements of Jews in the Comtat Venaissin, Avignon and the Principality of Orange in the later 13th century. However, with the exception of Avignon, under the rule of Alphonse of Poitiers and Charles of Anjou until 1274 as a result of the unstable political situation, there was “little consistency in the policies to which various lords subjected their Jews.”

Carpentras, the capital of the region, was a particularly precarious setting for the Jews, who were consistently the victims of hostility, including heavy taxation and excommunication, as well as repeated expulsions at the hands of the local ecclesiastical authorities, who were threatened by the power of the papacy. The final expulsion from the city occurred in 1269 leaving many Jews “lordless” and open to exploitation by other Comtadin seigneurs until the official papal takeover, when they reverted to the Pope as overlord.

Under the pontificate, the Jews in the Comtat and Avignon lived in a relatively peaceable atmosphere and suffered less persecution than their brethren in other parts of Europe. There were varying degrees of intolerance, depending on the religious zeal of the reigning Pope and external political and financial pressures. And the Jews of Avignon, in fact, experienced more leniency than elsewhere in the region. Many Jews found asylum there, after the 1306 and 1322 expulsions from France, and the expulsions from Carpentras. Even the more

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65 As mentioned in the geographical notes, Avignon was of the Comtat Venaissin geographically but not politically. They are generally referred to together as the ‘papal lands.’
67 Jordan discusses the political complexities of these excommunications of Jews in “The Jews and the Transition to Papal Rule,” 220-1. However, the phenomenon was not unique to this region and he deals with it more broadly in “Christian Excommunication of the Jews in the Middle Ages: A Restatement of the Issues,” *Jewish History* 1 (1986): 31-8.
stringent Popes showed tolerance toward them. Jean XXII, for instance, took in many Jews following the Shepherds’ Crusade of 1320, the Pastoureaux, after they had borne the brunt of the religious fervor of the peasants and were forced to flee from Languedoc.\(^69\)

The Jewish community of Avignon, like those of the three Jewish communities in the Comtat,\(^70\) was relegated to reside in a juiverie, a closed neighborhood locked by three portals, at the center of which were the synagogue, school, and other communal properties. The juiverie of Israel’s day, in the Paroisse Saint Pierre, was the second one in the city, assigned after the original quarter had been destroyed in the 1226 siege on the city by Louis VIII of France during the Albigensian Crusades. Its physical parameters were quite small and as a result, its inhabitants often lived in very crowded conditions.\(^71\)

The Jews had the status of citizens and were afforded a great deal of autonomy in the administration and organization of their quarter.\(^72\) The main body of government was a council composed of fifteen elected members, who held the legislative and executive power, including the collection of taxes and establishment of statutes. Yet the council’s independence was limited; ultimately all legal matters required the approval of the viguier, representative of the Holy See and the City of Avignon, under whose jurisdiction it was placed.\(^73\) Members of the community were subjected to several tiers of taxation, based upon their level of wealth, the tallia judeorum, capage and the aumône, which were collected by

\(^69\) Bardinet, “Condition civile,” 14-6.
\(^70\) Carpentras, Cavaillon, and l’Isle-sur-la-Sorgue.
\(^72\) Bardinet, “Antiquité et organization “ 274-5. It has in fact, been called “a state within the state,” “une État dans l’État,” both by Bardinet, 275, who even refers to it as “une véritable république” and Prévot, Histoire du Ghetto, 27.
\(^73\) Bardinet, “Antiquité et organization,” 275-7; Prévot, Histoire du Ghetto, 129.
three *bailes* appointed by the local Jewish council to act on their behalf in their relations with civil and religious authorities outside.\textsuperscript{74}

Many of the Jews found their livelihoods in simple professions: merchants, artisans, and to a lesser degree, farmers. They worked as dyers, weavers, binders and bookmakers, tanners, shearers, tailors and clothiers, and in retail sales.\textsuperscript{75} Agriculture was not prohibited; in fact, from the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, the notarial acts are full of contracts of purchases and sales of homes, land and vineyards. In Avignon the Jews were permitted to become the owners of the homes in their quarter and some were allowed to possess land outside the *carrière*\textsuperscript{76} as well. Those who owned land worked it themselves, especially in viticulture, which was easier and less costly.\textsuperscript{77} While money lending had not been very widespread among the Jews in the Comtat and Avignon until that point, it became more common in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, at times inciting hostility with a series laws prohibiting the practice and ensuing revocations of those prohibitions.\textsuperscript{78}

Of all the professions in which the Jews were engaged the most prolific was medicine. The Jewish physicians were able to practice under the same conditions as their Christian counterparts. Indeed a disproportionate number of physicians in Avignon itself\textsuperscript{79} as well as southern France overall was Jewish.\textsuperscript{80} Many of them were also involved in other disciplines and were part of the flourishing community of Jewish intelligentsia that had established itself through the region. Typically they were active not only in the world of medicine and science, but were also engaged in belles-lettres pursuits, philosophy, jurisprudence, and of course theology.

\textsuperscript{74} Bardinet, “Antiquité et organisation,” 278; Prévot, *Histoire du Ghetto*, 129.
\textsuperscript{76} The *carrière*, from the Occitan word for street, is the name given to the closed quarter of the cities in which the Jews lived. The group of these in the Comtat, along with Avignon, is referred to as the *Quatre Carrières* in the latter, Cavaillon, Carpentras and l’Isle-sur-la-Sorgue.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 40-1.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 13-5.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 44. See also Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” for a broader discussion of this phenomenon.
Despite the freedoms that they enjoyed, the Jews were nevertheless marginalized and suffered restrictions. All individuals in the community, regardless of economic or professional standing, were obligated to wear a *rota* to distinguish them from the members of Christian society.\(^{81}\) Other laws forbade the sale of meat by Jewish butchers to Christians,\(^{82}\) or the incarceration of any citizen of Avignon by Jews.\(^{83}\) There were numerous statutes limiting the times when they were permitted to circulate outside of their quarter, particularly on Christian feast days and Sabbaths.\(^{84}\) And of course, there was always pressure for conversion, which was far preferred over protection. Yet despite the limitations placed on them and the statutes inhibiting their ability to mingle with the larger populace, members of the Jewish community did indeed have day-to-day dealings with their non-Jewish counterparts. They shared the same vernacular language,\(^{85}\) they had regular business exchanges and their lives were intertwined on a grassroots level.

For members of the Jewish elite, which included physicians like Israel, relations with Christian society, the world outside their Jewish enclave, would have been considerable, perhaps even greater than others in the community, as a result of their professional activities.\(^{86}\) It is known that Jewish physicians had clientele among the non-Jewish populace, and for some, this even included nobility,\(^{87}\) and the papal court.\(^{88}\) Jewish physicians were also called upon to testify in courts, even at times when there were regulations in place to

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\(^{82}\) Bardinet, “Rôle économique et intellectuel,” 39.


\(^{85}\) For a discussion of questions regarding language, see Chapter Three, “We Are What we Speak.”

\(^{86}\) The municipal statutes at different times do make provision for physicians and surgeons to leave the Jewish quarter, and while there were restrictions placed on whether Jewish physicians were permitted to give care to Christians, they were often treated with laxity. See for instance, Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” 53, n. 19.


\(^{88}\) Bardinet, “Rôle économique et intellectuel,” 44-5. See also Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles.”
limit interaction with Christian society. Additionally, many of the Jewish physicians not only had contact with non-Jewish practitioners in the field, but were affiliated, albeit unofficially, with academicians at the university’s medical faculty and a handful were involved in collaborations with other scholars.

These men, we might say, inhabited two worlds at once; yet despite their external liaisons, they were not integrated into the culture outside the walls of their community. Even the most successful individuals in this group, even those whose commitment to their profession was unwavering, were also devout Jews steeped in ritual and tradition. Their erudition and interest in secular learning was equaled only by their education in canonical Jewish texts and sacred literature, as well as contemporary works ranging from scriptural exegesis to legalistic or halakhic treatises.

In this milieu, many authors generated texts of a scientific and philosophical nature alongside commentaries on the bible, Hebrew grammars, social satires, as well as belles-lettres. It was not uncommon, moreover, that the same individual would have been a practitioner of medicine, a translator and a paytan composing liturgical poetry. In this way, Israel was a man of his time.

**Review of Scholarship**

To date, the Judéo-Provençal text has been published in four editions, with varying degrees of commentary. P. Meyer and A. Neubauer were the first to bring the work to light in an 1893 article in *Romania* XXI, with transcriptions of the manuscript’s Hebrew characters, transposed into its Provençal equivalent in Roman characters, accompanied by some commentary both on the text itself as well as on the transcription. Their work was groundbreaking, introducing Israel’s previously unknown text to the public, but it is certainly not without flaws and limitations. Neither of the editors was proficient in both languages; Meyer had no experience at all with the Hebrew alphabet before undertaking this project and

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Neubauer did not know Provençal. Despite their notes on the corresponding Hebrew and Roman characters, and their valuable efforts, their readings of the manuscript are problematic. In their opening commentary on the text, they do point out some of the striking elaborations of the biblical narrative, such as the burning of Vashti and the culinary additions, which they believe were Israel’s own. However, the scholars themselves acknowledge their lack of familiarity with rabbinic literature, which, given the text’s reliance on this source matter, naturally precluded any critical exploration of content.

The Romania edition was followed in 1925 with a re-publication of the text by Pierre Pansier in the Annales d’Avignon et du Comtat Venaissin. Pansier presents an emended form of the Meyer-Neubauer transcription of the original Provençal with a facing translation into its modern language correlative. His version, however, is equally problematic since he did not consult the manuscript, and replicates some of the errors of his predecessors. What is more, his corrections are often, according to Silberstein, “without foundation and his translation frequently replaces a cryptic medieval expression by a cryptic modern one.” In his introduction and notes to the text Pansier does identify and discuss Israel’s use of culinary references in the description of Ahasuerus’ royal banquet, also pointing out expressions and terminologies specific to Avignon. However he, too, only nods to the midrashic sources that are integral to Israel’s romance.

Susan Milner Silberstein produced a third edition of the vernacular text in her 1973 dissertation, “The Provençal Esther Poem Written in Hebrew Characters c. 1327 by Crescas de Caylar, Critical Edition.” This is the most comprehensive study of the text, which includes a lengthy introduction contextualizing it in its historical setting and thoroughly analyzing its linguistic features. Silberstein offers a brief history of the Jews in Provence before 1500, as well as background on the Judéo-Provençal language, and some discussion of the intellectual life of the Jewish community during the period of its composition. Her thesis

91 Ibid., 196-7.
92 Ibid., 201.
contains a section which provides information on scholarly references to the text, a
codicological description of the Jewish Theological Seminary manuscript, and a considerable
treatment of its linguistic (i.e. phonetic and morphological) aspects and form. The bulk of
the study is devoted to a diplomatic transcription and transliteration of the manuscript into
Roman characters and a translation of the Provençal into English, with a synoptic table of her
corrections to the Meyer-Neubauer and Pansier editions. Unlike her predecessors,
Silberstein has a command of both the Hebrew and Provençal languages and a solid footing
in talmudic literature, thus allowing for compelling commentary on Israel’s Jewish and
secular sources alike. Finally, she adds for the purpose of comparison a useful transcription
and translation of those passages in the Hebrew text that have parallels in their vernacular
counterpart. To the best of my knowledge, Silberstein’s dissertation has never been
published as a book.

In 1997, Marie-Françoise Notz-Grob and Suzanne Méjean-Thiolier published the "Roman de
la Reine Esther" in their anthology of novas entitled Nouvelles Courtoises Occitanes et
Françaises.96 Their collection seeks to establish the nova as a literary genre, as they discuss
in their introductory chapter, where they also make clear the reasons for the inclusion of the
works that appear in it. Israel’s text, they explain, while somewhat different from the others
in the anthology due to its unique linguistic features and its religious theme, belongs to the
nova category for its didactic qualities. It is, as they state in their prefatory remarks, meant to
teach as much as to entertain, and “if the teachings in the Esther text are far from those of the
troubadours and courtoisie, this “roman” still presents a common point with the courtois
works: in all cases the author considers himself less an artist/creator than a master of
knowledge, a craftsperson of the soul and the beautiful.”97 Notz-Grob and Méjean-Thiolier
present the narrative transliterated into Provençal with a facing-page translation into modern
French. While their notes to the text are not extensive, they do offer many original
observations as well as notes on references and sources, both Jewish and Occitan. Their
edition is an emended version of Meyer’s Romania transcription, with no reference to the

original manuscript. There is also no indication that they use or are aware of Silberstein’s study of the text.98

While not an edition per se, Susan Einbinder’s “A Proper Diet: Medicine and History in Crescas Caslari's ‘Esther,’” first published as an article in Speculum in 2005,99 and later included as a chapter in her monograph, No Place of Rest in 2009,100 makes a significant contribution to the scholarship on Israel’s texts. It is an innovative treatment of the texts, wherein Einbinder considers Israel’s work as a physician and his medical embellishments to both language versions. Her central argument hinges on the influences of his scholastic training as a member of the intellectual elite in the Jewish community, showing most effectively how Israel introduces theories from popular medicine into his text. Her research brings to light many of Israel’s important sources, from his professional milieu as well as his erudition in the Jewish canon. The thematic concern of her book is expulsion, exile and memory in medieval France and the expression of these phenomena in a group of what she calls “generically eccentric”101 14th-century literary works. She also considers the trajectory of these works in later historical contexts, among other Jewish communities. In the case of Israel’s Hebrew text, Einbinder incorporates some discussion of an edition that made its way to print in 19th-century Salonika, tracing its movement and the “reinterpretation of historical allusions” in it.102 Since my focus in the present study is on the original medieval versions of the text, I do not use this edition as a primary source.

Limitations of the Present Study

Given that we do not have a complete version of the vernacular text, and certain sections are not available for direct comparison, some of my discussions are necessarily not comprehensive. In spite of this limitation, the portion of the Judéo-Provençal romance that is accessible to us does indeed offer sufficient material for an analysis and reasoned speculation.

98 Ibid., 124. The editors have a note on a dissertation in process on the Caslari text by Anne Wanono, however, I have been unable to locate it.
100 Susan L. Einbinder "A Proper Diet." in No Place of Rest, 85-111.
102 Ibid., 111. This text is cited below in “On the Texts Used for this Study.”
My work with the Hebrew Union College manuscript, Ms. HUC 396, a copy of the Hebrew text, written in Italy and dated between 1447 and 1455, is based on a microfilmed copy of the manuscript. The transcription that appears at the end of this dissertation as an appendix incorporates variants from this manuscript as well as portions of the text that are corrupted in the Bodleian manuscript. While it would have been optimal to consult the HUC manuscript in person, the manuscript is in good condition and the microfilm provided a clear reading of the full text. I do hope to do a detailed hands-on codicological study of it in the near future.

While a second fragment of the Judéo-Provençal text has been identified at the Biblioteca Casanatense, as noted below, it does not figure into my project. I have, indeed, examined a microfilm of Casanatense Ms. Heb. 3140, which seems to be severely damaged and considerable portions of the text corrupted; but it has not yet been possible for me to consult the manuscript in person. I do, however, intend to do so and will transcribe those pieces of the texts that are accessible and legible as well as prepare a codicological description of the manuscript.

**On the Texts Used for the Present Study**

The first of the two adaptations of the *Scroll of Esther*, dated to 1327, is in Judéo-Provençal, the southern French vernacular written in Hebrew characters in octosyllabic couplets. It comes to us in fragmentary form in two manuscripts, one at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and the other, discovered by Susan Einbinder, at the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome. For the purposes of this study, I have relied solely on the former, JTS Ms 3740, a collection of Purim parodies, which is described below in the manuscript section. That fragment is 449 lines in length, breaking at the point in the biblical narrative when Esther has been chosen to replace Vashti as wife to the Persian king Ahasuerus. I have also worked closely with the four editions of the text, using the two most recently produced (Silberstein, 1973 and Notz-Grob/Méjean-Thiolier, 1997) as my main sources, but ultimately deferring to the manuscript where there are questions about transcription.

Israel’s Hebrew version, on the other hand, is extant in its full 960 lines, as a sacred poem, a *Mi Kamokha*, used as part of the liturgical cycle for *Shabbat Zakhor* (Sabbath of
Remembrance), the Sabbath preceding the Purim festival.\textsuperscript{103} It is extant in its entirety in two medieval manuscripts at the Oxford Bodleian Library, Ms. heb. e. 10, dated 1402 from Provence, and the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio, Ms. HUC 396, dated 1447-1455 and written in Italy. They are both \textit{mahzorim} or collections of prayers and poems for holidays and special Sabbaths. The text has also been preserved in two later \textit{mahzorim} from the Quatre Carrières of Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin,\textsuperscript{104} both collections of hymns and prayers for the Four Sabbaths according to the rite of Avignon. The first, Ms. X893 C-J55 Vol. 31, a 1701 codex from l’Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, is housed at Columbia University in New York. The second, BL Add 19663, is likewise dated to the 18\textsuperscript{th} century and lives at the British Library. The integrity of the medieval text is maintained in both \textit{mahzorim} with no discernible changes.

There are, finally, two existing copies of an edition of the Hebrew text printed in 19\textsuperscript{th}-century Salonika by Isaac Jehun housed in New York at Yeshiva University\textsuperscript{105} and at the Jewish Theological Seminary.\textsuperscript{106} The print edition contains some alterations to the content of the text and the author’s colophon has been folded into the text itself so that its original layout is indistinguishable.

To date no formal transcription or critical edition of the Hebrew text has been published; however, I have produced a full transcription of Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10 with variants from Ms. HUC 396 in an appendix to this thesis. All of the primary source material discussed in the present study is derived directly from these two medieval manuscripts. While I have consulted the later versions of the \textit{Mi Kamokha}, in both the southern French \textit{mahzorim} and the Salonika print incarnation, my work is based immediately on the medieval manuscripts since they would be the copies closest to the actual moment of their composition and thus most relevant in this context.

\textsuperscript{103} A description of the manuscripts follows below.
\textsuperscript{104} The four Jewish communities of Avignon, Cavaillon, Carpentras and l’Isle sur-la-Sorgue.
\textsuperscript{105} 262 Rare Lutzki.
\textsuperscript{106} Rare Book Room BS 1374 .H4 C74 1853.
Notes on Translation and Transliteration

Translation

Unless otherwise cited, translations to English are my own. They are intended to be faithful to the original texts despite the linguistic losses sustained in the language-transition. The result is sometimes less than “poetic,” however, I hope to retain the concepts arising from previous layers of language and literature and convey the ideas expressed in the text.

Lineation

The Appendix at the end of this dissertation is a full transcription of Israel’s Hebrew text, the *Mi Kamokha* poem from the 1402 Bodleian manuscript with variants from the 1447-55 Hebrew Union College manuscript (both described below). In both manuscripts the text in its original form is not broken into strophes but fills the width of the text space. My transcription reflects the strophic structure of the poem and is lineated accordingly. All of my references to line numbers correspond to the lineation in the Appendix. It should be noted that there are lines missing from the Hebrew Union College manuscript, resulting in a change in line number correspondences at line 320. Until that point, the lineation is the same for both copies.

Transliteration

The transliteration in this study follows the 2006 Hebrew Academy table of equivalences for consonants presented below. In general, transliterated titles of scholarly works are my own and follow the same system. The exception to this is where the transliteration of Hebrew titles into English characters of names, publishing companies or titles have been formulated and published, in which case I have retained the publisher’s rendering.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonants:</th>
<th>Vowels and Diphthongs:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>א = ’ alef</td>
<td>ב = b bet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>י = n nun</td>
<td>ס = s samekh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ו = v vet</td>
<td>י = ‘ ayin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

107 I have opted for this system primarily for the facility of reproducing the characters in the standard “Microsoft Word” program.
The Manuscripts

Hebrew

The Oxford Bodleian manuscript, heb. e. 10, written in Provence and dated to 1402, has been the main source for my research and I have worked extensively with it. A detailed description of it is included here, along with the transcription of the text in an appendix. My work with the Hebrew Union College manuscript, Ms. HUC 396, written in Italy and dated between 1447 and 1455,\(^{108}\) is based on a microfilmed copy of the manuscript. The transcription incorporates variants from this manuscript as well as portions of the text that are corrupted in the Bodleian manuscript. I include below details from the catalogue description of Ms. HUC 396.

Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10

The manuscript’s 73 folia contain prayers and poems for holidays and special Sabbaths,\(^{109}\) all in Hebrew. It is written in Provençal semi-cursive script, all by the same hand, with inconsistent vocalization. It is in relatively good condition, though many of the edges are

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\(^{108}\) The manuscript description was included on the microfilm I was sent by the Institute of Religion, Hebrew Union College.

\(^{109}\) *Shabbat Shekalim, Shabbat Zakhor, Shabbat Parah,* and *Shabbat ha-Hodesh,* named for the additional Torah portion which is read when they occur each year. Two occur before the Purim festival and two before Passover, respectively.
frayed, particularly on the paper folia. Both paper and parchment are yellowed with some brown spots and a wormhole on folium 24.

The scribal colophon on folium 71v reads:

בשלמה כתיבת זה הספר על ידי משה שמייל דאשקולה בשלשים يوم
לחדש סיון שנת קס"ב ברוך השם המלמד ידיו לקרב ומרומם
על כל ברכה והחל אמן אמן סלה

(“The writing of this book has been completed by Moshe Shmeil of Escola on the 30th day of the month of Sivan, 5162 [1402]. Blessed is God who trains his hands for battle [Psalms 144:1] and is exalted above all blessing and praise! Amen, amen, selah! “)

The owners are indicated at the beginning of the manuscript as Joseph and Solomon Avigdor אביגדור. It is also possible that some of the scribbled writing on the end folia indicates additional owners.

The binding on the manuscript is new and measures 21mm in width, with quires sewn individually into acid-free strips which are glued in and bound. The cover is 219 mm in height and 182 mm in width.

**Material**

The manuscript is a combination of parchment and paper.

1. Parchment:

Inner and outer bifolia of each quire are parchment. The outer bifolium starts with hair side, while the inner starts with flesh side and opens out on hair side (where the quire is sewn).

Hair follicles on these sheets are mainly visible.

2. Paper:

The remaining folia in each quire is paper, with visible laid lines and watermarks and single chain lines.
Many of the paper leaves have frayed and the edging is poor - these have all been fixed by
the preservationist with acid free paper added at edges so that all the sizes of the pages are
relatively uniform.

There are 2 fly leaves at the front and 2 at the back of the manuscript. The outer (on both
front and back) is a thicker paper and the inner a finer paper.

The ink color is brown.

**Ruling**
There are no prick marks anywhere in the manuscript. Ruling, done by hard point leaf by
leaf on the verso side, is visible and complete throughout the manuscript. The last written
line falls below the ruling.

**Foliation and Quiring**
No foliation was designated by the scribe, but numbers were added later at the upper left
corner of each recto folium.

The manuscript contains five (5) quires, which are generally uniform with eight (8) bifolia in
each. The fourth quire (folia 45r-57v) contains 13 leaves, some of which are singletons.

There are two additional parchment folia at the back of the manuscript which are separate
from the quires and do not belong to any of its texts. They seem to have been added at a later
date, but are numbered as folia 74 and 75.

There are catchwords below the lower margin of the text on some folia, but there seems to be
no pattern to when they are used and does not seem related to quiring. The following
catchwords appear:
Fol. 1v - ואף
Fol. 8v - כן
Fol. 12v - אף
Fol. 19v - קורץ
Fol. 27v – מחלתה
**Layout and Measurements**  (all measurements shown are averages)

1. **Text**

The texts are written in one block column, with the exception of Israel’s *Mi Kamokha*, which is mainly laid out in two columns. Each folium contains 22 lines of text covering the margin area, except in some cases where particular texts finish and the remainder of the folium is left unused. The text area is 142 mm high and 83 mm wide. All of the texts have headings which are written in larger script.

Character height is 13 mm for headings and 7 mm for main text. Some of the characters at the end of lines are extended or truncated to conform to the ruling.

On most of the verso folia, the scribe wrote either the full word or an abbreviation of the word that begins the next folium as the last word of the bottom line. This is regular throughout the manuscript, but does not appear in Israel’s *Mi Kamokha* text.

2. **Folia**

Page height: 210 mm  
Upper margin: 23 mm  
Lower margin: 45 mm  
Page width: 142 mm  
Margins are mainly uniform:  
  Outer margin: 36 mm  
  Inner margin: 23 mm

**Marginalia**

The manuscript has marginal notations in the hand of the scribe regarding the *piyyut* cycle: i.e.

\[ \sim \text{ is above all of these side words} \]

פזמון סלוק
מחיה משלש

"Mi Kamokha"
as well as indications for the hazzan or cantor: i.e.

The final two added folia, 74 and 75, contain writing in both Hebrew and Roman characters.

Folium 74r has a list of numeric calculations in one column on the right. A second column on the left is a vertical list of Roman characters with numbers, which seem to be numeric equivalents, for instance:

- a-1
- b-2
- c-3
- d-4
- e-5
- f-6

Folia 74v- 75v contain random writings in Hebrew and Roman letters and some numbers. The hand on these folia is not that of the scribe of the main text, but matches with much of the marginal glosses in parts of the main text.

**Corruptions**

The manuscript has incurred some damage, with pieces cut out of fols. 30, 46, 47, 48 and 56, and the text corrupted as a result.
Fol. 51 has three lines at the top which were scratched out and portions of the lines were rewritten later in a different hand.

Fol. 59 is torn and the top half is missing.

Israel’s Mi Kamokha text, begins on fol. 48r and ends on fol. 59r. I have utilized the HUC manuscript to fill in, as indicated in the transcription in Appendix 1.

**Ms. HUC 396**

The following details are taken from the Hebrew Union College Library catalogue description of the manuscript with some additional observations from the microfilm of Israel’s text.

מַחּוֹר מַנְהָג פְּרוֹבֶנְצִין

(Mahzor according to the Rite of Provence)

Written in Italy by an Italian hand, rabbinic. Texts are vocalized (with a few exceptions vocalization is phonetic according to the Sephardic pronunciation).

Dated between March 6, 1447 and March 24, 1455, the pontificate period of Pope Nicholas V, who is mentioned on fol. 131b.

Measurements: 238 x 177 mm.

New blue buckram binding.

The manuscript contains 156 leaves, of which one leaf, 54b, is blank.

Material is paper and vellum. The vellum leaves are: 1, 9-10, 18-19, 28-29, 36-37, 46-47, 57-58, 67-68, 77-78, 88, 97-98, 104-105, 111-112, 120-121, 129-130, 139-140, 148-149, 151-152, 156). There is a lacuna between leaves 152-153-154, 155-156.
Owners: Ḥayyim de Cavaillon and Eman‘uel Haim de Cavaillon and Gad de-Kat[ě]lon ben Haim de Cavaillon

The manuscript contains prayers and poems for holydays and special Saturdays, Hagada for Passover (fols. 42b-53b), a blessing for Pope Nicholas V and his cardinals (fols. 131a-b) and approximately 600 poems with notations of melodies, many of which are represented only by their first few lines.¹¹⁰

Israel’s Mi Kamokha begins on fol. 19b and ends on fol. 27b. While some of the texts in the manuscript are laid out and written in columns, Israel’s is not written in columns, but there are observable spaces left to separate the lines of the poem. The colophon, on fol. 27a and b, however, is laid out in two columns, with four dots at the beginning of each line. The heading: "מי כמיך ואין כמוך מי דומה לך ואין דומה לך" both precedes and follows the text, centered and with slightly larger characters. Folium 21b contains the catchword מלחמת included on the last line of text, probably indicating the beginning of the next quire.

**Judéo-Provençal**

**Ms. JTS 3740 (formerly Ms. Adler 2039)**

In her 1973 dissertation, Susan Milner Silberstein includes a thorough description of this manuscript. I, too, have done a codicological examination of Ms. 3740, and include here details summarizing Silberstein’s data and add to or build on her work with it. For additional details, not included here I direct the reader to pages 68-74 of her dissertation and edition of the text.¹¹¹

The Judéo-Provençal fragment is one of four Purim texts, all listed as parodies, contained in the manuscript housed at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. All of the texts that make up the 29 folia of the manuscript are written in the same hand, and are in Hebrew characters without vocalisation. The first three are Hebrew-language prose texts with some

¹¹⁰ The manuscript description was included with the microfilm of the manuscript sent to me from he Klau Library, Institute of Religion, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio.
Aramaic; the fourth, Israel’s Esther fragment is the only verse composition and also the only one in the vernacular. The texts were originally identified and titled as:

- **מגילת סתרים** (Megillat Setarim, “Scroll of Secrets”), fols. 1r-4v
- **מסכת פורים** (Masekhet Purim, “Tractate Purim”), fols. 5r-20v
- **מסורה מגילת פורים** (Mesorah Megillat Purim, Tradition of the Purim Scroll), fols. 21r-23r

The first three texts were attributed to Kalonymos ben Kalonymos. Silberstein, however, proposes that these were misidentified, and based upon her reading, the first text is actually **ספר הבקבוק** (Sefer ha-Bakbuk, “The Book of the Bottle”) and the second, **מגילת סתרים** (Megillat Setarim, “Scroll of Secrets”), while she states that she was unable to identify the third. Based upon my own assessment of the first two texts, I agree with Silberstein. The third text is indeed rather mysterious, with portions in Aramaic, “lashon targum.”

There is no scribal colophon in the manuscript, since it ends quite abruptly after the Israel fragment, nor is it dated. In his edition, Neubauer suggested a 16th-century date, though according to Silberstein, Dr. Schmelzer, the librarian at the Jewish Theological Seminary, with whom she consulted, estimated the hand to be earlier. Silberstein herself narrowed the classification to a semi-cursive “rabbinic” script called “Sephardic Mashait” rather than “Provençal-Sephardic.”

The current record in the online catalogue for the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, as well as an internal catalogue from 1990, list the manuscript with an 18th-century date, which seems improbable, based on the codicological evidence - both the hand

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112 Ibid., 69.
113 Ibid., 71.
114 Silberstein provides a detailed explanation or how she arrived at this conclusion, based upon examples from Solomon A. Birnbaum’s Hebrew Scripts. Ibid., 72.
but on the materials used. The combination of parchment and paper and the arrangement of
the quires suggest an earlier date.115

Material
The manuscript is a combination of parchment and paper. and the binding, according to
Silberstein and Schmelzer is probably from the early 20th century.116

The inner and outer bifolia of each quire are parchment which is yellowing at the borders:
Folia 8, 15, 16, 23 and 29 as well as the first guard sheet. The remaining folia in each
quire are paper, with fraying edges and signs of water damage on the final five folia.

At both the front and the back of the manuscript there is an individual paper fly leaf.

The ink color is medium brown with some fading.

Ruling
The manuscript has a number of small points, some in the text area, others in the margin that
do not seem to have a regular pattern. Given that they are in the same position, though
diminish in number from the back to the front of the manuscript, Silberstein believes that
these might have been piercings to guide the ruling of the manuscript. However, as she
states, these holes sometimes eliminate letters from the texts, indicating that the holes were
made after copying.117 As such, it is unlikely that they are ruling mechanisms, but rather
perhaps damage to the manuscript.

Foliation and Quiring
No foliation was designated by the scribe, but numbers were added later at the upper left
corner of each recto folium.

117 Ibid., 70.
The manuscript contains two quires, the first composed of eight (8) bifolia, and the second of seven (7).

There are no catchwords.

**Layout and Measurements**

**1. Text**

All of the texts are written in one block column.

The text on the first two folia of Israel’s poem is laid out in two parallel columns averaging 40-50 mm. in width, but the remaining folia of the fragment revert to a single block of text. Fol. 23r contains 21 lines of text in addition to the larger block letters of the at the top. Fols. 23v and 28r contain 22 lines and the remaining folia contain 23 each.

On the first two folia, 23v and 24r, where the two column layout is utilized, the spacing between words in the text is fairly regular. On the remaining folia, 24v-29v, however, the spacing is very irregular and in a number of cases, there is inaccurate separation of the Provençal words, which Silberstein proposes might indicate that the scribe did not know the vernacular language.\(^\text{118}\) Given that there are no such irregularities in the preceding Hebrew texts, her suggestion would be a plausible explanation.

The text area ranges between 76 and 98 mm. in width and averages 145 mm in height. All of the texts have headings which are written in larger square script, approximately equal at 3-4 mm in width and height, with the longer Hebrew letters (such as ꝏ, ꝛ, Ꝣ) extending to an average of 8 mm. These characters are also used for the first word of the first line of the text. In the first three texts, the larger square letters are used to mark the end of chapters or sections, using סליק פרקא. In the Caslari fragment, there are two headings with larger square characters that are the same size as the title of the text. They are in fact, used to introduce particular sections of the poem and are meant to be read as the first word of the line. The

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\(^{118}\) Silberstein does point out that in similar texts, where Hebrew characters are used for writing in the vernacular, irregular spacing is a common scribal practice. The rarity of examples in Judéo-Provençal, however, does not allow for adequate comparison. Ibid., 73.
first appears at the top of folium 24r, and corresponds to line 43 of the text. The larger word is *Al tems* [אל-times] and the following line continues the text with “*que.l mont era d’enperi.*” The second occurrence of this is a centered word (written as one word in the Hebrew characters) near the bottom of on folium 28r which corresponds to line 354 of the poem. The words *la cort* [לאורט] begin the line and are followed by “*la cort romanc mot consirosa.*” These headings represent the beginning of chapters in the biblical narrative. The first, *Al tems*, matching up with the first chapter of *Megillat Esther*, “*זֶה בֵּיתוֹ*” [*It came to pass*] in the days of…” The second instance marks the start of Chapter two of the *Megillah* following the account of Vashti’s sentencing and her disappearance. We can assume that this would have been consistent through the remainder of the text, but the fragment ends in the middle of Chapter two of the biblical narrative.

2. Folia

Page height: 195 mm
Upper margin: 15 mm
Lower margin: 35 mm

Page width: 145 mm
Margins widths vary slightly:
   - Right margin: 27 mm on recto and 25-40 mm verso
   - Left margin: 25-40 mm on recto and 15-40 mm on verso

Marginalia

There is one marginal note on folium 21v in the outer (right) margin. The note is in Hebrew characters in an indecipherable hand, clearly added later.

There are two marginal additions in Israel’s text, in the same hand as that of the scribe. The first, on folium 27r, at the end of line 16 of text (corresponding to line 286 of the poem), following the word *acto* [אקטו] is the Hebrew character *sin* or *shin* [ש], which must have been

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119 Silberstein’s transcription. Ibid., 192.
120 Silberstein’s transcription., Ibid., 200.
121 Ibid., 72.
added to make the word a plural *actos* [אקטוש] since the preceding word is *los* [לוש]. The second is on folium 29v, at the end of the fourth line of text (corresponding to line 424 of the poem), following the word *conpan fi* [קונפאניי] is the combination of Hebrew characters *aleph-heh* [א] in order to complete the word and make it *conpanha* [קונפאנייאה].

In several places, only in the Caslari text, the scribe seems to have run out of room to complete the line and wrote the final word in the margin perpendicular to the line to be read upward. This occurs at the end of the second column on folium 23v at lines 16 and 21 (corresponding to lines 28 and 38 of the poem) of text with the words *a mort* [א מורט] and *larc* [לארק] respectively. On folium 24r this occurs at the end on the second column at line 2 (corresponding to line 44 of the poem) with the word *Sozeri* [שודירי] and at the end of the first column on line 12 with the words *las cors* [לאש קורש] and again at the end on line 3 (corresponding to line 267 of the poem) on folium 27r with the letters [פ] to complete the word *temple*.

At the bottom right of folium 29v, just below the text and also in brown ink, the inscription “Auzish S” appears in Latin characters. According to Silberstein, this might be a scribal signature, the name of the person for whom the manuscript was copied, or perhaps that of an owner.122 While all of these are certainly possibilities, the less likely is that it is a signature of the scribe, which would normally be written at the end of the manuscript after its completion; however, it is also possible that the copyist of this manuscript did not have a complete original.

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122 Ibid., 74.
Chapter One

Medicine, Midrash and Miracles

Israel Caslari’s Esther romances were composed in the early 14th century, a time when the Jewish community in southern France was alive with creative spirit and intellectual activity, both within its own boundaries and also in the larger society of which it was a part. These texts themselves are a living representation of just such internal activity as well as the cross-pollination with the world outside. Each version on its own, the Judéo-Provençal and the Hebrew, as well as the pair as an entity, is by nature a hybrid, with its overlapping motifs of scholastic medicine and traditional Jewish learning drawn from the two worlds with which its author was deeply engaged. The romance is palpably charged with embellishments to the biblical narrative, some additions based on contemporary medicine and others that reflect centuries of Jewish intellectual history. But the very fact that these additions live side by side in the text points us back, in turn, to the cultural and intellectual hybridity of the community itself. The co-existence of two such diverse influences in Israel’s oeuvre offers some indication of the author’s own dualistic identity and by extension, perhaps, that of his audience of co-religionists.

Israel was one of an important group of Jewish physicians in Occitania whose involvement with scholastic medicine would necessarily lead to a series of ambiguities and tensions involving cultural translation and identity in his writings: first in his Hebrew translation of Arnau of Villanova’s *Regimen Sanitatis ad Regem Aragonum*, a Latin medical treatise, and then in the Esther romances. Like his Jewish colleagues, he would have had the experience of a parallel education, one that in many ways mirrored the curriculum of the universities - despite the impossibility of actual enrollment for Jews - and was comparable to that of the Christian physicians training at Montpellier. At the same time, moreover, he would have received the same education as that of any pious Jewish man, trained in Torah, Talmud,
halakhah (Jewish law) and all of the traditional religious teachings. The incorporation of these spheres into the Esther romances at once shows a fluidity and a tension between them. The present chapter will examine these tensions as they are embodied in Caslari’s texts, in their expression of a phenomenon common to diasporic Jews: a concurrent inclination to acculturate into the dominant society and a need to preserve Jewish identity. The articulation of this bicultural experience is pronounced in the hybridity of the Esther texts, where Caslari’s medical training enters into conversation with his status as a man of letters and a devout member of his Jewish community in southern France. And taking this stance still one step further is the notion of ‘miracle’ in the text; that is, Israel’s authorial persona as self-ordained mediator for the salvation of his people. Rooted in his didactic position that Jewish exile and persecution are the result of transgression, Israel takes his authority as writer and physician into an almost Mosaic realm in which he is, through his text, a spokesperson for his people, a go-between for the Jews and God.

Susan Einbinder’s pioneering research on the medical additions to the texts serves as an important foundation for my own explorations. In “A Proper Diet,” she presents a study of Caslari’s amplifications to the biblical Esther narrative, drawing on his practice as a scholastic physician and on his translation of Arnau of Villanova’s *Regimen Sanitatis*. Her close reading is enlightening in its identification of popular medical knowledge and its transmission through Caslari’s literary adaptations. As Einbinder has so convincingly shown, Israel’s texts bespeak his professional engagement with scholastic medicine, yet they are, as she also points out, offset by the religious tradition on which he draws as well. And it is this very dialogue that I propose to examine in depth in the ensuing pages. Parts of my argument necessarily parallel the trajectory laid out by Einbinder, following on her innovative analyses to expand on and highlight the hybrid nature of the narratives and the biculturalism expressed in them.

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2 This notion of “miracle” in the text is closely tied to his identification with rationalist ideals, echoing a Maimonidean approach to the question of miracles and divine intervention in the natural world order through allegorical interpretation. Joseph Shatzmiller, “Rationalisme et orthodoxie religieuse chez les Juifs provençaux au commencement du XIVe siècle,” *Provence Historique* 22.89 (1972): 264.
Each text in its own right contains a discursive construct between its secular influences and those rooted in Judaism and its canonical heritage. At same time, this internal dialogue also translates cross-textually, so that a separate dialogue is generated between the vernacular and the Hebrew versions. Einbinder indicates that the linguistic limitations of the Hebrew contributes to the fuller treatment of the medical and local references in the vernacular version, but also points to inclusion of medical allusions in the former. And indeed the two exhibit both medical and religious impulses. Yet, I would expand on this argument that the Judéo-Provençal narrative is stylistically attuned to and more heavily infused with direct references to popular literary trends, while the Hebrew inclines more toward a devotional model, inspired perhaps by earlier liturgical traditions in classical Hebrew *piyyutim* (liturgical poems), even adopting a moralizing didactic tone.

In an article on medieval Hebrew medical poetry, Maud Kozodoy offers examples of works by late-antique *paytanim* (composers of liturgical poetry) Yannai and Kalir, which incorporate “quasi-scientific” material from the Bible and the Talmud and provide a parallel to Hellenistic medical verse. She also discusses a continuation of this practice among certain poets during the Golden Age of Hebrew poetry in al-Andalus, among them, Ibn Gabirol and Moses Ibn Ezra. As she indicates, however, the inclusion of such information was not to proffer instruction of medical wisdom per se, but rather, it plays a secondary role, intended to enhance the devotional aspects of the poems and celebrate God’s creation of the human body. Referring to the works of his contemporaries and medieval predecessors who wrote verse and rhymed prose narratives that were specifically medical, Einbinder has affirmed that Israel would surely have been familiar with the tradition of Hebrew medical poetry. And while I do not propose that he was imitating the classical *paytanic* (liturgical)

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3 Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 89.
5 Ibid. She refers here to certain portions of 10 *Job, Psalms*, as well as passages from *Talmud Bavli* (Babylonian Talmud) *Masekhet* (Tractate) *Kiddushin* and *Leviticus Rabbah* that treat the body’s limbs and organs, as well as the fetus.
6 Ibid., 236-47 [sections V and VI].
7 Ibid., 237, n. 68 in particular.
8 Einbinder refers to Kalonymos’ parody, *Even Bohan*, to the rhymed prose narratives of Judah al-Harizi and Joseph ibn Zabara, to Shem Tov ibn Falaquera’s 12th-century, “Batei Hanhagat ha-guf ha-bari” (A Verse
style, his Hebrew adaptation is in fact a piyyut, and therefore concerned with pious themes above all. Nor do I wish to diminish the significance of the medical additions in the Hebrew version, but simply to call attention to the formal scaffold of the text, which might in turn help us to understand his emphasis on religious matter in it.

The literary model for Israel’s piyyut, is believed to be Yehuda Halevi’s Mi Kamokha ’Adon Hasdeka (Who is like you, Lord, let your kindness…). Indeed, it is mimetic in form, as a “girdle” poem, and in its retelling of the Hebrew Bible’s Esther narrative amplified with rabbinic references. However, Halevi, who was also a physician, does not bring anything of a medical nature into his Purim poem. Of course, the medical material that Israel introduces into his Esther text is specific to the rationalist school in which he had been trained; he does not draw on the same quasi-scientific biblical or midrashic sources as those of his aforementioined paytanic forerunners. Still, it might be conjectured, that their poems, while not the immediate prototype for his work, provided some justification for the introduction of medical references into a text which would have been used for liturgical purposes. It becomes clear, therefore, that even if considered as a stand-alone text, the Hebrew version of Israel’s Esther narrative is a hybrid.

Similarly, the Judéo-Provençal text does not conform to an easily-defined generic paradigm. It, too, is an amalgam, weaving together conventions from multiple traditions - certainly the religious and the medical among them. Yet, the flourishes in this first version are differently shaded, seeming to be filtered through a distinct set of concerns, in which its devotional character becomes less pronounced and the contemporary and more secular influences of his milieu on our author are more palpably felt. For reasons which will be fleshed out forthwith, this composition becomes a stage for Israel’s rationalist leanings and his expertise with

Regimen for the Healthy Body), and Abraham ibn Ezra’s “Shim’u na’ el divrei ha-rofe” (Hearken to the Words of the Physician.) “A Proper Diet,” 88-9.

9 For a more detailed discussion of this generic model, see Chapter Four of the present study, “A Poem by Many Other Names: On the Mixing of Genres.” See also, Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 85; Binyamin Bar-Tikvah, Sugot ve-sugyot be-piyyut ha-Provensali ve-ha-Kataloni (Studies [Types and Topics] in Provençal and Catalan Liturgical Poetry.) (Be’ersheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 2009), 323.

10 See Chapter Four, “A Poem by Many Other Names,” for more on the mixing of other genres in the vernacular text.
popular medicine. His lengthy additions attest to a deep involvement with rationalist ideologies and current medical practices.

Although the two form a textual unit, the Hebrew version is not a translation of the vernacular; rather, it is an adaptation. And what seems to occur in the movement from one version to another might be called translation of another kind: a translation of one self into another, one identity into another, one culture into another. Of course, the texts bleed together at certain points, and each is a hybrid in itself. Yet I would argue that although the Judéo-Provençal version is undeniably a Jewish text, and decidedly makes use of midrashic motifs, it privileges the medical additions and thus its author’s immersion in a world that is not focused strictly on religion. The Hebrew, on the other hand, also reflects Israel’s professional concerns, but it naturally assumes a more pious tenor, integrating religious and even moral messages. Both worlds inhabit the individual texts, but each in its own way, gives voice to a different cultural priority.

The State of Medicine and Israel’s Milieu

Israel’s work comes at a time in European history, the turn and beginning of the 14th century, when the fields of science and medicine were moving toward a new model. Heavily influenced by the rise of the Latin universities, the period marked the start of a major shift in society and its overall approach to health and hygiene. This phenomenon, called by Joseph Shatzmiller “the medicalization of society,”11 occurred in all levels of the profession: in its client body, its practitioners and even its very structure. With the increased focus on its practical applications and a growing middle class, the interest in medicine was no longer limited to nobles and royalty, but instead grew into a popular concern. Prescriptive health regimens became more common and could be found in the homes of merchants and clerics as well as in the palaces of kings or libraries of aristocrats. Even peasants and artisans came to

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rely on the medical profession to the extent that health-related expenses were no longer considered a luxury.\(^{12}\)

Whether as cause or effect – in fact, probably both at once – the medical establishment underwent significant changes of its own. The practice of medicine was becoming institutionalized as a profession, requiring certain levels of standardization such as exams and licensing, and by extension, education, which took place, for the most part, in the relatively new university system.\(^{13}\) Among the physicians of the western Mediterranean, the phenomenon of medicalization evolved into a mode of scholasticism that drew on Greco-Roman, largely Galenic, scientific thought, fusing it with a modern approach that favored reason over empiricism. The new Galenism\(^{14}\) found a comfortable niche in institutions of higher learning. It should be emphasized that while this movement was taking place in a society comprised largely – but certainly not exclusively – of Christians, the Jewish influence on and participation in it is impossible to ignore. Given the demographic of the Jewish community, particularly in southern France, the number of physicians was quite disproportionate to its size. In fact, scholarship on the region asserts that in some cities, Jews made up as much as fifty percent of all the practicing physicians.\(^{15}\)

There are a number of explanations for the high percentage of Jewish physicians in the western Mediterranean. One of the primary reasons stems from the fact that many Jews had access to the Greco-Arabic tradition,\(^{16}\) which had been brought to the Iberian peninsula from the Islamic world, often as a result of Jewish migration. The presence of Jews within the Muslim regions of the Spanish domain was key in disseminating medical learning. Many of the Jews who lived in Muslim Spain were literate in Arabic and therefore had access to original scientific, medical and philosophical texts in that language as well as texts that had


\(^{16}\) Garcia-Ballester, Ferre and Feliu, “Jewish Appreciation,” 85.
been translated into it from the Greek. Many of these were in turn translated into Hebrew, starting in the 12th century, and traveled along with the Jews to wherever they settled.

Many Jews, with their proclivity for scholarship, migrated to southern France as a result of persecutions, bringing with them extensive knowledge of the Greco-Arabic traditions. Renowned Jewish scholars from Spain, such as Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Kimhi family opened the way for Languedocian and Provençal Jewry into a new world of learning and initiated a tradition of medical writing by Occitan Jews. Others, such as the famous Ibn Tibbon family, formed part of a movement translating Arabic texts into Hebrew, including the influential works of Maimonides.

Until the 12th and 13th centuries such knowledge had not been available to Christian Latinate practitioners, thereby setting Jewish medicine apart for its departure from the empirical model that was prevalent in the west, and allowing for a proliferation of doctors within the respective Jewish communities. Consequently, they were sought after not only by their co-religionists, but by Christians who were able to benefit from their knowledge. Jewish physicians were not only esteemed by lay people, but they were quite often employed by aristocrats, in royal and even papal courts. Thus the migratory character of Jewish people


18 Nancy Siraisi, Medieval & Early Renaissance Medicine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 29. García-Ballester describes the rationalist model as one of three branches of Jewish intellectual activity, which “made the practice of their Jewish faith compatible with the rationalist study of nature (natural philosophy). Physicians who were members of this group made an effort not to reduce medicine to a mere application of remedies and routine practice but to make it an activity based on natural philosophy.” Luis García-Ballester, “A Marginal Learned Medical World: Jewish, Muslim and Christian Medical Practitioners, and the Use of Arabic Medical Sources in Late Medieval Spain," in Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death, ed. Michael McVaugh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 368.

19 The Statutes of the city of Avignon, dated 1441, allow for Jewish physicians to leave the Jewish quarter even at times when other Jews are not permitted to leave. Avignon - Archives Municipales Communaux, DEPOT AVIGNON AA art. 4, “Actes constitutifs et politiques de la commune,” fol. 63r: “Du temps pendant lequel les Juifs ne doivent pas sortir de la Juiverie:

Quo tempore Judei non exceant Jusateriam, Reformurat ut Sequitur: Item statuimus quod Judei vel Judea a die mercuris sancta in sero usque ad diem Sabbati ad horam qua pulsabuntur campanae, non audeant exire Jusateriam excepto quod Phisici, Chirurgici et Bailoni exire possint licentia curia petita en obtenta.” While I was not able to locate statutes from Caslari’s period, there is some archival evidence of Jewish physicians treating patients of the noble classes outside the Jewish community, and thus a possibility that similar standards
and their exposure to a diverse range of ideas facilitated entry into fields that might have been closed to others.

Training for Jewish physicians was not always uncomplicated since Jews were not admitted to Latin institutions of higher learning. Nevertheless, the disproportionately large number of Jewish physicians indicates that they were indeed studying medicine. Moreover, since the 14th century brought with it the requirement of licenses for all physicians, we can assume that the Jews in the profession were procuring the same level of knowledge as those who attended the universities. Training for Jewish doctors was largely private, but scholars do not dismiss the possibility that Jewish schools were teaching secular subjects, including medicine, alongside traditional Judaic studies. It seems, in fact, according to one scholar, that there were rabbis who were actually teaching science in the Jewish schools.20

Even if this were not the case or the common route, however, there is no question that Jewish physicians and their Christian counterparts did interact and exchange information. Because of the licensing laws, Jewish physicians were obliged to have an equally solid scientific training, and even though no formal medical school existed for them, they are likely to have been using at least some of the same texts as those used for instruction at Montpellier. Indeed, in order to receive certification, they would have had to come before the same examination boards and prove to have the equivalent level of knowledge as anyone trained at the medical faculty.21

And while the Jews of the Western Mediterranean had a legacy that provided entry into Greek and Arabic texts that had been translated into Hebrew far earlier than they had been into Latin, by the 14th century, the Jewish rationalist physicians were looking to scholastic Galenism and the Latin medical corpus of the late medieval period, which touted itself as the new “scientia” and carried with it a greater social prestige. According to Einbinder, García-Ballester, Ferre and Feliu, the newly developed Latin system of learning became the model

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21 Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 87 and 194, n.16.
for Jewish practitioners.\textsuperscript{22} By the time Israel was practicing, moreover, knowledge of Arabic among Jews in southern France was becoming less common, so that access to original texts in that language was limited. Instead, they were turning to the Latin university texts - some translated directly into Hebrew, others translated from the Latin to the romance vernacular and then into Hebrew.

The Latin university had an appeal for rationalist Jewish practitioners as well because of its freedom from ecclesiastical authority.\textsuperscript{23} For while the Church did have some influence over the universities, the medical discipline was relatively independent from attempts to control or restrict it. In fact, despite the prohibition of Jews from the faculty, there was no lack of exchange between Jewish and Christian medical scholars even there. One of the most distinguished of such interactions was between Armengaud Blaise, incidentally a nephew of Arnau of Villanova, and Jacob ben Makhir Ibn Tibbon (called Prophatius in Latin) who collaborated on translations from Hebrew into Latin and vice versa at Montpellier.\textsuperscript{24} The curriculum and its texts were generally free of Christian theological dogma that might otherwise have posed a problem for Jewish students of medicine. Thus the possibility for Jewish acculturation in the field of medicine was significant.

At the same time, a great intellectual controversy over philosophy within the Jewish community of Occitania itself surprisingly left rationalist physicians relatively unscathed. The 13\textsuperscript{th}-century Maimonidean controversy had seen its second wave by the time Israel was on the scene, and the tensions between those who believed that philosophy was a means to understanding God and his book, the Torah, and those who held more conservative views on how God’s law was to be interpreted, had not quite settled yet. Those who disputed rationalism gravely feared that Greek teachings on natural science and metaphysics would be a distraction, ultimately drawing its followers away from orthodox Judaism.\textsuperscript{25} Consequent to this, Rabbi Solomon Ibn Adret of Barcelona issued a decree that no Jew under the age of 25

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 87; Garcia-Ballester, Ferre and Feliu, “Jewish Appreciation,” 86.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Garcia-Ballester, Ferre and Feliu, “Jewish Appreciation,” 101.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Even among the lesser known practitioners within and outside the university the phenomenon of intellectual exchange was not unusual. Michael McVaugh, \textit{Medicine before the Plague} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 63; Lola Ferre and Michael McVaugh, \textit{The Tabula Antidotarii of Armengaud Blaise and its Hebrew Translation} (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2000), 2.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Garcia-Ballester, Ferre and Feliu, “Jewish Appreciation,” 87.
\end{itemize}
was permitted to study philosophy. 26 His decree, however, specifically exempted the medical discipline “inasmuch as it was sanctioned by the Torah, and the Greco-Arabic medical literature….flourished” in the Jewish communities under his jurisdiction. 27 Invariably, then, Jewish students of medicine did not have the same religious restrictions imposed upon them as those in other areas, making it more plausible for them to study the same texts as their non-Jewish counterparts, in turn, opening the way for more contact with that culture.

And it is here that we can begin to see the conflict for a Jewish rationalist physician like Israel, who was faced with dichotomies and at times complicated choices. For despite the fact that the Latin university was becoming increasingly technical and less ideological as a result of its relative independence from ecclesiastical influence, 28 despite the more homogeneous character the profession was taking on, and despite the allure of and admiration for scholastic learning, he was a Jew in a Christian culture where he possessed little power. And ultimately, he was at least a witness to persecution, if not also a victim, because of it.

**Israel, Author and Physician**

Israel was one of these Jewish physicians whose education would have been twofold: mirroring the curriculum at the Latin university, and at the same time imbibing the traditional teachings of his observant Jewish community. 29 Given how little is known about Israel’s life, it would be difficult to conjecture upon his specific role in the community. Nevertheless, his writings do reveal a man who was probably quite typical of his intellectual circle, as Einbinder and other scholars who have worked on his texts concur. 30 It is clear that he possessed an intimate knowledge of the Jewish canon. In fact nearly every line of his

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27 Ibid.
29 Einbinder discusses this twofold learning and the collision of worlds among the Jewish rationalist physicians: “The world of the Jewish rationalist physicians permitted a rare synthesis of rabbinic and rhetorical expertise, sometimes lightly indulged, sometimes with heavy pedantry, in their literary efforts. “A Proper Diet,” 88.
Hebrew poem draws on or directly cites a line or passage of the Pentateuch (with its additions) or commentary from midrashic and talmudic writings, based on the poetic form *shibbuts* (the Latin *compilatio*). Moreover, it is quite possible, since his Hebrew poem was part of the Purim liturgy and meant for ritual use, that he was a cantor in the local synagogue and therefore a public Jewish figure as well as a physician. Undoubtedly, Israel was a man who was well-versed in Jewish law, *halakhah*, and literature, taking references from their respective sources and skillfully using them often in an entirely different context, but one in which his Jewish audience would have understood the allusions and the associations, that is, the reasoning behind his choices. The Judéo-Provençal romance is crowded with allusions to biblical and rabbinical sources as well, although the use of the vernacular necessarily dilutes their didactic effect to some extent, a fact which contributes to the distinction in both tone and focus of the two versions.

The break from convention in the Esther romances becomes more apparent when Israel introduces popular medicine into the texts, for this is where the meeting of the worlds takes place and whence its biculturalism arises most conspicuously. Yet in order to contextualize this aspect of the text and to understand its acculturative role, we must turn elsewhere first; for this phenomenon occurs simultaneously in the other major oeuvre of Israel’s corpus, his translation of Arnau of Villanova’s *Regimen Sanitatis ad Regem Aragonum*.

An original creation of medieval medicine, the *regimina sanitatis* were texts generally commissioned from a particular physician by a wealthy patron. They were designed to be highly individualized and prescriptive in nature, suggesting a way of life that promoted health based upon the conditions in which the patron lived, the kind of foods available, and his humoral make-up. In short, they were both personalized as well as localized, and since the expense of commissioning such a work was prohibitive, they were accessible to few.

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31 See Chapter Four in the present dissertation, “A Poem by Many Other Names.”
32 In the case of liturgical poetry, the author might well have been the praecentor שליח ציבור of his congregation as well. However, anyone reading the text aloud before an audience would naturally assume the voice of the narrator. Michael Rand, “Fundamentals in the Study of *Piyyut*,” (presented at Shalom Spiegel Seminar, Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, New York, June 2012), 2.
33 This is treated in greater detail in the chapter on genre, where I discuss the more parodic tone of the Judéo-Provençal version. Chapter Four in the present dissertation, “A Poem by Many Other Names.”
34 Einbinder “A Proper Diet,” 90.
There was, however, a decided shift in the users of these texts when members of the new urban bourgeoisie of the 14th century became interested new customers as well. From there, the genre grew and the dissemination of the texts to a wider audience was made possible. Thus while they had, at first, been popular only among the princely classes, soon they were being written in the vernacular and translated for the general public, including the Jewish community.

At the core of the *regimina* are the “seven naturals,” comprising one’s physiology, such as elements, humours, qualities, and complexions, and the “six non-naturals,” connected either to external factors or voluntary acts. These factors change according to environmental conditions and humoral constitution; and it is their interaction which determines one’s overall state of well-being. Their management, in turn, was the responsibility of the physician in the Middle Ages.35

Given the significant presence of Jewish physicians in southern France during this period, their engagement with the genre comes as no surprise. Indeed, Jewish physicians were not only aware of works in the genre but were making use of them with their own patients. Moreover, the great hero of the rationalist physicians in Southern France, Maimonides himself, wrote an early *regimen sanitatis* for Sultan al-Malik al-Afdal in 1198, which was translated into Hebrew in 1244 by Moses ibn Tibbon.36 While few *regimina* had been translated into Hebrew before Israel’s time, they were nevertheless available to Jewish physicians either in the Latin originals or in romance translations. There were, moreover, several examples of similar texts in Hebrew, such as Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera’s “*Batei hanhagat ha-guf ha-bari*’ (Verses for the Conduct of the Healthy Body),”37 and even a


chapter of Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah* (Commentary on the Mishnah), Chapter four, *Hilkhot De’ot* (Laws of Personal Development),[38] which is a more general guide to maintaining the wellness of the body with the purpose of better serving God.[39] The Greco-Arabic teachings from which the genre derived were also accessible to the Jewish community via the many works that had been translated into Hebrew.[40]/[41]

In 1301 Arnau of Villanova, one of the foremost physicians of his day and a highly esteemed professor at the medical school in Montpellier, composed his Latin *Regimen Sanitatis ad Regem Aragonum*, which had been commissioned by King Jaume II of Aragon. It was translated into Catalan during Arnau’s lifetime by another court physician Berenguer Sarriera.[42]/[43] With the increased demand for works of this sort as well as his own familiarity with and respect for scholastic medicine, Israel undertook the translation of Arnau’s treatise into Hebrew in 1327.

Israel’s translation of the *Regimen* offers some insight into the tension between acculturation and preservation of Jewish identity that is so palpable in the Esther texts.[44] In his apologia to

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[39] Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 88-89. This will prove important in terms of what Israel does with the Hebrew text.

[40] Such foundational works such as Averroes’ commentaries on Aristotle, the *Cantique* and the *Canon* of Avicenna, works by Hippocrates and Galen. Danièle Iancu-Agou, “Préoccupations intellectuelles des médecins Juifs au moyen âge: inventaires des bibliothèques,” *Provence Historique* 26.103 (1976): 21-43.

[41] There were several *regimina* written in Hebrew: one by Abraham Ibn Ezra, a second, mentioned above, by Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera, as well as the Hebrew translations of Maimonides. Lola Ferre looks at the differences between those in prose and in verse in her article, “Los regimenes dietéticos medievales en prosa y en verso: Entre la medecina y la literaturae,” *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, 3rd ser., 7 (1994): 327-40. She argues that the prose *regimina* are more accurate from a medical point of view and are intended to address physicians directly so that they may use them professionally. The verse *regimina*, she says were not necessarily written for an audience of professionals, but more for their literary value, contributing to a timely and fashionable genre.


[43] The apologia in one of the manuscripts of Israel’s translation of the *Regimen Sanitatis ad Regem Aragonum* tells us that 15 years earlier, Jacob ben Makhir ibn Tibbon began a translation of that text into Hebrew, but that the work was lost when the translator was forced to leave his home during the 1306 expulsion. I discuss this later in the present chapter. Joseph Shatzmiller, “In Search of the *Book of Figures*: Medicine and Astrology in Montpellier at the Turn of the Fourteenth Century.” *AJS Review* 7/8 (1982/1983): 388.

[44] There are many questions about Israel’s translation of Arnau’s *Regimen* that could be addressed here – particularly issues regarding the source text and language from which Israel translated, however, for the purposes of this study, I am limiting this only to those aspects that relate to the Esther texts and my argument
the translation, Israel implies that at least part of his intention in undertaking the task of translating the *Regimen Sanitatis* was to make the treatise accessible to his colleagues. Many of the Jewish physicians in southern France at this time had a clientele comprised of both Christians and Jews, and Israel was offering them a useful tool through which they could enhance their medical practice. By this time, it would be safe to assert, most Christians would have been aware of the vogue for the *regimina* and their prescriptive nature, for the genre had already begun to reach the larger populace rather than being reserved solely for the elite. Moreover, dispensation of a regimen would normally have had to be supervised by a medical professional, aside from which, copies were no doubt still rather difficult and costly to acquire for the individual patient. In bringing the *Regimen* to his colleagues, therefore, and helping them to maintain their Christian client base, we might already witness a manifestation of the acculturative process at work. Moreover, in this act he was assisting in the popularization of the genre and its approach to healing.

Although Israel might have executed this work for professional use, I would also propose that - at least indirectly - he was targeting lay people and non-professionals as well. For just as the Jewish physicians could use the *Regimen* in treating their non-Jewish patients, they could also use it for their Jewish patients, who on their own, were unlikely to have been well-versed in science or medicine or even have had exposure to it. Israel tells his readers in no uncertain terms that “this book was written according to the customs and habits of the Christians,”45  "כי המאמר הזה חבר לפי מנהג הנצרי וחוקותם."

Thus, there is no doubt that he was bringing an element of Christian culture to his co-religionists, whether in a direct or obtuse fashion.

I would add here the possibility that Israel was gesturing toward democratization with his Hebrew translation of Arnau’s *Regimen Sanitatis*. As discussed earlier, there was indeed a

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45 As quoted in Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 86; García-Ballester, Ferre and Felic, “Jewish Appreciation,” 105, ln. 44; Ms. Munich Bayerische Stb., Cod. hebr. 288, fol 1r.

movement toward the popularization of these texts. While there had been a proliferation of the genre among the upper classes, they were usually individualized, prescribing advice for specific maladies, specific remedies and foods depending upon one’s humoral composition and climactic conditions. Israel says, “It could almost be said that every man needs a text written for himself…,” but in executing this translation, he was actually part of a growing trend to make the genre less individuated in order that it be used by more people. Surely Israel would have been in favour of such a movement for both Christian and Jewish patients - it would allow more people to benefit from the teachings of scholastic medicine, Christians and Jews alike.

Joseph Ziegler, in his article “Steinschneider Revised,” addresses the “judaization” of some of the Hebrew translations of the genre, specific changes that would have diluted some of the Christian references, thereby making them inoffensive to potential Jewish clients. The regimina sometimes prescribed foods that did not adhere to Jewish laws of proper consumption or made recommendations that were not in keeping with the teachings of the Torah. In order to compensate for this, the translators sometimes adapted the texts so that they would be more suited to a Jewish audience. Ziegler primarily addresses a later Hebrew translation of Arnau’s Regimen in his study, but he does state that he has examined other translations of the same text – including that of Israel – and that they exhibit the same pattern

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48 Several physicians had indeed tried to write more general regimina, including Bernard de Gordon, one of the key players at Montpellier, as well as Maino de Manieri, to whom I refer later in this chapter. According to Pedro Gils-Sotres, in Arnau of Villanova, Arnaldi de Villanova Opera Medica Omnia, Vol. X.1 - Regimen Sanitatis ad Regem Aragonum. eds. Luis García-Ballester, J.A. Paniagua and Michael Mc Vaugh (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 1996), 535, these more generalized texts were quite technical, that is, more academically oriented. As such they would still not have been accessible to the general public, but rather to the physicians who treated them. The Maimonidean regimen was comprised of two distinct parts – one part highly individualized for his patron, and the second more general, in fact incorporating theological components. Ferre, “Los regímenes de salud de Maimónides y Arnau de Villanova.” I would emphasize the argument that I make later in the Miracles segment of the present chapter, the notion of Israel placing himself between Maimonides and Arnau, since the former had not only already made the gesture toward democratization of the genre, but in fact accentuated Judaism in the more general part of his work.
49 Ziegler refers to changes in specific Christian terminologies, such as Lent, Church and revelation as a source of medical knowledge, which were substituted by more neutral terms. “Steinschneider Revised: On the Translation of Medical Writings from Latin into Hebrew " Medieval Encounters 3.1 (1997): 102.
of judaizing. In this case then, Israel would have been bringing Christian practices to his Jewish patients, and at the same time, making them more palatable to them – literally.

Thus the tension again becomes evident. On the one hand, we see a twofold phenomenon of acculturation in that Israel was learning the customs of the larger non-Jewish society and that he felt a need to pass these on to other Jewish physicians because they were treating clients from that larger society. However, when we consider that changes were made to the original text that would render it more agreeable to a potential Jewish reader, Israel was clearly not concerned only with the physicians who would be treating non-Jews. Instead he must have anticipated that among the clientele of those physicians using the text as a tool for treatment there would be at least some Jews. Thus Israel, in gesturing toward the teachings of the non-Jewish world, was at the same time encouraging Jewish readers to hold fast to their religious and cultural identity.

No doubt it is the intersection of the biblical and midrashic motifs with popular medical theories that is one of the dominant signposts of hybridity in Israel’s Esther, and I will discuss specific examples of this phenomenon later in the present chapter. Yet while medicine and midrash are in dialogue in both texts, the Hebrew enunciates another layer of complexity in the tensions arising from this meeting in the author’s colophon to the text, which is discussed below.

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50 There is surely more work to be done here comparing the texts to see what more this pattern might suggest or how it manifests under different translators. It is, however, not within the scope of this work.
51 Ziegler also refers to changes specifically recommending the use of pork for various illnesses, “Steinschneider Revised,” 100-1, but he also discusses Maimonides’ allowance of forbidden foods if they are necessary for healing.
52 I would even suggest that there might have been readers who were not professionals necessarily, but other members of the community interested in this fashionable form of preventive medicine – that was essentially a prescription for lifestyle that had originally been written for someone living under the same environmental conditions.
53 Another interesting point on the question of acculturation in translating Arnau’s *Regimen Sanitatis* is Israel’s source text. Although recent scholarship concurs that Israel executed his translation of Arnau’s treatise from an intermediary vernacular source, of which at least one existed at the time he did this work, there is still a question as to whether or not Israel knew Latin. Although the components of this discussion are somewhat tangential to my argument, they do speak to the question of acculturation, interaction, education of doctors in the community – and specifically Israel. Ziegler, “Steinschneider Revised;” García-Ballester, Ferre and Feliu, “Jewish Appreciation;” Lola Ferre “La terminología médica en las versiones hebreas de textos latinos: Miscelánea de Estudos Arabes y Hebraicos 40.2 (1991): 87-107.
Miracles

As an adherent to scholastic ideologies Israel was in many ways acculturating, embracing customs and practices of the dominant culture and incorporating them into his worldview. On another level, however, something quite different was occurring. As a member of his religious community, Israel held fast to his Jewish identity. And this state of seeming opposition is woven into the both versions of the Esther text themselves in such a way that scholasticism and traditional Judaic thought engage in a conversation, even as they speak in one voice through their author. Consequently, the two texts appear at once paradoxical and perfectly harmonious, now a lilting parodic narrative, now a somewhat heavy-handed hortative tool.

While strictly in the medical realm of the Regimen Sanitatis, Israel’s religious loyalties are understandably less evident. In the Esther texts, however, the question of religio-cultural integrity comes to the fore with a clarity and drama not possible in a technical work. Indeed, with its popularity, both in his own time and historically, its situational relevance and the opportunities it afforded for adaptation, the story of Purim was an ideal authorial choice for Israel for the integration of his dual roles.

On the one hand, Israel looks to Arnau and the scholastic school for their immediate geographical and chronological applicability. Since the focus of the regimina was on local environmental conditions and since the genre was familiar as popular medicine, Israel’s reliance upon the material available in that genre seems quite reasonable. Yet he refers to Maimonides in the introduction to his Regimen Sanitatis translation, which might be revealing in terms of his authorial stance in the Esther texts.54

54 In his introduction to the Regimen Sanitatis of Arnau of Villanova, Israel naturally praises its author, but does include Maimonides as well: “In reality I have two reasons for doing so: the first is that this text is written taking into account the nature of [this] country, for its author is Master Arnau de Vilanova who was in Barcelona, in the service of the King of Aragon; the second is that this book was written according to the customs and habits of the Christians, / in whose lands we live. The great personages always asked him to compose diets, and in order to lighten the task, he composed this work. I have deemed it fit to translate it, thus adding it to the similar work by the sage I have mentioned [Maimonides], because the author was a great scholar; his wisdom was so great and his science of medicine so high, that he surpassed all his predecessors, to such a point that the common people considered him a prophet. The truth must be accepted for itself; and the truth must be received from him who speaks it.” Israel ben Joseph Caslari,”Prologue to the translation by Israel
Israel wrote his apologia to the *Regimen Sanitatis* to “justify” translating a scientific text, and in this very act indicates that acculturation is at play. That Israel would acknowledge - and even praise - Arnau of Villanova in his apologia to the *Regimen* is to be expected, but by introducing Maimonides in that same preface to a text having no particular religious significance, I would suggest that he makes a statement of religious allegiance. This could have been intended to explain his undertaking to those authorities and members of his community who might consider it questionable, yet it seems to point to something more telling and perhaps even more personal for Israel himself - positioning Maimonides strategically as a counterpart to Arnau, the Jewish counterpart to the Christian theologian/physician. He cites a binary allegiance – to contemporary rationalism and to Judaism. Of course, rational philosophy and the Greco-Arabic tradition were not exclusive to Arnau, and they were certainly elemental to Maimonidean scholarship, so much so that they sparked great controversies, the second wave of which still reverberated palpably in Israel’s day. Yet for Maimonides’ intellectual heirs, who were also concerned with the marriage of philosophy, science and Judaism – Israel among them to be sure – he was a role model. For despite the debate around his teachings, Maimonides was a learned rabbi and certainly a figure to be emulated among the Jewish intelligentsia.

In the 12th century, as mentioned above, Maimonides himself wrote a regimen commissioned by Sultan al-Malik al-Afdal which was subsequently translated into Hebrew by Moses ibn Tibbon. Lola Ferre, in her article on Hebrew texts of *regimina* genre, compares the *Kitab fi tadbir al-sihha* work of Maimonides with Arnau’s *Regimen*. One of the differences she points out is that Arnau’s treatise deals with medicine in a more technical way, concentrating on the physical aspects of health. Maimonides, on the other hand, in the fashion of the Arabic tradition, deals with more esoteric material, namely the healing of the soul. In his regimen, the health of the soul, is directly linked to the health of mind and body, and proper care of it is unequivocally related to the study of Torah and other sacred Jewish texts. For

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55 Lola Ferre, "Los regímenes de salud de Maimónides y Arnau de Villanova," 117.

56 Ibid.
him - and others like him - Judaism and medicine are interconnected, which we see even in the Classical piyyutim discussed earlier.

While in the Regimen Sanitatis ad Regem Aragonum Arnau does not mix his treatment of medical questions with those theological, he had very specific views on both of these topics and their relation to one another. Particularly in the later years of his career, he was heavily involved in theology and politics, in addition to medicine, and even gestured toward a self-appointed prophet-hood of sorts. And while Arnau probably had some interaction, perhaps even collaboration, with Jewish scholars while he was at Montpellier, he was decidedly anti-Jewish, especially when it came to the medical field. He voiced severe opposition to Jewish physicians serving in royal courts, and attempted to restrict their practice in Avignon as well. In spite of the reverence he had for him, Israel could no more deny Arnau’s antisemitic biases and political gestures than he could his own Jewishness.

One of the existing manuscripts of Israel’s translation of Arnau’s Regimen Sanitatis ad Regem Aragonum, in fact, refers to an earlier translation of that text by Jacob ben Makhir Ibn Tibbon, who had begun the task 15 years earlier, but never completed it. A resident of Montpellier, he was forced to leave during the 1306 expulsion from France, and the work was lost. Israel credits Jacob ben Makhir with the first Hebrew translation of Arnau’s treatise and calls him “the king, the great philosopher… who numbered the clouds by his wisdom, Jacob Ibn Tibbon.” The awareness of persecution was in no way lacking for Israel, a Jewish physician in Avignon. As such, I would suggest that in Israel’s apologia to the medical translation Arnau of Villanova and Maimonides function as complements, the latter

57 He does, however, mix theological and medical ideologies in other medical treatises, such as his Medicationis parabole, according to Ziegler, his second most widely defused text. This is a text of medical aphorisms wherein “Arnau’s epistemology touches his attitude towards divine revelation as a possible source for medical knowledge.” “Steinschneider Revised,” 96.
61 Shatzmiller, “In Search of the Book of Figures,” 388; he also cites MS Escorial G-III-20, fol. 46v in note 19.
standing as the Jewish equalizer to the former. And I would go further to suggest that he carries forward this mindset to his Esther texts.

In fact, we need only look to the realm of medical astrology to see how these figures offset one another: Arnau was himself a teacher and practitioner of medical astrology in the treatment of illness, while for Maimonides astrology was not only a blatant form of idolatry, but it was directly tied to the Jewish exile. According to Maimonides, the “loss of our kingdom, the destruction of our Sanctuary and the extended duration of our exile….” were rooted in idolatry, of which astrology was a form, “to the present day.”

From the start of both the Judéo-Provençal and the Hebrew Esther romances, Israel reminds his readers that this notion of idolatry is one of the causes for Jewish exile. Before we hear anything of the Purim narrative, Israel brings us back to the story of Nebuchadnezzar and how he fashioned an idol before which the Jews bowed down. Citing the Book of Daniel, Israel admonishes his readers that “that sin was great and grave” [“Aquel pecat fon gran e fort…”] in the Judéo-Provençal. In the Hebrew text, he refers to the same incident and here he follows with an imperative: "וורו והובשו מעכה טריה שמעו נא את הדבר הזה..." (Be swabbed and be bandaged from a fresh wound Please listen to this matter.) The full stanza reads:

"םי יי כמעט ריחם הבאישו לפור לִמְצוּותה היהשאו או קדוש ישראלא לא חקדישו לפור היהשא בזון לִבְכם ואמך פש נקיו והי שם היה זורו וחובשו מעכה טריה שמעו נא את הדבר הזה:"

(God’s people almost made themselves stink they hastened to stray from his divine commandments
And they did not sanctify the holiness of Israel before this man:
He who scrutinizes hearts sees a pure soul he was aware of their sin and God was there
Be swabbed and be bandaged from a fresh wound Please listen to this matter.)

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64 Silberstein, "The Provencal Esther Poem," 191, l. 27.
65 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 48v, ll. 39-40.
66 Ms. Bodleian heb. e.10, fols. 48r-48v, ll. 33-40 and Ms. HUC 396, fol. 19b, ll. 33-40.
Israel beseeches: let us not make such a mistake if we are to be saved! Indeed in the narrative itself, Haman follows in the footsteps of the Babylonian king also wearing a molded image of himself on his shoulder to which Mordecai refuses to bow. 67

It is true, of course, that some of Israel’s colleagues and predecessors engaged with medical astrology, and whether Israel himself would have specifically been in favor of or opposed to the practice (considering his circles and his influences) is not readily discernable from his writings. 68 Yet while he mentions neither Arnau of Villanova nor Maimonides per se in the Esther romances, Israel takes the position in these texts that he, like his mentors, like Mordecai in the Esther narrative itself, is a figure of authority. Here he is a physician, bringing popular dietary and medical practices to a lay audience of Jews, his brethren celebrating Purim. Here too, he is the Jewish scholar, bringing them wisdom from traditional Jewish texts, offering his own brand of intervention on behalf of his exiled community.

This is fathomable in different ways throughout both texts, yet in his closing passage to the Hebrew text, Israel communicates this stand most plainly – and I might add, quite playfully.

67 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10 fol 51r, l. 274.
68 Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer discusses the fact that Haman was an avid practitioner of astrology, which agrees with Einbinder’s suggestion that Israel posits Arnau as a parallel to Haman, pg. 109, and in turn the argument that I present here. Gerald Friedlander, ed. and trans. “Haman” (Chapter 50) in Pirḳei De Rabbi Eliezer (The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great): According to the Text of the Manuscript Belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna. (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1916), 399.
This is the day for which we have hoped — a time of relief; there was light and happiness for the Jews God did this for us to give thanks in song and in praise — and to bless his name until this day:

He who heals all flesh wondrously — When one from afar rose up against us, he brought his counsel

The one who is called by name God came — to test this vision:

Israel, your nation, in all their distress — you stood up for them and avenged them

Liberate your first born child and raise this nation from their pit of exile — Lift [them] up

Let him turn again to gather his flocks — Let them come to an expansive meadow to graze

Let straw be given for the lion and let the cow and bear pasture together — for the peace of this nation:

Dress the sons of Yitshar {Levites} in holy garments and — patterned tunics and gather the scattered Judeans

The one who dwells on high will raise up the families of Ya’avets {Judah} — so they may be among the blessed of this nation:

Oh, Rock, {God} dwell in the holy city, dweller of heaven — and the enemies of your nation will be annihilated and cut down

Send ’Avi Yinon {Messiah}! — Let all the nations of the earth see that you, God, are in the midst of this nation:

May he watch over us, the one who cleared a pathway through the sea — for the children of Israel, treasured nation

Oh, Rock, {God} who changed lake water into flint, pools and canals — this holy God:

Amen, so let Him do — God who battled for us in Egypt — Israel crossed over on dry land and He did lead them with a pillar of smoke

Make us exceedingly strong as when, out of the land of Ham {Egypt}, — you brought this nation up with your might:

Lord, Saviour, who placed souls into bodies — so they might walk in the light of the Torah and the mitsvot

He will enlighten this nation with the secret of his knowledge — To those who know them not.

69 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10. fols 58v-59r, ll. 917-938 and Ms. HUC 396, fols. 27a-27b, ll. 913-57. Fol. 59r of the Bodleian manuscript is damaged, and most of the text corrupted; thus, lines 938 onward have been transcribed from the HUC manuscript.
He will emanate his thoughts to this very day: Our Saviour, let his righteous messiah be hastily revealed. The fruit of our lips is the site of our offerings and burnt sacrifices.

You have changed the appointed days of our mourning into dancing. You made a name for yourself this very day: You led Israel, the seed of your holiness, with your strength, to the dwelling place of your holiness.

Your holy children have seen your majesty, oh one who parted the sea before Moses:

Who is like you? There is none like you. And who resembles you? No one resembles you)

It is necessary here to point out that the clarity of what Israel is attempting to convey is visible only in the manuscript form and the later copies of the text that preserve his layout. In the manuscripts, Israel has placed his signature at the margin with its letters enlarged, bolded and separated. The signature is to be read vertically:

"וז ישמרנו הצור אמן חזק
{אבי ינון}
{לבני יنصر השוכן בעיר}
{אבי יنصر השוכן בעיר}
{שם הנח בפי}
{האל המושיע ישראל}" (The physician called Israel ben Joseph {Caslari}, resident of the city {Avignon} did this for the sons of Yitshar; may the rock watch over us, the powerful master, the Lord, Saviour of Israel.)

With this Israel makes a weighty statement, literally laying out his place as author and scribe, claiming his auctoritas. These are potent words with religious references built into them, allowing him to assume his authorial position. Yet he has written the colophon as an acrostic in such a way that the words that form the colophon are to be read horizontally as well, folding into the verses that follow, making up the continuation of and conclusion to the narrative. There is a great deal of punning in this section, allusions to the Hebrew Scriptures, to exile, to traditional liturgy, yet what stands apart, both conceptually and spatially is the author himself, his place of residence, his profession and his Jewish lineage. This text was written by “the physician called Israel ben Joseph Caslari,” state the first eight words of the

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70 In the 18th-century print edition from Salonika, the physical presence of the colophon is lost entirely as the text is absorbed into the narrative itself. It is, however, preserved in the 18th-century mahzorim from the “Quatre-Carrières,” Columbia Ms. X893 C-J55 Vol. 31, fols. 83v-84v and BL Add. 19663, fols. 32r-32v.
colophon. But the name “Caslari” has been noticeably broken so that the Hebrew reads קש לארי [Kash la’ari] meaning “straw for the lion,” an allusion, with the subsequent words of the verse, to Isaiah 11:7 “...and the lion shall eat straw like the ox,” followed by a direct citation from that same verse, יפתה והברעה, “and the cow and the bear shall feed together.” This chapter of Isaiah concerns the birth of King David and it refers to the flocks of Israel being gathered together again to live in peace, a most germane reference to exile for one writing such a plea for salvation.

We see a similar word play initiated in the twelfth line of the colophon, when he breaks the name of his city to read אבי ינון [’Avi yinon] playing on Avignon and the messianic evocation of Psalm 72, “his name shall continue as long as the sun.” Several lines later Israel writes that this text is לبني יתשת [“for the sons of Yitshar” or the Levites, the priestly class. Israel himself was a Levite71, as was Mordecai, who descended from King David; and here he states that he has written this text for the Levites, bringing us back to the his apologia, where he indicates that he wrote the Hebrew for the Jewish men (עברית לעברים).72 On the same line, Israel also talks about the tribe of Judah, נפוצות יהודה [“He will gather the scattered Judeans”), again a quotation from Isaiah 11, and he will raise the families of Ya’avets, who are the families of scribes, citing 1 Chronicles 2 and many biblical exegetes. It is also worth noting that Maimonides, too, is believed to be a descendant of David and Judah.74

71 According to Renan, all of the Caslaris were Levites. Thus, presuming that Israel belonged to the same family as Crescas, to whom the text was attributed, he too would be a Levite. Ernest Renan, “La famille Caslari,” in Les Écrivains Juifs français du XIVe siècle (Farnborough: Gregg International, 1969), 644-50. Also, Henri Gross, Gallia Judaica (Paris: Peeters, 2011), 619. See my discussion on the author’s identity in the Introduction.
72 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 48r, l. 11.
73 In the aforementioned pun with the city name of Avignon, and its messianic reference to avi yinon, we can find a parallel use of language in the apologia as well, when Israel states that he wrote the vernacular for נינ וני-נקגד "children women great-grandchild and grandchild." The words nin and yinon share the same root, which means continuation. In the case of the former, Israel refers to great grandchildren, or progeny. In the latter, the messiah, the redeemer, also connotes future generations. Whether this was intentional is difficult to say, but I would speculate that it sets up an intriguing authorial frame with this second complement to the apologia.
With these allusions Israel seems to be intimating an analogous relationship to his biblical forebear. Like Mordecai, he is a teacher and like Mordecai, a rhetorician, interpreter and advisor, "מליץ" (melits) learned and pious. He posits himself as one of a line, of Jewish scholars – following in the footsteps of such iconic figures as Mordecai and Maimonides. According to the Megillah, Mordecai was the author of that very book, and here Israel has authored his adaptation of it, to use, like his ancestor, as a teaching tool for his people. Mordecai, who intervened on behalf of his people, is considered a prophet in the rabbinical literature, and here Israel assumes a similar role.

Earlier in the narrative, we find Mordecai in his role as teacher, and maître, instructing a class on mishnaic laws "וילך המן אל מרדכי וימצא אותו מראה באצבע הלכות קמיטסא" ("And Haman went to Mordecai and found him teaching the laws of the kemitsah [flour offering at the Temple"]). He is also a physician at court and, in fact, works with Haman to create the first great banquet; they, according to both versions of the text, were responsible for the menu and made the choices for all the dishes – the ‘contemporary’ meal discussed below. Einbinder, in fact, speculates that the figure of Haman in the narrative may have some parallels to Arnau, the anti-Jewish apologist, and that Israel in his portrayal of Haman, was offering a critique of “high-ranking physicians whose counsel to their powerful patients includes anti-Jewish statements.” If we read Haman as a parallel to Arnau, Israel, by extension, might then have a kinship with Mordecai setting himself in opposition to the anti-Jewish apologist.

In the closing section of the text with the colophon Israel creates a prayer, a plea for salvation from exile, with praises to God and immediate references to the Torah. The force of the

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75 Israel uses this name for Mordecai in his treatment of the episode with Bigtan and Teresh, who conspired in a plot against the king. "םלט אל גיסי אל המליץ והיה בנתיב" ("For they did not know that the interpreter/rhetorician was in their midst.") Ms. Bodleian, fol. 50v, l. 251. The verse originates in Genesis 42:23 and refers to Joseph. This is probably Israel’s updated version of the references to “Mordecai Bilshan” in Ezra 2:2 and Nehemiah 7:7, which give an account of those who returned from exile with Zerubabel. The rabbinical literature understands the name Mordecai to be in apposition to “Bilshan,” which means “interpreter,” because of his knowledge of many languages. I discuss this reference to Mordecai as melits further in my chapter on language, Chapter Three of the present work, “We Are What We Speak.”

76 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah, 15a.

77 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 55r, l. 614.

tanakhic extractions and its liturgical tone openly communicate Israel’s authorial persona as intercessor. Yet here too, we can observe a distinct form of hybridity at work. For while Israel assumes an almost prophetic stance, he is, at the same time being playful, indeed almost subversive, about the seriousness of what he has written by engaging in this elaborate signature and word play, befitting the holiday being celebrated. The mood of Purim is one of jollity and merriment; the holiday is characterized by its inherent irony. The very scroll (Megillat Esther) that commemorates it is filled with satire and so many of its later literary incarnations are equally or even more playful. Thus parody is as relevant as piety - a requisite, even a mitzvah! Where this is palpable in the Hebrew text is firstly in Israel’s word play and punning, such as what we see in the colophon. It is also conspicuous in his clever exaggerations, such as actually calling the king “stupid” or Haman an “idiot” where in the biblical version it is only implied, and in his use of colorful midrashic material.79

The subtle parodic elements of the Hebrew help to illustrate how Israel uses the topos of auctoritas in that version of the Esther narrative. Since the Judéo-Provençal romance exists only in fragmentary form, in the absence of the latter portion we cannot know whether Israel had constructed a parallel signature in that text, although it is likely that he had done so since this type of literary convention was not unusual at the time. However, the Hebrew colophon, even in its own right, points to the text’s innate hybridity, its author taking his persona with more than a modicum of earnestness while poking fun at his own sober attitude and that of the text through his tongue in cheek conclusion.

The result is a poignant depiction of a people struggling to understand and define their identity in a milieu where it is concurrently alien and participant. In this world Jewish scholars such as Estor ha-Parḥi collaborated with the likes of Armengaud Blaise on Hebrew and Latin translations of scientific texts.80 In this world, Estor’s close relation, Jacob ben

79 The question of parody and the particular midrashim Israel uses as sources are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four, “A Poem by Many Other Names,” which deals with the non-medical genres of the texts.
80 Estor was an exile from Provence, who migrated frequently (Palestine was one of his destinations and informed his works). He hailed from a family of rabbis/scholars, and like many of his peers, was learned in the religious traditions and literature as well as philosophy, grammar and natural science. His most important work was the כפתור ופרח (Kaftor va-Feraḥ), which Renan calls “un document de grand prix pour la géographie et la botanique de la Palestine.” Among his other works was the translation of Blaise’s Tabula Antidotarii, which is believed to have been written in 1306. Renan,“Estor Parḥi ou Farḥi,” in Les Écrivains Juifs français, 57-63;
Makhir Ibn Tibbon, had been an active member at the medical faculty of Montpellier during
the same epoch in which Blaise’s uncle, Arnau of Villanova, introduced “medical metaphor
into the theory of body politic” so that non-Christians were represented as “fester ing wounds,
leprous impurities or a diseased organ or limb whose excision was necessary for the health of
the Christian body.” Is it any wonder that Israel, living in this polysemous world, mocks
his own profession in the style of other Jewish writers and physicians, such as Kalonymos
ben Kalonymos in his farcical ’Even Bohan [אベン בוחן] (Touchstone), or that we find him
acknowledging Galen or integrating contemporary Latin-influenced medicine into a post-
exilic Jewish narrative? In fact, Israel was not ahead of his time. He was aptly in his time, a
product of it and embodiment of its conflicts and confluences: moralist, satirist, interpolator,
and of course, physician.

Medicine and Midrash in Israel’s Esther Texts

One of the clearest enunciations of the hybrid nature of the Esther texts, where medicine and
midrash converge, is in the figure and treatment of King Ahasuerus. Israel presents his
audience with the same monarch they know so well from the Megillah, a rash yet indecisive
and highly gullible leader, who is all but ineffective. Yet while the ruler we first met in the
Bible story is familiar, he is little more than a sketch in his original incarnation.Israel’s
Ahasuerus, on the other hand, is a more developed, or at least, more embellished personage
with his primary characteristics intact, but filled out and particularized. So where the king
was simply foolish in the biblical narrative, in the Hebrew, his ministers actually think him
“stupid” "זחלו מנו כי היה מלך טפש (They crawled away from him because he was a stupid
king), and where previously he was presented simply as a drunkard, Susan Einbinder has
astutely outlined how he is rendered also as the model for a medical condition:

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Shatzmiller, "In Search of "The Book of Figures;" 388; Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 206, n. 89. Cf. also
82 Kalonymos ben Kalonymos, ’Even Bohan (Touchstone). ed. Abraham Meir Haberman, (Tel Aviv: Mahbarot
Lesifrut, 1956. Also Chotzner, “Kalonymos ben Kalonymos, a Thirteenth-Century Satirist,” The Jewish
84 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 49r, l. 117.
85 This was also iterated in midrashic literature.
melancholia.\textsuperscript{86} This in turn allows for study, speculation, diagnosis and even didactic commentary on the part of the author, who makes use of his Ahasuerus to impart his expertise in contemporary medical theory. At the same time, Israel introduces material from his Jewish sources that lend another layer to his characterization of the king, one that speaks more to religious concerns. And I would add that these are more pronounced in the Hebrew text due both to the language and the form of that version as a liturgical poem.\textsuperscript{87} In the following pages, I will retrace some of Einbinder’s discussion of the medical additions, and consider as well where they come into dialogue with the biblical and rabbinic amplifications, thereby emphasizing the dualisms that they convey. From the start, in both the Judéo-Provençal and the Hebrew romance, the king exhibits patent symptoms of melancholia, a condition which, according to Arnau of Villanova, clouds the intellect, impedes understanding, dulls the memory and darkens the spirit.\textsuperscript{88} It stems from a humoral imbalance, namely an excess of cold and dry qualities, and was considered to be gravely dangerous, an accident of the soul.\textsuperscript{89} The notion of elemental balance, deriving originally from Hippocratic theory, was central to Galenic medicine and thus to medieval medical thought - certainly to that of the faculty at Montpellier, where Arnau was a proponent of the “new Galenism.”\textsuperscript{90} It called for the treatment of conditions associated with a particular type of constitution using substances that would generate a state of overall balance of body, mind and spirit.

Melancholia, first addressed in early humoral theory by the physician Theophrastus and later integral to the medieval model, was an ailment brought on by an excess of black bile in the body which in turn dominates the entire constitution. While the bile is basically cold and dry, it does possess hot elements and the mixture of hot and cold can be the cause of the emotional instability associated with the condition.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{86} Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 86.
\textsuperscript{87} For more on this, I refer the reader to Chapter Four, “A Poem by Many Other Names.”
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{90} Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 87; Garcia-Ballester, Ferre and Feliu, “Jewish Appreciation,” 86.
Thus we can begin to see how, according to popular theory, Ahasuerus’ actions in the narrative can be accounted for medically. He organizes a great feast with abundant amounts of food and wine. Wine, a warm and moist substance, would have been a plausible antidote for melancholia when it manifests itself in sadness and depression. Yet, while wine could well bring about humoral balance if used in moderation, that is, in keeping with a physician’s instructions, intemperance could incite another kind of disequilibrium in the system. In fact, Theophrastus compares the instability and mood changes that are associated with melancholia to the effects of drinking wine. Thus, if a melancholic overindulges in wine, it would naturally exacerbate his already inconstant state.92

According to Avicenna, who first brought Galenic teachings into Arabic and systematized them, thereby making them accessible to the European continent, and whose *Canon* was one of the primary texts used in medieval medical faculties, including Montpellier, of course, alcohol consumption can stimulate the passion of joy; however, in excess that passion can be pushed to the extreme emotion of wrath. Furthermore, he says that while alcohol can bring about joy or the awareness of things that are joyful though perhaps unnoticd when we are sober, it does not stimulate the intellect and can in fact have negative effects on the brain. It produces excess moisture in the spirit in the brain and makes it unreceptive to the higher activities of the intellect. Thoughts can be unsteady or float about.93

Thus if Ahasuerus indeed suffered from some form of melancholia, a condition which is associated with cold and dry qualities, it would be perfectly likely that one remedy prescribed to treat his condition would have been wine, which is warm and moist.94 Indeed this could have been an effective treatment for the king’s state if it had been kept to a moderate level of consumption.95 However, even from the narrative’s earliest incarnation as *Megillat Esther*, the king’s excessive consumption of wine had been well known, and his lack of

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92 Ibid.  
93 Avicenna *Liber Canonis*. 1522 Lyons, Jacob Myt. This edition contains Avicenna, *De viribus cordis*. [Photo-reprint of British lib 541 b 1]. Ca. 5 “De causis exterioribus et delectationibus et tristitie et earum diversitate.”  
95 Ibid.
responsibility and control, his indecision and weakness are certainly implied. And as the narrative evolved through literary history and its treatment in the rabbinic tradition, both of these points become more pronounced. Israel runs with this, as it were, stating quite plainly, as we have seen, that the king is regarded as ‘stupid.’ Thus his physical and emotional balance, already impaired, become even more so with his intemperance; and what might have initially been administered as a medicinal remedy actually aggravates the king’s state repeatedly through the story.

Over and over in the narrative – in all its versions, including the biblical original – we read that Ahasuerus becomes enraged, "ויחר אף המלך.

And as our author is wont to do, Israel makes the most of this character trait, showing his fidelity to contemporary medical theories, since both spirit and right action are sacrificed for the base and carnal, as Avicenna asserts. Again Israel uses midrashic extractions, stating plainly that Ahasuerus commands the queen to appear before himself and his guests stark naked for purely ignoble, selfish reasons. The biblical narrative never makes explicit that Vashti was summoned to come without clothing; this interpretation of the original text, derives from rabbinic writings. When she does not comply with the king’s wishes, he is filled with wrath and following a consultation with his advisors – after all, he was not capable of making such choices on his own, even under the best of circumstances – he calls for her execution.

(And the king’s wrath burned within him and his spirit was stricken and his heart was saddened and he was still in his fog…)

Later, when the effects of the alcohol have subsided, he remembers neither the incident nor its outcome: his memory is affected, in the Hebrew:

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96 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 55r, l. 597, for example.
97 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah, 12b.
(After all this, he remembered Vashti and found it more bitter than death and he regretted having done disgrace...)99

And in the Judéo-Provençal:

“Pauzet son vin, tenc se per fol E de Vashti lo cor lhi dol. Non sabia com l’avia perduda…” (“He laid aside his wine, realized his madness and his heart grieved for Vashti. He didn’t know how he’d lost her…”)100

As a consequence of the diminished warmth and moisture from the wine, he is filled with remorse and his state of intense sadness returns.

It should be noted here that insofar as their exegetical content is concerned, Israel’s embellishments are not his original adaptations; for the proposal of execution as Vashti’s punishment is again a rabbinic exposition of the scene rather than a direct derivation from the Megillah.101 What makes Israel’s treatment original is in borrowing from Jewish sources and spicing them with contemporary references from his discipline as physician and his status as a Jew in medieval Provence.102 And while the Vashti incident is perhaps the most blatant expression of such a fluctuation in temperament with the use of wine, we see again and again the king’s emotional instability as he moves between sadness, wrath, indecision, lapses of memory, always enhanced in Israel’s text with its author’s knowledge of Jewish exegesis and scholastic medicine.

Thus when, for example, Israel uses phrasing such as "יוֹתָעָט אֶל לְבָּנו" (and his heart was saddened), which appears only once in the Bible, in Genesis 6:6, he is again working with multiple levels of meaning. While, on the one hand, etsev would be the Hebrew equivalent of the Latin tristitia, which Arnau uses in the Regimen Sanitatis, in the Hebrew, Israel is also drawing on the biblical allusion to Noah. In the original, it is God who is saddened witnessing the state of humankind and promptly announced his intention to “blot out” his creation.103 The effect of this citation draws the audience back to the source text,

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99 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, folio 50r, ll. 173-4.
101 This is found in Esther Rabbah and has been commented upon by Rashi and Ibn Ezra, among many others.
103 Genesis 6:6-8.
rhetorically underscoring the notion of errancy and losing favor in the eyes of God. And while Noah was spared for his righteousness, he too, eventually went astray after an excess of wine, a fact which arises again later in Israel’s text when he warns against overconsumption, the downfall of even great biblical heroes. Although these references can be somewhat tongue-in-cheek, it would be difficult to ignore their double-entendre, leaning at once on medical and Jewish teachings.

In her chapter on Israel’s Esther romance in *No Place of Rest*, Susan Einbinder elucidates another application of medical theory in ministering to the king’s melancholic condition. She points to a specific passage in each of the versions which supports the premise that warmth, in this case human warmth and companionship, would help to alleviate some of the symptoms of the imbalance. Vashti’s death leaves the king rueful and lonely, leading his advisors to recommend that he find a new queen: Esther. This takes place during the winter months: in the vernacular “dezembre,” and in the Hebrew in the month of Tevet. Here we see how the text incorporates local allusions; for the Persian winter season would have been quite mild relative to that of Israel’s audience, which would have been far colder. As Einbinder suggests in “A Proper Diet,” the suggestion to seek a new queen could thus be understood as a subtle measure to deal with Ahasuerus’ despondency and bring relief not only to him, but to those in his court who had to bear the brunt of his gloomy state and poor health. Indeed, the narrator tells us:

“And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart. And the Lord said: ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and creeping thing, and fowl of the air; for it repenteth Me that I have made them.’ But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Mechon-mamre.org, Hebrew-English Bible, JPS Masoretic 1917 Edition. http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0106.htm.

104 The Judéo-Provençal manuscript reads "יִדְרָנְמֵר" “tre-nem-re,” JTS Ms. 3740, fol. 29v. Meyer emended this in his transcription to *desnemere*. Silberstein, in her edition, transcribes it as above, and states “We are surely dealing with a corrupt copy, for every possible reading I can propose requires emendation.” She also includes an elaborate note to explain her final emendation. “The Provençal Esther Poem,” 253.
The corresponding section in the Hebrew romance is similarly evocative of the king’s winter blues:

כתר מלכות שם על ראשה ונזר
בחדש טבת אשר כפור כאפר יפזר
טוב לגבר אבדתו תהי מחזר
החדש הזה:

(He placed a royal crown and diadem on her head in the month of Tevet when frost is scattered like ashes\textsuperscript{107} it is good for the man to return to what he has lost during this month:)\textsuperscript{108}

The passage in the Hebrew, however, brings with it multiple layers of meaning, allusions which only the Hebrew could capture. Einbinder discusses a reference in the second hemistich of the verse, "יטב לגבר אבדתו תהי מחז" (it is good for the man to return to what he has lost") to the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin, and a relationship between the excessive consumption of alcohol with sexual disease, an allusion which she states would not have escaped a traditionally-educated Jew, who would understand its overtones and Israel’s suggestion of impure/unclean sexual relations – presumably referring to the non-Jewish king and his new Jewish bride.\textsuperscript{109} Yet I would add that there are other implications to this verse, specific references that make it a pronounced example of textual hybridity. "כפור כאפר יפזר" ("scatters frost like ashes") is a direct citation of Psalms 147:16. The Psalms, praises to win God’s favor, are often recited in times of trouble. This particular Psalm, was composed after the destruction of the first temple and the Babylonian exile, and it contains an implicit prayer for return to the Land of Israel and the construction of a new temple. Moreover, the siege of Jerusalem, which would ultimately lead to the destruction of the Temple and the Jewish exile, took place on the tenth of Tevet, a time of fasting and mourning for pious Jews. And while Esther is crowned in the month of Tevet in the Megillah, here Israel takes advantage of the range of associations that might be invoked by the confluence of the these particular citations. Consequently he brings together in one verse his preoccupations with popular

\textsuperscript{106} Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50v, ll. 221-4; Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 93. The Ms. HUC, fol. 21a, l. 222 reads כפור כאפר יפזר.
\textsuperscript{107} Einbinder translates this word as dusty.
\textsuperscript{108} Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 93.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
medicine and cultural identity, at the same time dispensing a mildly moral message to his co-religionists. For this allusion hearkens back to the notion that the Jews are living and suffering in exile by their own doing, namely by not following God’s laws, which runs as an underlying message throughout the romance.

To return to the question of alcohol, a similar medical/religious hybridity comes to light later in the text. Israel’s approach to wine consumption is much in keeping with medieval medical practice, recognizing its benefits but calling for moderation. However, the narrative tends to operate in a more dualistic way than we might expect with regard to this question. As a physician, Israel warns his readers of the dangers of overindulgence through the example of Ahasuerus, who suffers the physical, emotional and spiritual consequences of such behavior as well as its negative effects on his humoral balance. The king serves as a medical model of intemperance. However, Israel steps out of his role as doctor to assert a more ideologically pious perspective as well. For on the Purim festival, as he aptly conveys, Jews are not only sanctioned to imbibe, but to do so is a fulfillment of one’s responsibility to the commandments of the Torah. And indeed, this is spelled out clearly to his readers at the close of the Hebrew romance. Yet Israel admonishes them that despite this obligation temperance must be observed lest one fall victim to a fate similar to that of the Persian king, or even that of Jewish figures from the Scriptures whose earlier righteousness had been compromised by an excess of wine.110

"גבורים לשתות יין ומיי מצאו מנוח
ויבחר לו לוט ויזכור אלהים
ת נח  ולא ישתכח שמשון בר מנוח
בדבר הזה:" 111

(Great ones drank wine and found God’s respite.
And Lot was selected [for him] and God remembered
Noah, and Samson, son of Manoah, should not be forgotten
in this matter:)

Of course, both medical and religious concerns are articulated in each text, again pointing to multiple levels of hybridity in the works. Nevertheless, we can see how the Hebrew poem’s

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110 This is also addressed in rabbinic literature.
111 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 58 v, ll. 897-900.
montage method of composition, the *shibbuts*, with its inherent reliance on biblical verses, allows for greater transparency of Israel’s religious themes, perhaps even exacting a more deliberate expression of them. On the other hand, the medical material, almost ambiguous - or perhaps more disguised - in the Hebrew, is performed quite explicitly in the Judéo-Provençal version, perhaps most notably in Israel’s lengthy embellishment to the first feast of Ahasuerus.

I begin by revisiting Einbinder’s discussion of the feast in the Judéo-Provençal romance, since it is the more detailed of the two and so clearly illustrates Israel’s use of the material in the dietary regimens. Proceeding from there to the foodstuff as it is presented in the Hebrew, I attempt to show how the two texts, both separately and as a pair, are a definitive expression of hybridity in the work, in Israel’s thought, and by extension perhaps, in his community.

Our first encounter with culinary medicine, as it were, comes fairly early on in the text at the first feast of King Ahasuerus. After the king takes up instruction of his staff on how the palace is to be decorated to receive the banquet guests, he lays out the menu for the cook, who is to have “cauldrons on the fire all day long and must have ready

“asts de capons et de galinas e de totas atras salvezinas a tot om lhi sie donat bolia, raust o cozinat.”

Several verses later Israel launches onto a 20-line narration of the meal service in all its extravagance:

“Ministereron morteirols aquels vengron a plens pairols; bueu e mouton venc am pebrada, Amb eruga e am mostarda; Deron cabrit en gratonia, Mujols e lops en gelaria; Simple broet det am galina Am bona salsa camelina…”

(“They served sauces which came in filled cauldrons; beef and mutton came with pepper sauce, with rocket and with mustard; they served kid in its own fat mullets and sea bass in jellied sauce; thin broth he gave with chicken (?) with good cameline sauce…”)

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That such particularization is devoted to the description is quite deliberate. Sauces played a crucial role in medieval cuisine, for they could be used not only to render foods more palatable, but even more importantly, to make them more healthful. Depending upon their ingredients, sauces could alter the qualities of a dish which might be too hot, dry, cold or moist, “correct” it so that it is safe and suitable for consumption. Likewise, cooking methods would affect the temperateness of foods and certain techniques would be preferable for different kinds of foods according to the time of year. The objective, ultimately, would be to maintain humoral balance and in turn good health.\(^{114}\) Therefore, when Israel stipulates that beef and mutton were served with a pepper sauce or a sauce of rocket and mustard it is of some consequence. As Terence Scully points out in his article on the \textit{Opusculum de Saporibus}, “Culinary art in the Middles Ages tended to be less a matter of inspiration than of science, a science which relates in some respects to the rational operation of the scholastic method…”\(^{115}\) In fact, the author of the \textit{Opusculum}, the Milanese Magninus Mediolanensis (also called Maino de Manieri), was himself a physician who taught at the medical faculty in Paris.

In addition to this saucebook, Magninus composed a health handbook for the Bishop of Arras, one of the chapters of which is fundamentally a condensed version of the \textit{Opusculum}.\(^{116}\) These texts have particular relevance to Israel and his Esther for a number of reasons. Firstly, Magninus was his contemporary and operated within the medical milieu. Furthermore, they illustrate the significant connection made between food and medicine at the time. But more fascinating is that the regimen dedicated to the Bishop of Arras, at least in some of its manuscript copies, was attributed to Arnau of Vilanova. While most scholars today believe that this regimen was indeed written by Magninus and not by Arnau,\(^{117}\) the material was clearly of the same nature, based on scholastic medical theory, and was believed to have been written by one of Israel’s great role models, Arnau himself. It is, therefore, not


\(^{116}\) Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 100.

surprising that the foods and sauces laid out for the reader of the Judéo-Provençal Esther story should follow, almost to a tee, the guidelines in the *Opusculum de Saporibus*.\(^{118}\)

Einbinder’s detailed explanation of the passage shows the connection between foods and cooking methods appropriate to the winter season as Magninus outlines them and as they are rehearsed in our Esther text. Israel’s choice of capons, meats stewed all day in cauldrons or roasted on skewers, mullet for the fish course, as well as the variety and combinations of sauces served, are likely not incidental. He abides by Magninus’ recommendations of the “permissible materiae” for the colder months, even drawing on specific recipe suggestions for the components of the meal.\(^{119}\)

Looking therefore at what the king chose to serve to his guests at the feast, there remains little question about its significance to Israel from both a culinary and a medicinal standpoint.\(^{120}\) In fact, he does not end his description with this but continues with the following phase of the meal:

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“Mangeron tartas per fizica.   (“They ate tarts for medicinal reasons
Aisi con medicina poblica.   just as common remedy prescribes.
En redier det ris am sumac Last he gave rice with sumac berries
Per confortar lor estomac…” to calm their stomach…”) \(^{121}\)
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The Hebrew version of the opening feast is far less elaborate than its vernacular counterpart. It too offers a list of the meats and fowl served,

\(^{118}\) Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 100.

\(^{119}\) According to Magninus, meat and fowl from a castrated male animal, such as capon, retains humidity and is most beneficial for eating. Meats roasted on skewers and slow-cooked in cauldrons add warmth. In both the *Opusculum* and his health regimen, he unequivocally recommended the use of sauces in combination with particular combinations of foods, which we also find described on Ahasuerus’ menu. For a fuller discussion of the foods served at the banquet and their reliance on Maino, see Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 101 as well as Scully’s “The *Opusculum*”, 182-183 and 194-195.

\(^{120}\) Einbinder offers a very interesting argument that Israel might also have been using this material to point out the dangers of misusing a dietary regimen, which he specifically states in his translation of Arnau’s treatise is generally tailored to the needs of a particular individual. The meal in this text was geared toward the temperate individual, the “Golden Mean,” as she explains, and may not have been well-suited to the king’s complexion, leading to his unfortunate behavior and its consequences. “A Proper Diet,” 102.

\(^{121}\) Silberstein, “The Provençal Esther Poem,” ll. 149-52; Einbinder also discusses the digestive qualities of these desserts, “A Proper Diet,” 102. See my discussion on this passage as it relates to language in Chapter Three, “We Are What We Speak,” 188.
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(Ram and deer, roebuck, lamb
Fatted calves and stuffed swans
steeped in the blood of grapes [wine] he gave to all
some from here, some from there:)

But where the Judéo-Provençal devotes more than fifty lines of the description to the banquet meal, the Hebrew condenses it to ten. It is true that this would seem a severe reduction in what Israel had given so much attention to in his vernacular text, yet I would return to the question of his didactic motivations and his devotional model in both.123

The intentionality of Israel’s biblical and midrashic citations is difficult to overlook considering how he juxtaposes fragments of text, bits of tanakhic verses throughout the Hebrew romance in keeping with its formal constraints. There are, of course, midrashic and biblical allusions in the vernacular romance as well; however, these can be only that - allusions. On the other hand, the form of the Hebrew text makes it absolutely feasible to insert precise quotations from traditional Jewish literature. In the narrative Israel reminds his readers that the Jewish state of exile is a result of their own transgressions against God, a topos found in the Bible itself. Here we get a glimpse of Israel’s authorial stance as spokesperson, teacher, even prophet. Israel intimates that just as the Jewish exile in the Bible was a punishment, so too is that of his fellows in southern France. As such, I would suggest that part of Israel’s objective with the Hebrew text is to emphasize the specifically Jewish aspect of the story, the subtleties of which would likely be more accessible to his Hebrew-speaking audience because of the religious references he makes. Thus, not only might the condensed Hebrew version of the opening feast stem from the dearth of terminologies in that

122 Ms. HUC 396, fol. 20a, ll. 77-80; Ms. Bodleian heb. e.10, fol. 48v, ll. 77-80 [this folium of the Oxford Bodleian ms is damaged and the text of these lines corrupted]; Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 99. See also Chapter Three on language, “We Are What We Speak,” 189-90.
123 I discuss this passage as it relates specifically to questions of language in Chapter Three, “We Are What We Speak,” 189-90.
language, but again, it is equally possible that his focus for the second text was more religious than medical.

I would assert this point even further based upon Israel’s treatment of food later in the text, when he explicates the Purim festival and how it is to be celebrated. Of course, since the Judéo-Provençal romance exists only in fragmentary form, the corresponding vernacular passages are not available for comparison. Nevertheless, this is arguable, in my view, solely on the strength of the extant copies of the Hebrew narrative. For, where the dietary references are relatively terse in the Hebrew version of Ahasuerus’ banquet, they receive fuller attention following the Jewish victory, when the day of its commemoration is declared.

The Purim holiday in the Hebrew version is, according to custom, one of feasting and merriment, a time when Jews are mandated to indulge gastronomically and to imbibe wine to their heart’s content. Israel encourages his readers of the Hebrew:

"לבר פורים כי עשתה יפת הדר
משתה המלך לזכרוה עם יין..."

... "האיש אשר במרום הרים את כרמו
לכו דודים שתו ושכרו עמו
הלחמו
אם יאכל עם תרנגולת שמנ
גדול יהיה כבוד הבית הזה:
למאוהרים על היין האוכלים למעוני
לצניעל פומת נפשם דוכין..."

(In memory of Purim, for the one fair to behold
made a banquet for the king—remember it with wine…) …

The man on high who raised his vineyards
let’s go friends: drink and get drunk with him
If he should eat fattened turkey with his bread,
the glory of this house will be great:

124 Ferre, Ziegler, Garcia- Ballester and Einbinder concur on this point. I refer here to Michael McVaugh and Lola Ferre’s edition of Estor ha-Parhi’s Hebrew translation of Armengaud Blaise’s *Tabula Antidorarii* in which there is a full correspondence of Latin and vernacular botanical and culinary terms transliterated from the Latin and vernacular for the very reason that these terminologies did not exist in Hebrew.

125 Ms. Bodleian heb.e. 10, fol.58r, ll. 885-94.
Those who tarry over wine and eat delicacies are prepared to save themselves from death...)\textsuperscript{126}

And as Einbinder points out, the following two verses refer to a very specific combination of ingredients, bone marrow, garlic and honey, which is indicated in the \textit{Opusculum (\& Regimen)} as healthful in sauces prepared for winter meals.

\begin{quote}
"לשת השמן לأكل הלומ אום חמר
דפרת פ תעל תיכן גירה
תומ תשם עליה ואל תאחור
לשת הדבש הוו."\textsuperscript{127}
\end{quote}

(And if you should choose to eat marrow on this day be careful lest it stick to your throat Put garlic on it with a little honey and don’t delay:)\textsuperscript{128}

The marrow, a delicacy that is cold and moist,\textsuperscript{129} (probably too cold to be eaten on its own in winter), would be tempered by the heat and moisture of the garlic, softened and made drier by the moderately warm, but dry honey. Thus Israel abides by the guidelines for humoral balance. And again it is noteworthy that even when indulgence is called for the physician advocates for moderation over excess, “lest your throat should begin to be parched….”

These two lines are particularly useful in examining the hybridity of the Hebrew text with its playfully pious tone. The word \textit{leshed} itself means ‘marrow,’ and coupled with the following word \textit{shamen} (fat, oil) certainly implies richness. However, the words as a pair form a phrase whose origins lie in the Five Books of Moses. \textit{leshed ha-shamen} appears in \textit{Numbers} 11:8, and later the rabbis refer to that verse in explicating other biblical passages, such as \textit{Exodus} 16:4-5 and \textit{Psalms} 32. Both the original passage in \textit{Numbers} and the passage in \textit{Exodus} refer to the mannah that God sent the Jews to feed them as they wandered through the desert after their deliverance from Egypt and \textit{leshed ha-shamen} (leshed

\textsuperscript{126} Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 103. (I have made a few minor alterations).
\textsuperscript{127} Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 58v, ll. 909-10.
\textsuperscript{128} Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 104. I discuss this passage again in relation to language in Chapter Three, “We Are What We Speak,” 187-8.
\textsuperscript{129} “… partaking of the nature of brain and nerve matter…” Scully, “The Opusculum,” 188; Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 105.
ha-shamen) refers to the taste of the mannah as that of “cake baked with oil.” In the same passage from Numbers, the Jews are crying out for flesh to eat and lamenting their release from Egypt, sinning against God and showing a great lack of faith. And when God does send them flesh to eat, he is angered by their lust and greed in gathering the meat. We might thus make a connection to Israel’s warning against excess.

Rashi and other exegetes also use this phrase from Numbers in their interpretations of Psalms 32:4, "לשת לשדי בחרבונים הקים," with the word לשד (leshed) here meaning “sap,” “my sap was turned as in the droughts of summer.” Not surprisingly this Psalm speaks of the joy of one whose sins have been pardoned, which would again suggest that Israel is making such allusions with the intent of addressing what he sees as the transgressions of his community. Israel is punning here, using double-entendre as he so deftly does, writing about popular dietary matters, and at the same time conjuring biblical passages that serve a didactic purpose as well, drawing parallels between the Jews who lived in the days of Moses and those who were his contemporaries.

Just before his directive on the Purim feast, Israel appropriately instructs his readers on what they must do first, before feasting: they must commemorate the fast that Esther did in preparation for her unannounced visit to the king.

לזכור מאכלי אסתר ושלשת השועים
יאכלו בני ישראל מן הזרעונים
בלילה הזה:

(Remember the food of Esther and the three nobles
Let the children of Israel eat pulses
on this night:)

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130 Numbers 11:8. “The people went about, and gathered it and ground it in mills, or beat it in mortars, and seethed it in pots, and made cakes of it; and the taste of it was as the taste of a cake baked with oil.”

131 As a side note, I can’t help but wonder how complex Israel’s allusion might have been, whether he thought through the allusions to the extent that מַכֶּפֶל לְשֵׁד בֵּית־רֹבֶרֶנִים תַּקַּיִם (makpelet lashed b’eroranim takayim) of Numbers led to the name of one of the eunuchs in the Megillat Esther: הרְבּוֹנוֹת (Harbonah).

132 Ms. Bodleian heb e.10 fol. 58r, ll. 877-9; Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 104.
As Einbinder points out, this statement seems rather enigmatic since it seems to refer to the *Ta’anit Esther*, the fast of Esther, which most we would normally understand to mean complete abstinence from food. Why, then, would the author direct his readers to consume any substance at all? In using the word מאכל (ma’akhal) (food) in the text, he is indicating that Esther’s fast was not one of complete abstinence, but that she consumed this substance herself.

This particular food reference in the Esther romance is a particularly complex and apt representative of Israel’s ties to the contemporary medical world and its theories. At the same time, however, it is also closely tied with Jewish tradition in biblical court literature. Einbinder explains that the Hebrew word זרעים (zera’im) is found in rabbinic literature, where it is used to mean *seeds, pulses or legumes* in general, but that Israel uses it here to mean *chickpeas* specifically. In his translation of the *Regimen Sanitatis*, he uses the word זרעיים (zer’onim) in the section on pulses, where Arnau uses the Latin *cicera*, and where the Catalan translation (which scholars now believe to be Israel’s source) uses *cuirons*. Arnau recommends chickpea broth as a digestive aid, particularly during the Lenten period, when legumes, which can produce negative effects on the body, were consumed more frequently. This point is one of interest, as Einbinder remarks, since the time of Lent corresponds with the Jewish commemoration of Esther’s fast and the Purim holiday in the Gregorian month of March, Adar in the Hebrew calendar. In the Christian tradition, the period of Lent does not require total abstinence from food, but rather abstinence from meat. In turn, the consumption of meat-substitutions, such as fish and pulses naturally increases, often causing humoral imbalances and a variety of digestive complications. The chickpea broth, according to Arnau’s *Regimen*, alleviates some of the symptoms brought on by the pulses and beans. Einbinder goes on to suggest that Israel’s Jewish community could have been fasting “in accordance with the gentile custom,” that is, abstaining from meat and replacing it with legumes. In this way, Israel’s instruction can be more easily understood. And his use of

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135 Einbinder notes that the menu at the papal court at Avignon for the month of March had an “overwhelming appearance of chickpea soup,” which confirms this. “A Proper Diet,” 107.
136 Ibid.
chickpeas in his translation of the Regimen Sanitatis as (zer’onim) confirms the source.

Even left at this the “chickpea” reference would be indicative of the paradoxical situation of Israel’s community when they (perhaps without premeditation) adopt a Christian practice in the very act of observing Jewish law and commemorating the deeds of one of the Bible’s great Jewish heroines. Yet I would propose an even deeper complexity here that stems from a biblical source of the word (zer’onim) or (zera’im). In Daniel 1:12 and 16, we find both the former and the latter variations of the root רָזָע, רָזִי, "נסנא את עבדיך, ימים עשרים, ויתנו-לן מן הזרעים, ונאכלה-לן ושתהו.

"Try thy servants, I beseech you, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink."

"ויהי המלצר, נשא את פת בגם, ויין,مشתיהם; ונתן להם, זרענים."

“So the steward took away their food, and the wine that they should drink, and gave them pulse.”

The story of Daniel has an important relationship to that of Esther since it deals directly with the destruction of the Temple and the Babylonian exile and the two were linked closely in rabbinical literature. At the beginning of the narrative, Daniel, along with three other Judean youths, is held at the court of Nebuchadnezzar. Not wishing to defile himself with the king’s food, Daniel requests to eat pulses, “זרעים” [zera’im] in verse 12, “זרענים” [zer’onim] in verse 16. The relevance of this in relation to Israel’s text hearkens back to midrashic matter that deals with the question of whether Esther observed kashrut, following the Torah’s laws of consumption, when she was at the court of Ahasuerus. How, after all, could she maintain the secrecy of her Jewish identity if she would not partake of the food at court? And Tractate Megillah of the Babylonian Talmud argues that Esther did indeed observe the Sabbath and held to the mitzvah of kashrut. Israel alludes to the Book of Daniel throughout his Esther texts because of exegetical connections, their shared themes of exile and the destruction of the Temple and their setting in a royal court. In the instructional verse he even states that the

137 Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 206, n. 95; MS Munich Bayerische Stb., Cod.hebr. 288, fol. 72.
138 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah, 13a.
purpose of this custom is to commemorate the food of “Esther and the 3 nobles,” "לヶ月 מסעלאי אסתר והשלושה השועים."  

It would seem here that Israel was making a point to his audience about its own observance of kashrut, perhaps a warning against such transgressive ways. For even Esther and Daniel, in the challenging circumstances they faced, were righteous and found ways to abide by God’s law. Here again the text takes on a didactic tone and Israel a rather declamatory stance of authority.  

No doubt, Israel’s method, his rhetorical approach, is performative. This is particularly so in the Hebrew, where he could display his agility with both form and language for the benefit of his circle of colleagues. And while it would be difficult to ascertain the degree to which he took his own stance seriously or to what extent he intended his renderings of the biblical narrative to be allegorical, there is an undeniable presence of didactic flourish, both in its medical and its religious shades in the two versions of the Esther text.

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139 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 58r, l. 877.
140 I would propose an alternate reading of this passage, namely, the verse wherein Israel admonishes his readers to commemorate the food of Esther by eating pulses might not refer to her fast per se, but could simply be suggesting that she, like Daniel, consumed pulses while at a foreign king’s court. Israel’s following line, in fact, does specifically tell us that on the appropriate day, the 13th of Adar, we must fast, which could justify this reading. "ביום שלשה עשר באדר רבעו להתענות ולקרוה את המגילה ביום ובלילה/Shall we fast on the 13th of Adar and read the Megillah in the afternoon and evening?"
141 Einbinder advances her discussion of this section to include an important variation of the passage in the 19th-century print edition from Salonika and its implications as well as the later mahzorim (books of liturgy) in the British Library and Columbia University collections. I do not deal with these here, since I have limited my study of the text to its medieval manuscript sources.
142 Einbinder points out “controversial interest of rationalist Jews in allegory and analogy,” which she suggests “confirms [Israel’s] membership in a small and elite minority.” “A Proper Diet,” 87.
Chapter Two

Esther’s Issues [or The Blood of Others]

Israel’s authorial stance is something of a paradox, as we have seen; for he moves in two worlds as once. His work is characterized, on the one hand, by an obfuscation of cultural margins in his professional practices, and a fastidious attitude toward religious fidelity on the other. His text brings to light his concern with boundaries and their transgression, a concern not unique to him, but emblematic of the two circles in which he travels.

As a doctor in fourteenth-century Provence, Israel was faced with boundaries intended to limit him as a Jew. Not only was he forbidden [official] entry into the universities, but there were consistent endeavors to curtail Jewish medical practice by Christian physicians such as Arnau of Villanova, whom Israel also clearly saw as a mentor, having translated his work and praised him in its introduction. Yet despite the limitations, in his Esther texts Israel shows signs of acculturation and the crossover of religious borders and identity among his co-religionists. And at the same time, he shows his reactions to both.

Hearty midrashic embellishment is one of Israel’s most powerful tools in assuming his role of auctor in this reworking of the Megillat Esther story. His additions to the text are deliberate, functioning as didactic measures, enabling him to put forth messages at once subtle and powerful, pointed and ambivalent to his community of co-religionists in their diasporic state. In fact, I would suggest that they create a longer, more spacious text, even in the most literal sense. Yet it is not only the enhancement to particular portions of the text that brings to light Israel’s authorial motivations. Perhaps of equal import are those elements that he omits or the potential expansions he carefully chooses to suppress. In his treatment of cross-cultural boundary issues, Israel concurrently engages questions of gender that in turn point back to where his own professional and intellectual inclinations intersect with those of the majority culture. That is to say, in his texts gender is constructed on multiple levels, medical, religious and social, each reflecting the author’s bicultural ambivalence. Israel adopts standard medieval medical models of sex difference, for instance, in which women
are innately lesser than men based simply on their physiology. At the same time, however, he makes distinctions for Jewish women, whose faith binds them in such a way that if they are true to God’s commandments the inherent danger of their sex can be somewhat mitigated.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the ways in which Israel’s work as rationalist physician motivated some rather lengthy expansions to his source text in both his Hebrew and his Judéo-Provençal adaptations. In the latter particularly, the addition of the section on the banquet of King Ahasuerus numbers approximately 100 lines (inclusive of the descriptions of decoration, invitees and the feast), and provides the audience with great detail on the menu, including types of food, their preparation, and even the sauces with which they are served.

In that same text, several verses later, we learn, much in keeping with the biblical narrative, that Vashti the queen held a banquet for the women. However, Israel’s treatment of this section of the Megillah is striking not for his enhancement to it, but rather for his purposeful avoidance of its development.

“Per tota part Vasti mandet; (“Everywhere Vashti sent word; Les gentils donas envidet. she invited the noble women. A totas fes mot bel manjar: For all she had very fine food; Que lor donet non cal dechar.”¹ No need to relate what she gave them.”)²

Indeed it is true that Israel does elaborate on the Megillah’s 1:9:

"גמ ושת המלכה עשה משתה נ – בית המלכה אשר למלך אחשורש.

(Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to King Ahasuerus.)

His expansion here, however, is quite minimal in comparison with that of the men’s (i.e. the king’s) banquet, and it is primarily a generic enhancement, namely he imbues it with

¹ Silberstein explains the use of caure and caler in her transcription/translation. Here, she attributes to it the meaning “to be fitting” and dechar (or deixar) to relate. Notz-Grob and Méjean-Thiolier translate it similarly as “Inutile de décrire ce qu’elle leur donna.” Roman de la Reine Esther, 137. What is clear is that the author is telling his readers that this information should not revealed.

elements of medieval courtly romance. Thus, whereas Israel used the king’s banquet as a forum for the communication of popular medical theories from the dietaries and regimen sanitatis literature, he intentionally disengages from that aspect of Vashti’s banquet: “no need to relate what she gave them.” Invariably, this raises a multitude of questions. Clearly Israel is not concerned with remaining loyal to his biblical source text; the breadth and character of his additions throughout the text attest to this. In fact, they are generally quite calculated, rarely random. The intricate culinary descriptions of the king’s banquet, for instance, are, as has been established, ultimately medical in nature, meant to offer health advice to readers, be they women who are responsible for cooking and caring for their families, or physicians of Jewish and/or Christian origin who might then use the information in treating their own patients. It is significant, however, that Israel saw no need to elaborate on the food served at the women’s banquet; moreover, he explicitly states his view on this. What could such an omission be telling us?

Here we begin to see a gender-related topos in the text, a pattern that reveals not only Israel’s personal and professional marginalization as a Jew, but also his own acculturation. Elisheva Baumgarten, in her article on comparative research on medieval women, makes the point that religion in medieval Europe was the basic organizing factor around which social units were constructed, an inherent marker of identity, superseding even class and gender. Yet, she adds, all medieval societies shared a social order in which men were considered superior, and she further suggests that within their respective religions, even those which were themselves marginalized, women were generally the other. In light of this, I would propose that in his text Israel is conveying the gender-based otherness within his own community and that

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3 I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter Four, “A Poem by Many Other Names: On the Mixing of Genres.”
4 The question of audience for these texts is quite complex. Israel tells us his intention in the apologia to the Hebrew, but whether this is a rhetorical device and who his actual audience is is not fully clear. Einbinder posits that there could well have been Jewish as well as Christian physicians in the audience of the Judéo-Provençal text. Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 89.
5 Elisheva Baumgarten, “A separate people? Some Directions for Comparative Research on Medieval Women,” Journal of Medieval History 34 (2008): 214 and 216. These points arise in Baumgarten’s discussion of interaction between Jewish and Christian women, and while she deals primarily with Ashkenazic culture in this article, she makes these statements about Europe in general.
where he is given a secondary status in the larger culture because of his faith, women are in turn accorded a secondary role in his text.  

That women are relegated to a distinct place apart from the central banquet is notable even in the *Megillah*, and as Drora Oren discusses, the separate space of the women’s banquet in the biblical narrative is symbolic of their political exclusion from agency or decision-making. At the same time this mirrors the larger social framework, wherein the Jews of Shushan are closed off from the power structures of the dominant culture, a theme that has made the story so appealing for diaspora Jews throughout the centuries. Certainly this would hold true in the case of Occitania and Israel’s own community. However, taken to another level, it might also parallel, to some degree, the microcosm of the medical establishment in that region, which barred its Jewish members from full participation, such as admission into the university system, the central locus of the discipline. Considering his authorial stance, wherein, as I argue in the previous chapter, he posits himself as an antidote of sorts to Arnau of Villanova and his anti-Jewish polemic, Israel could well be making a statement about being excluded from the establishment as an exiled Jew and physician in his own right.  

Israel makes a potent statement when he dismisses the women’s meal, again asserting his role as rationalist physician, implying that the women in his audience had no need for detail about a matter as intellectual as the content of popular medical treatises like the *regimen sanitatis*. Yet it is in this very act of silencing that we witness something more: a profound albeit subtle articulation of the author’s place among his Christian medical contemporaries in his attitude toward women’s bodies. By sharing in the Christian culture’s silencing and marginalizing of women, Israel can, paradoxically, assert his own voice and place in a Christian cultural economy.  

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6 I treat this issue further – with a view to Israel’s differentiation between Jewish and non-Jewish women – later in the present chapter. For Israel, a Jewish adaptor of the Esther story, Vashti would necessarily be other, not only or necessarily because she is a woman, but because she is the granddaughter of Nebuchadnezzar, who was responsible for the destruction of the Temple.  


8 I discuss the notion of Jews being “feminized” again later in the present chapter beginning on page 121.
Judaism has always been a religion grounded in carnality, one that does not seek to suppress the body or its functions. As early as the book of *Leviticus*, in fact, it engages quite openly with the body, setting out rules for proper sexual conduct and physical cleanliness and impurity. Nor did this involvement with the body end at that. Exegetes and commentators continued to treat the material first set out in the Torah, and the rabbis created a tradition of their own on the subject, with detailed discourse from the *mishnayot* (commentaries on the Torah), through to the Talmud and beyond. So extensive was the treatment of the body that pages and pages of the Talmud are dedicated solely to discussing the Jew’s correct relationship to and care for it. Women’s bodies are perhaps even more extensively dealt with, for they require greater attention in terms of menstruation, childbirth and nursing. The rabbis devote an entire tractate, *Tractate Niddah*, to the specific purpose of establishing rites and practices for female purity and expound on how they are to be carried out. Moreover, the obligation and willingness to contend with the body remained a characteristic of Judaism in the Middle Ages, and even until the present day. “One detects no sense of embarrassment, shame or disgust in these pages of the Talmud, a feeling familiar to those who have grown up in the west, which allows mostly only euphemistic, hidden reference to bodies and their messiness…”

It should be made clear at this point that the discourse about women’s bodies was not necessarily symmetrical with that about men’s, despite the potential symmetry in reading some of the original passages of *Leviticus*. In fact, the greater part of rabbinic literature constructs women’s bodies into objects of their discourse, with virtually no possibility for women to inhabit either the texts or their own bodies. I will be discussing this further in this chapter, however, my intention in the present exposition is to emphasize not only the acceptance of corporeality within the religious framework of Judaism, but also to call attention to the fact that it is closely tied up with ethnic identity. Indeed, as Daniel Boyarin and Charlotte Fonrobert have asserted, the rabbis’ hermeneutic strategies were based upon a

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10 In chapter one of her *Menstrual Purity*, “Framing Niddah,” 18-39, Fonrobert writes of the potential for symmetry in the biblical context insofar as Leviticus 15, which deals with impurity of genital discharges, discusses both those of women and of men.
desire to enact the biblical community of Israel as an ethnically distinct, embodied community distinguished by corporeal practices.¹¹

Christianity, in contrast, held quite a different view of the body. As a religion whose early focus lay in asceticism, in its young days, the Church took a Platonic stance toward the body, rejecting it as illusory. It was fallen and imperfect and served best as a vehicle through which one could achieve virtue in this lifetime. While in Judaism the material body is not considered to be secondary to the spiritual, in early Christian terms corporeality was not only secondary, but the flesh was all but denied and its care often discouraged.¹² Medieval Christianity moved towards a more Aristotelian perspective which affirmed the reality of the physical world and the body as part of that world, although it was indeed necessary to reconcile rationalism with Christian theology, a task to which great thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas dedicated much work. The rationalist physicians of the Middle Ages, with their grounding in Hippocratic and Galenic teachings, embraced the Aristotelian marriage of theory and empiricism.¹³ For them maintaining physical equilibrium was crucial to a healthy mind and soul as well. Thus while there was still a belief that the body was prone to sin, it was held as a means of attaining closeness to God.¹⁴

As such, in the later Middle Ages, the male body was not invariably the subject of disdain. The female body, however, was quite a different matter, both in the Christian and in the medical view. In Aristotelian terms, the female is considered to be an “imperfect or defective male,” and his theory of the humors tended to read value in its poles of warm, cool, moist, dry, with the privileging of the male body’s heat and dryness as the ideal humoral

¹¹Ibid., 40. Cf. also Daniel Boyarin, Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 29, for example.
¹² It was discouraged particularly amongst clerics – disease was a divine consequence of sin. On the other hand, healing the sick was considered an act of Christian charity, thus there was some ambiguity. Siraisi, Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine, 24.
¹³ Ibid., 16.
Galen’s approach was not as radical as Aristotle’s in defining sex difference, according to Joan Cadden. His was an eclectic approach that synthesized the more balanced view of the Hippocratic tradition with that of Aristotle and borrowed selectively from other predecessors and contemporaries. Despite this relative moderateness, Galen nevertheless regarded the female as more imperfect than the male based upon her humoral complexion, which is cold and moist. The superabundance of warmth in the male, effecting greater activity and strength, made him inherently superior. Such notions of sex difference, clearly grounded in antiquity and Greco-Roman tradition, found their way into the medieval Christian worldview via theologians such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, and into medieval medical theory through Galen, who inherited Aristotle’s theory of the elements. They were, moreover, the generally accepted belief in the western Middle Ages.

As a rationalist physician in 14th-century Europe, Israel would likely have maintained such an opinion himself. Therefore, while it would be fitting and proper to offer his readers a detailed account of King Ahasuerus’ feast, the men’s feast, with full medical-culinary description of its menu, to discuss the woman’s banquet was not only less important and thus less worthy of mention, but, in keeping with the dominant perspective of his time, to do so could upset the tolerable bounds of gender and engage the problematic nature of the feminine.

In her discussion of purity rituals, Mary Douglas states that in primitive religions, “rules of holiness and uncleanness were indistinguishable; if advanced then rules of cleanness disappeared from religion...[and] the less uncleanness was concerned with physical conditions and the more it signified a spiritual state of unworthiness, so much more decisively could the religion in question be recognized as advanced.” So Christianity, which rendered the body of woman a taboo, silencing it for its inherent pollution, “perceived

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16 Ibid., see Chapter 1.
18 García-Ballester, Ferre and Feliu, “Jewish Appreciation,” 86.
During this period Christianity moved away from a focus on the body by redirecting the notion of purity to the internal realm, the spiritual realm, avoiding reference to or discussion of physical orifices and bodily secretions, except when they could serve as illustrations about the body as a site of temptation or damnation. This was especially true for women and their bodies, whose secretions were dangerous, a perpetual reminder of original sin and the fall of humanity. Avoidance of the body altogether would necessarily contradict the role of a physician; and Israel does not ignore the male body nor its health, since he prescribes the foods that would nourish it and preserve overall well-being according to medical norms. While he does deal with the male body on only a somewhat superficial or general level – since the nature of the text would not make it suitable for in-depth medical prescription – he does nevertheless address it, much in the way that a Christian physician might have. However, a propos of the bodies of women, Israel adopts the dominant Christian cultural stance and chooses silence, a clear safeguarding of boundaries. Indeed, based upon the medical – and social - differentiation of the male and female body, the regimina sanitatis were generally written for men and not intended to address “matters of women,” which existed as a separate genre, as we shall see forthwith. To enter into any discourse on the women’s feast would not only require adjusting the menu to suit women’s cold and moist complexion, but it would require openness to female digestive processes.

Yet it is not only in this example of Vashti’s banquet that we see Israel espouse contemporary Christian attitudes toward women’s bodies, for it is even more pronounced when it recurs in another absence in the text. In Megillat Esther 2:11, Mordecai is said to check on Esther while she is in the harem:

"ובכל יום ויום מרדכי מתהלך לפני חצר בית הנשים: לדעת את שלום אסתר وما יעשה בה".

21 Ibid., 6.
(And on a daily basis Mordecai would walk out in front of the court of the harem, to learn how Esther was and how she fared).\(^{23}\)

And indeed, Mordecai does wonder about Esther’s well-being in the Hebrew romance,\(^{24}\) albeit slightly later in the narrative, “מרדכי לדעת את שלום אסתר נכסף...וישב בשער המלך על..."\(^{25}\) (Mordecai longed to know Esther’s welfare…and he used to sit at the threshold of the king’s gate…). It is not this slight adaptation, however, that is surprising, but rather the author’s choice of a midrashic omission that reveals his Christianized approach. For Israel, as we have seen, embellishes his text quite liberally with midrashic and talmudic topoi. Yet in this instance, he carefully disregards a significant commentary that explains the reason for Mordecai’s visits before the harem. In *Midrash Esther Rabbah* the explication for verse 2:11 tells us that he went “to question her as to her staining and her menstrual period, to know how Esther fared...”\(^{26}\)

[“…receive questions as to her menstrual rag and her menstrual period…”]\(^{27}\)

In fact, the rabbis devote extensive attention to Esther’s observance of the laws of *niddah* (menstrual purity).\(^{29}\) Why would Israel specifically choose to omit this midrashic explication of the scene when he has previously and subsequently added so many others into the story? I would speculate that his choice was influenced by the popular stance on the female body. Menstruation was to be mentioned either not at all in medieval Christian writings, or only for the purposes of theological exposition.

This is not to imply that Christianity saw the female body as a threat while Judaism did not, for that would be false. Douglas states that physical “orifices symbolize specifically vulnerable points and that any matter [such as blood, milk, urine] issuing from them is

\(^{23}\) My translation.
\(^{24}\) The Judéo-Provençal fragment ends just before this part of the narrative.
\(^{25}\) Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50v, ll. 123-6.
\(^{26}\) My translation.
\(^{28}\) *Esther Rabbah* [http://www.tsel.org/torah/midrashraba/index.html]
marginal...by simply hav[ing] traversed the boundary of the body.”  

And it is true that fear of the menstruant resulted in greater stringency and an expansion of the strictures on Jewish women in the Middle Ages.  What differentiates them is the fact that they take on the topic of the body with an altogether different approach.

The Christian stance is reflected quite plainly in the medical literature of the later Middle Ages as well, though it is difficult to know which had more influence on the other, the theological or the medical. Medicine saw a movement away from gynecological treatises dealing with women’s maladies and the alleviation of suffering to a tradition named for its most influential 13th-century text by Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, the *Secreta mulierum,* [*Secrets of Women*].  Yet as Caballero-Navas assures us, while this new definition surely affected the thinking of some Jewish intellectuals, Jewish texts show little evidence of its adoption.

To emphasize this point, I return directly to *Megillat Esther* 2:12, where we learn the prescribed course of preparation for any of the virgins before she could be brought to the king. It would take a full year:

"והגיעה תור נערה ונערה לבוא אל המלך אחשורוש בת עשר שנה - כי כן ימלאו ימי תמרוקיהן: ששה חדשים בשמן המור וששה חדשים בבשמים ובתמרוקי הנשים."  


31 The Kabbalah in Southern France and Spain emphasized more restriction and separation for fear of contamination, according to Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 87; Sharon Faye Koren writes of Nachmanides’ commentary on Leviticus, which is heavily influenced by biological theory and draws on Aristotle, "Women from Whom God Wanders: The Menstruant in Medieval Jewish Mysticism," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1999), 220-2. See also Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1984). Baskin asserts that Hasidei Ashkenaz were influenced by Christian views that women were responsible for the fall from Paradise and wanted to emulate Christian asceticism. See, for instance, Judith Baskin, “Jewish Women in Medieval Ashkenaz,” in *Late Medieval Jewish Identities: Iberia and Beyond*, eds. Carmen Caballero-Navas and Esperanza Alfonso,(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 86; Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 22, argues that this shift can be viewed from a somewhat different perspective from which it would not necessarily be interpreted as a shift per se.


33 Ibid., Caballero-Navas.
“When the turn of each and every maiden came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after she [had undergone the ritual treatment] according to the law of the women, twelve months for their anointing to be completed, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odors and ointments of the women.” 34

What comes into question here is the specific phrase "מקץ היות לה כדת הנשים," “after she [had undergone the ritual treatment] according to the law of the women,” whose meaning is rather ambiguous. Given the context of the verse, we might easily understand it to refer to the ritual bathing and anointing in oil and being beautified for the king, as Persian custom required. Nevertheless, feminist scholars have interpreted this as a reference to something quite different indeed: menstruation. Drora Oren relates this expression to Esther Fuchs’ discussion of Genesis 31:35 about Rachel, who sits on Laban’s teraphim when he has come to search her tent for the idols she had taken from him and excuses herself for not rising before her father because: "…כי דרך הנשים לי…" 
Fuchs identifies the phraseology in Genesis, “the way of the women,” as a biblical euphemism for woman’s polluted body in her menstrual state; Oren sees this as applicable to the complementary expression in Esther. 35 She argues furthermore, that this reading of Esther 2:12 not only implies the young age of the virgins, but also that they can go to the king only after menarche, when they are physically able to produce an heir to the throne.

In keeping with his pattern of suppression, Israel makes no mention of this verse, not even an allusion to it. Nor can we find anything analogous in its place. He evades “the way of the women” entirely; and more striking still, he refrains from all discussion of the virginal oil and bathing rituals which are so prominent in the biblical narrative. Israel’s text offers a description of Esther’s beauty, followed immediately by an added passage wherein the Jewish maiden defends herself to the king for not revealing her identity, a passage that serves to foster the author’s didactic stance about Esther’s piety, to which I will return shortly.

Here I would like to take a few steps back to explore the Jewish discourse regarding menstruation, which does have some parallels to its Christian counterpart. In rabbinic discourse, as in so many cultures, the female body with its various forms of pollution, must

34 My translation.
35 Drora Oren and Esther Fuchs as quoted. in Oren’s dissertation, Embodiment in the Book of Esther, 86.
be controlled and contained. In Levitican terms, where all discharge – including that of a man – is impure and dangerous, physical and temporal separation was a requirement during the process of ritual purification and approaching the Temple was forbidden. However, female impurity was not equal. This was the case even in Temple days, for woman’s impurity was more easily imparted to others and necessitated longer periods of exclusion.36 Yet in post-Temple Judaism, according to Rachel Biale, the focus of niddah (menstrual purity) shifted from “the realm of ritual purity to the sphere of marital relations,” and that importance of the Levitican laws of control regarding defilement of the sacred in Chapter 15 of Leviticus was transferred to the “regimentation of sexual relations.”37 The talmudic Tractate Niddah renders the body of woman into an object of discourse using architectural metaphors, in particular.38 The rabbis discuss the female body in highly theoretical terms, figuring it as a house composed of various chambers and a vestibule, a trope that plays a related role in the midrashic treatment of The Book of Esther, and in turn in Israel’s text. Charlotte Fonrobert contextualizes the discourse on women’s bodies as having been written in the same approximate time period when “Soranus and Galen attempted to develop a more focused gynecological vocabulary,” and suggests looking at both bodies of texts as a cultural impulse to make women’s bodies more accessible to language, epistemology and the enquiring male mind.”39 And while the Jewish writings are, in Boyarin’s terms, “androcentric,” they are not misogynistic in the same way as the Greco-Roman writings,40 nor do they ignore the materiality of women’s bodies as the Christian does. Moreover, the Jewish gynecological literature of the later medieval period “retained the association with female sexual difference manifested in the older Hebrew references to women’s private parts as the ‘house of secrets,’ but it did not share the strong misogynistic connotations that this term would acquire in the contemporaneous Secreta Mulierum tradition.”41

I would propose, then, that in his silencing of the female body, Israel reveals the impact of Christian mores – and certainly those of the medical establishment – on his text and thus, a

37 Biale, Women and Jewish Law, 158.
39 Fonrobert, Menstrual Purity, 10.
40 Boyarin, Carnal Israel, 89, 94 and 106.
subtle and perhaps unrecognized act of acculturation. Whereas the original biblical text and its later rabbinical explications are cloaked in euphemisms, such as "דת הנשים," יד הנותן, "the law of the women," they do nevertheless engage with women’s bodies, and try to come to terms with them, their constructions and discourse “making women’s genitalia and internal organs visible textually.”

It is interesting to note that there was an awareness outside of the Jewish community of the rabbinic engagement with the female body and menstrual purity, which I might add would have held some importance for Israel in his medical milieu. In fact, Fonrobert describes such evidence of external knowledge of talmudic literature in a correspondence of patristic writer, Jerome, “They have as heads of their synagogues certain very learned men who are assigned to the disgusting task of determining by taste….whether blood is pure or impure…” Although this particular hermeneutic is not actually mentioned in the Talmud, the rabbis do fashion themselves as “experts in the science of women’s blood.” Again, as a rationalist physician in the later Middle Ages, Israel surely would not have wished to associate himself with such rabbinical practices, since they were not in keeping with the contemporary scholastic medical perspective with which Israel would have identified. And while it is unlikely that any Christian physician would have been exposed to a Hebrew text of this ilk, surely Israel would have internalized this stigma as a physician from the same branch of learning; possibly even out of concern that his Jewish medical colleagues in the discipline might disapprove.

I would add here that the silencing of women’s blood was not restricted to the realm of theology, whose ideals and doctrines invariably seeped into other levels of the culture, including the literary. Peggy McCracken has explored the phenomenon of blood in medieval romance in The Curse of Eve, The Wound of the Hero, where she asserts that blood per se is not absent from the genre. In fact, it is dense with scenes of battle and blood shed for honor, allegiance and feats of heroism. This, however, is the blood of men; it is the blood of

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42 Fonrobert, Menstrual Purity, 130.
43 Ibid., 115-6.
chivalry, profoundly public blood that “maintains or reestablishes social order.” Women’s blood, in contrast, remains hidden and might even “seem subversive of the symbolic system in which heroism is defined.” Thus, while Israel’s role as a physician was probably the most prominent source of his reticence, he was also a man of letters, not at all untouched by trends in popular literature. We will see in a later chapter on genre that Israel’s Esther texts smack of romance elements, the vernacular version in particular. And if, as McCracken reminds us, in courtly literature, the queen does not menstruate, how then could his Esther?

Despite what might be called Israel’s “modernization,” even Christianization, however, ultimately both the text and its author exhibit a brand of ambiguity in terms of gender not unlike what we saw in the previous chapter. That is, that even through a gendered lens, there is tension between acculturation and preserving Jewish identity. For where Israel suppresses certain aspects of women’s physicality and bodily function, as a medieval Christian writer would have been wont to do, in another instance, he actually draws on midrashic commentary dealing specifically with women’s bodies for the purpose of adding color and interest, on the one hand, but perhaps more so for his ongoing religio-cultural didacticism as well.

Later in the Hebrew text, when Esther learns from her handmaidens that they had “heard bitter crying and wailing,” she fathoms that that was the voice of her uncle, and that something was clearly amiss. At that moment, she shakes with terror and, according to Esther Rabbah 8:3, she finds bloodstains and miscarries the fetus in her womb, the offspring of Ahasuerus.

(And Esther’s handmaidens and her eunuchs came and they told her, the Queen shook; many rabbis say that her menstruation broke through and other rabbis say that she miscarried and from the time she miscarried, she didn’t give birth again.)

45 Ibid.
46 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 52v, l. 390.
47 *Esther Rabbah* 8:3.
Israel brings this directly into his Hebrew text:

"ותתחלחל המלכה כי נכרמו רוחמה
אינה שלא בטימה במקום
ויש אומרים הפילה טרם מלאת ימיה
בגלל הדבר הזה."

(And the Queen shook, for she welled up with compassion her period [literally: way] came not at its regular time and there are those who say that she miscarried before the completion of her term because of this.)

In keeping with his earlier model, Israel alters the literal midrashic text to exclude the fact that Esther saw menstrual blood. However, he does embellish his narrative with the specific reference to miscarriage. In much the same way that menstrual references were suppressed in medieval Christian writings, pregnancy, abortion or miscarriage, and nursing were also frequently avoided, for they too are related to a the female’s reproductive system, her body fluids and excessive wetness, and by association, to original sin. The most relevant exception to this was the Virgin Mary, whose maternity was so central to Christian dogma and whose body was often the subject of theological discourse.

Here Israel is inconsistent in his silencing of menstruation and is openly raising the issue of Esther’s pregnancy. That he would have used this particular midrashic reference, I would assert, is neither insignificant nor unintentional. For this topos carries with it the complex rabbinical discussion of Esther’s marriage to Ahasuerus. Not only do the rabbis deliberate about the fact that the king was uncircumcised, thus implicating Esther in a grave sin, but they also propose the even more problematic possibility that she had become pregnant with his child. The concern over Esther’s relations with Ahasuerus fits into the larger matter of her righteousness overall. And indeed, there were different camps among the rabbis. Yet the general consensus excuses Esther on the grounds that she was taken to the king involuntarily, or not for her own benefit. The Kabbalah even suggests that when she entered the king’s

48 My translation.
49 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 52v, ll. 393-6.
50 The Hebrew word הארחת in Jastrow’s Dictionary of the Talmud, and indeed in Hebrew dictionaries, is defined as “path” or “way” and is used euphemistically to refer to a woman’s menstrual cycle.
chamber, God brought a spirit in her place in order to prevent her participation in sinful relations.\textsuperscript{51}

Since Esther’s piety is primary to Israel’s objectives, we might then question why he chose to include this potentially incriminating material in the text. I would suggest that Israel positioned himself among those who saw Esther as blameless in her relationship with the king, that he too saw no compromise to Esther’s righteousness. For here the emphasis lies on her fealty to Mordecai, and even more importantly, to her people. Indeed, the \textit{Megillah} itself tells us:

\begin{quote}
"ויהי, בהשמע דבר - המלך ודתו, ובהקבץ נערות רבות אל - ושושן הבירה, אל - יידי הגי שמר הנשים,\\
ותלקח אסתר אל - בית המלך,\\
אל - יידי הגי שמר הנשים."
\end{quote}\textsuperscript{52}

("And so it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was published, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the castle, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken into the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women.")\textsuperscript{53}

What is key in the phrasing of this verse, as the exegetes point out, is that the our verb is in the passive voice: "Esther was taken," thereby absolving her of any culpability in this relationship, leaving her halakhically (according to Jewish law) untainted. But even if she had not partaken in the choice to go to the king, this still leaves the question of her pregnancy; for it would be natural to assume that she would have been expected to bear a child for him. Indeed, according to one explication, the year-long wait in the harem was not only for the purpose of beautification, but also because the maidens were just at the age of puberty when they were taken in and it was necessary to ensure that any girl who went to the king could bear a child for him, i.e. she had passed menarche.\textsuperscript{54}

Thus while it may not seem so, to include this particular midrashic reference, a reminder of the heroine’s physicality, is actually a strategic maneuver on Israel’s part. For it was imperative to specify both that her pregnancy never came to fruition and that she would never bear the offspring of a gentile. To leave any room for doubt in such a question would

\textsuperscript{52} Esther 2:8.
\textsuperscript{54} Oren, \textit{Embodiment in the book of Esther}, 68.
have been far too dangerous. Indeed, this passage further indicates Esther’s loyalty to Mordecai; for the moment she learned of Mordecai’s grief and the threat to her people, her womb gave way and her attachment was not to the child she carried from her marriage to a non-Jew, but to her kin, and ultimately to God.

We might further reconcile this reference by taking into account Israel’s literary inclinations as well; for depictions of birth are unusual in medieval literary works, though not entirely absent. Moreover, in the romances where scenes of parturition do occur, they are tied to issues of parental lineage and a gendered figuration of bloodlines. Here men’s blood is metonymic, while women’s is literal, reminiscent of the Christian medical model identifying women with corporeality (and her blood responsible for the child’s form) and men with spirit and the higher good. Such literary motifs would have made it all the more important for Israel to assure his audience that Esther did not carry her pregnancy to term. For not only could it undermine his objective of associating Esther with spirit over body, which we will see, but birthing a child fathered by Ahasuerus, would have brought with it the complicated consequences of carrying on his lineage, especially when Jewish law recognizes the child’s religion as that of the mother.

Here as such, what must be emphasized is the ways in which Israel privileges Esther’s piety; it is fundamental to his aims. For Israel there is no argument about her righteousness – even if she had been pregnant with Ahasuerus’ child. For him Esther is the consummate Jewish heroine, a figure to be emulated by other women of her faith, those in his own community surely not withstanding. Throughout the narrative, Israel holds Esther up as an example of female virtue, actually allowing her more leeway than he would any other woman because of this virtue. If she were indeed involved in a forbidden relationship with an uncircumcised non-Jewish man, she had no motivation outside of saving her people. In fact, she is self-sacrificing, not only being compelled to transgress on their behalf, but endangering her own life in order to do so. How then, could she be anything but righteous? Israel even uses the

56 Ibid.
57 This is addressed further in Chapter Four, “A Poem by Many Other Names: On the Mixing of Genres,” where I discuss wisdom literature and Esther as the “woman of valor.”
language of Psalm 22 when he refers to Esther as אילה השחר [‘ayelet ha-shahar], “the hind of dawn,” following the rabbinic exegesis of the biblical text of Tehillim [Psalms]. For the rabbis say that the hind is the most God-fearing of all animals, and that King David foresaw what was to come and “thinking upon Esther, arranged this Psalm “For the leader: upon [‘ayelet ha-shahar].”

Along these lines, I return to Israel’s didactic stance and the authorial choices that support it. If Esther had been carrying the child of Ahasuerus, again, this was attributable only to her obedience to Mordecai and to her concern about the welfare of the Jews. Nor did the rabbinical interpretations of the biblical text find Esther culpable as one “compelled to marry Ahasuerus against her will.” “How is it possible that that righteous woman should be married to to an uncircumcised man?” they ask in Esther Rabbah. “But some bad thing is going to happen to Israel, and they are destined to be saved by her.” In fact, when Israel makes use of the midrashic material on Esther’s miscarriage, he reinforces her honor with the interpolation of a phrase used to describe Joseph in Genesis 43:30, "כי נכמרו רחמיו" (‘For his heart yearned’). The incorporation of this specific phrase, with a slight adjustment for grammatical accuracy (i.e. changing it to the feminine: "כי נכמרו רחמה"), elicits multiple layers of allusion which Israel uses for both moralistic and poetic ends. The most known use of the phrase is its idiomatic meaning “to grow warm and tender,” as it was used in Genesis, to describe Joseph’s reaction upon seeing his brother Benjamin after many years of exile in Egypt. The citation of this idiom, which presumably his audience would have recognized from its original context, allows Israel to endow Esther with a similar emotional reaction of tenderness toward her uncle when she learns of his distress. The Joseph story is one of the earlier biblical narratives to which Esther is often compared; each deals with questions of

58 Ms. Bodleian, heb. e. 10, fol. 58r, l. 869.
60 Ibid., 305.
62 Esther Rabbah commentary on Esther 2:11; English translation: Neusner, 147.
exile and the rise to prominence of a Jewish figure in a foreign court. Moreover, Joseph too was a model of great righteousness. And in fact, according to the *Yalkut Shimoni*, a medieval compilation of rabbinical writings, Esther possessed even more charm and benevolence than Joseph, [“אמר רבה תמר ותאמה יודר מובת”].

Taken individually, the words in this idiom can heighten its emotional tenor, with the root כמר meaning “to grow warm and tender” and rahamim “compassion” or “pity.” However, the former can also be defined as “to grow hot” and the latter in its singular form rahem is a “womb” or “uterus,” which Israel exploits as a complementary pun to the midrash, alluding to the two at once. Esther’s goodness is bolstered by means of this association with Joseph, which in turn justifies including material that deals with female reproductive function and would not compromise the physician’s honor.

The preoccupation with Esther’s piousness pervades Israel’s text. The Hebrew version is particularly dense with such references to Esther, in part because the Judéo-Provençal cuts off just after the audience meets Esther. I would suggest, however, that this is also related to questions of language and audience, which are treated in greater detail in later chapters, but are addressed here briefly. Composition in Hebrew opens up many possibilities for allusion, double-entendre and direct citations from the Bible and rabbinic literature; and while the vernacular might have been more useful for conveying medical information, the Hebrew can be more effective for putting forward religious messages, also allowing for a brand of play that harkens back to a rich body of earlier and contemporaneous Jewish literature.

When Esther first appears on the scene in the Hebrew text, Israel introduces her as in the *Megillah*, with a description of her beauty. However, where Esther 2:7 describes her as of beautiful form and fair to look on,” Israel extends this to (as beautiful as you wish, and to another like her the king

65 *Yalkut Shimoni*, ילקוט שמעוני אסתר רמז תתרמג Bar-Ilan Responsa Project. Computer software database. Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel.
67 Mordecai is a descendant of the tribe of Benjamin (Esther 2:5), thus the connection of Esther and Mordecai to Joseph and Benjamin is significant.
68 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50r, ll. 198-9.
was never betrothed), drawing on rabbinical literature that places her among the four most beautiful women in the world\(^69\) as well as *Esther Rabbah*’s commentary that among all of the Persian and Median girls who gathered, she was most beautiful.\(^70\) Yet Israel does not stop at telling us that she had exceptional beauty, but ascribes to her a stature as elevated as that of the high priest or the *kohen ha-gadol* of the Temple, using the description of the stones of his “breastplate of judgment,” taken directly from *Exodus* 28:17, to refer to Esther’s eyes. "עיניה אודם פטדה וברקת..." \(^71\) (Her eyes were carnelian, topaz and smaragd…) compared with "hổ" אודם פטדה וברקת – הור ההואת (“a row of carnelian, topaz and smaragd shall be the first row…”). \(^72\) Where normally such colors as those of the breastplate stones would not be categorized as attractive for the eyes, what Israel is trying to convey is not necessarily their ocular beauty, but rather a brand of beauty that can be projected only by someone who would be righteous enough to wear them. In doing this, the author not only inscribes Esther’s physical body with metaphorical piety, but also insinuates a visionary office upon the heroine; she is one who realizes a prophecy and perhaps is herself prophet and prophecy. \(^73\)

Thus, while neither Esther’s beauty nor her righteousness is an original Caslarian phenomenon, referring rather to the Hebrew Bible itself and the body of exegetical texts that preceded his compilation, the author does in fact construct his own adaptations to suit his didactic ends. And again, he makes what seem to be calculated decisions about inclusion and omission. In the second hemistich of the same verse, which brings a new spin to the rabbinic motif of Esther’s righteousness using the breastplate stones, Israel extends this trope with a passage from the Babylonian Talmud אסתר ירקרקת היתה וחוט של חסד משוך עליה, (Esther was sallow [greenish] in complexion, [with] a thread of grace drawn about her.)\(^74\) This description of Esther as being pale or sallow is itself a thread that runs through much of the exegetical writings on the *Megillah* from the Talmudic period until the Middle Ages. The rabbis explain that Esther was pale and greenish, but that her beauty derived from her grace

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\(^{69}\) *Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah*, 15a.

\(^{70}\) *Esther Rabbah* ז (9).

\(^{71}\) Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50r, l. 201.


\(^{73}\) This is in keeping with the talmudic passage in *Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah* 14 that places Esther among the seven women prophets: השם ביאתת כי נשים – שרה, מרים, דבורה, חנה, אביגיל, חולדה ואסתר. “Who are the seven women prophets - Sarah, Miriam, Devorah, Hannah, Avigail, Huldah and Esther.”

\(^{74}\) *Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah* 13. My translation.
and goodness. Her Jewish name was Hadassah, meaning “myrtle,” and they ascribe the hue of her skin to the sweetness and loveliness of myrtle leaves. Midrash Panim ‘Aherim says that “the myrtle has a good smell, just like Esther, who performed good deeds; the myrtle does not dry out either in summer or winter, just as the righteous dry up neither in this world nor the world to come.” Israel, in turn, uses this same reference to illustrate that Esther’s beauty is a result of her inner virtue, that the greater beauty comes from within. It is probably for this very reason, that he does not tell us as the source does, that she “obtained favor in the sight of all who looked upon her,” instead he writes, “ואם היתהמעט ירקרקת בשפתותיה חן מוצקת אין.nasa אחרתה沃尔להבוד.” (and even if she was a bit sallow [greenish] she poured grace from her lips there is no other like her in this). Thus where the focus in the Megillah returns to her external features, for Israel her grace comes from inside, it is poured out through her lips. And she is unique, a person rather than simply the object of everyone’s gaze.

What is more, Israel omits any description of the oils and perfumes used, according to the biblical narrative and expounded further in the commentaries, to prepare the girls in the harem before going to see Ahasuerus. While he does relate the length of time for preparation in the harem (one year), and the reason (to make her more lovely), he makes no mention of the oil of myrrh, the sweet odors and ointments of the women. I would suggest several possible explanations for this exclusion, the first tying into the issue of boundary transgression and the avoidance of women’s bodies. Any detail of an act such as anointment or bathing, particularly for cosmetic purposes, would have been crossing a boundary, entering into forbidden territory, as it were, one better left unspoken. What remains once again therefore, is Esther’s righteousness and her modesty, the latter even compared to that of Rachel, one of the four matriarchs.78

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75 Midrash Panim ‘Aherim as quoted in Meir, “Esther: Midrash and Aggadah,” Jewish Women’s Archive.
76 Esther 2:15.
77 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol.50r, ll. 202-4.
78 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah 13.
The popular genre of the *regimen sanitatis* was generally intended for an audience of “one sex,” the masculine, according to Monserrat Cabré.\(^{79}\) Medieval medicine in the Latin school differentiated clearly between the genders, and treated them accordingly, rarely intermingling the care for their respective bodies in their texts.\(^{80}\) And while there did exist a category of women’s medical literature – such as gynecologies in the Graeco-Arabic tradition (via Hippocrates, Galen, Soranus, Dioscorides) in the Middle Ages – another genre aimed particularly at a female audience, grew out of this tradition, starting from about the 13\(^{th}\) century and consisting primarily of compilations based on texts dealing with physical beautification as well as gynecological/obstetric texts.\(^{81}\)

Current scholarship on this literature shows that while neither compilations nor the study of women’s healthcare was a novelty in medieval medicine, this genre was more selective and succinct in the material it presented, with an emphasis on praxis and a lack of theoretical development.\(^{82}\) Caballero-Navas, in her work on medieval Jewish women’s medical literature, states that what was new about this phenomenon was that these texts “draw together a wide range of knowledge on the preservation of health and beauty of the female body and are not only gynecological in nature, but also cover cosmetics and adornment of the female body and some include elements of magic.”\(^{83}\) Since the sources of these compilations were wide-ranging and often conflicting, some even employing information passed on by lay women themselves, they were not homogeneous or reliable as medical texts.\(^{84}\) One series of texts, together referred to as the *Trotula*, composed in Latin in 12\(^{th}\)-century Italy and translated between the 13\(^{th}\) and 15\(^{th}\) centuries into various vernacular languages, including

\(^{79}\) There are examples of *regimina* that were either translated or directly composed for women of the royal class, for instance the vernacular translation of Arnau of Villanova’s *Regimen Sanitatis*, which was commissioned of Berenguer Ça Riera by King Jaume II’s wife, Blanca d’Anjou, who did not know Latin and wanted to partake of the information originally written for her husband. However such cases were a rarity and certainly confined to women in the elite class. Monserrat Cabrè, “From a Master to a Laywoman: A Feminine Manual of Self-Help,” *Dynamis* 20 (2000): 379.


\(^{83}\) Ibid.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., 40.
Catalan, fits neatly into this literary classification and is probably its best known and most studied work.\(^85\) There are, however, other known treatises of this kind, many written in or translated into vernacular languages, as well as a small corpus in Hebrew. Indeed, in his *History of Jewish Gynaecological Texts*, Ron Barkai has identified at least 15 Hebrew treatises of this brand.\(^86\) These types of works, despite demand or necessity, however, were not condoned by members of the medical profession in general, criticized for the very reason that their authors lacked theoretical training and thus the knowledge for proper treatment.

We can, therefore, speculate that Israel - the rationalist physician - would have had little regard for the quality of such literature and would have disapproved of its use for that reason alone. Not only does it deal with “women’s matters,”\(^87\) falling outside of the realm of the masculine medical tradition, to which he was so deeply attached, but the fact that its scientific correctness was in question would surely have given him pause. Yet Israel would have found further grounds, perhaps of even greater magnitude, for concern for the women of his Jewish community, concern that would motivate a response in his Esther texts.

Caballero-Navas, who produced an edition and analysis of a text from this genre, the *Sefer 'Ahavat Nashim* or *Book of Women’s Love*, and other historians of medieval women’s medical literature,\(^88\) have discussed the occurrence of cross cultural exchanges between women and have, moreover, cited gender as one area that facilitated this phenomenon. Indeed, there exists textual evidence of exchange among women in the spheres of family and home life, personal aesthetics and ornamentation, as well as business, health care and medicine. But these scholars have also asserted that a great deal more attention needs to be given to the practical experiences and knowledge of the women themselves, the “weight of ‘orality’”\(^89\) among the women, who rarely recorded these in writing.\(^90\) The similarities


\(^{87}\) Caballero-Navas, *Book of Women’s Love*, 71.

\(^{88}\) Scholars of women’s medicine such as Monica Green and medieval Jewish women in general such as Elisheva Baumgarten.


\(^{90}\) Such scholars as Elisheva Baumgarten in “A Separate People;” Monica Green "Conversing with the Minority: Relations among Christian, Jewish and Muslim Women in the High Middle Ages." *Journal of*
between women’s lives, even across religious lines, their common vernacular, fundamental concerns and day-to-day interactions, are all factors to be taken into account,91 with the existence of texts that attest to female agency and female sources, even when they are not directly named. Moreover, Caballero-Navas has identified parallels in Latin, vernacular and Hebrew works that reveal the probability of significant exchange between Christian, Jewish and even Muslim women in Iberia and southern France.92

In her research, Caballeros-Navas has discussed such texts as the Sefer ’Ahavat Nashim [Book of Women’s Love] and L’ornement des dames [The ornamentation of women], both anonymous collections of recipes and information dealing with women’s health and beauty, the former from Catalonia or Provence and the latter Anglo-Norman, which contain remedies that are not only attributable to women, but that demonstrate a plausible exchange across religious boundaries.93 And while the Sefer ’Ahavat Nashim is believed to be dated to the 13th century, even if its extant 15th-century manuscript were the original, scholars have demonstrated that the interactions represented in it are not unique to that period, but were taking place throughout the high Middle Ages, with the aforementioned high point in the 13th century.94

As an established medical practitioner in the rationalist tradition (albeit a Jewish practitioner who didn’t physically attend university but had an equivalent education), Israel would surely not have endorsed any non-professional dispensing of medical advice; women exchanging information on an informal basis would have been even more problematic. What’s more, such exchanges were occurring across religious lines, which could tempt a Jewish woman to transgress by using impure substances or engaging in forbidden activities. In fact, Sefer ’Ahavat Nashim documents recipes for treating ailments found in the Anglo-Norman manual that call for the use of pork fat, pig’s blood, or other substances which are unequivocally prohibited to Jews.

92 Caballero-Navas, “The Care of Women’s Health,” 146-63 and Book of Women’s Love.
93 Ibid.
94 Cf. Caballero-Navas, Book of Women’s Love and “Care of Women’s Health.”
“To make hair grow anywhere [. Another remedy: Boil parsley juice and pig’s blood with white wine and filter it with water; take the fat that floats, mix it with honey and anoint the head; the hair will grow.”

Such an example, which is by no means unique, says Caballero-Navas, would corroborate the incidence of shared experiences among medieval women of different religions, and would in turn, have provided Israel with further basis, this time moralistic, for censure of these texts. More objectionable still is their inclusion of magic – charms, amulets, and spells – as well as overt discussion of eroticism and sexuality. The *Sefer ‘Ahavat Nashim*, in fact, contains entire sections devoted to the latter and incorporates magical advice throughout.

Returning, therefore, to Israel’s own work, the absence of any elaboration on Esther’s beautification in the harem comes as no great surprise. Nor was he the first Jewish author to object to the matter of women as the source of advice. In fact, the unknown author of the *Sefer ha-Yosher*, or the *Book of Rectitude*, a Hebrew medical encyclopedia written in 13th-century Provence, advised women against seeking out “women caretakers,” arguing that “these women could neither appreciate that a given condition might be derived from a variety of different causes, nor that people had different complexions,” and could therefore administer a potentially harmful cure.

But for Israel the problem was twofold: medical and religious. In the Hebrew version of his Esther romance, as I have suggested, Israel places significant importance upon the heroine’s righteousness; hence his trope of the High Priest’s gemstones as her only adornment sends a very strong message to his audience. Any preoccupation with physical beauty and decoration could not possibly be the mark of a pious woman, let alone the use of information culled from foreign origins. Once again, Israel uses his role of *auctor*, making the most of an opportunity to convey a compelling point about the women in his southern French

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95 Caballero-Navas, *Book of Women’s Love*, 120-1 and “Care of Women’s Health,” 152.
96 Caballero-Navas, “Care of Women’s Health,” 152. She also cites Ziegler’s article, “Steinschneider Revised,” dealing with the use of unkosher substances in the Hebrew texts of the *regimen sanitatis* genre, an article to which I refer in the previous chapter.
98 Caballeros-Navas, “Care of Women’s Health,” 150.
community. He effectively “inscribes” Esther with piety, adorning her not with fine garments or with extravagant cosmetics, but with a symbol of incomparable sanctity, thus a woman to be emulated. To associate Esther with the High Priest of the Temple, to inscribe her with the gemstones of his breastplate, to describe her physical characteristics as analogous to the colors he bears, is to endow her not only with the utmost holiness, but with a status permitted only to a man, a man of high birth and great honor, no less. What is more, Esther is not donning these colors as a result of the application of any external substance, such as make-up or oils, but they are inherently her own; these are the hues of her very eyes and lips, unabated by anything except what God had given her. With this he establishes her and sets her apart as a woman of greatness. Could there be a more potent or persuasive model to which Jewish women should aspire? Could there be a more superlative example of a Jewish woman who preserves her faith and upholds its traditions according to the covenant made with God – even under the most adverse circumstances?

If, as Israel – and many before him – has previously asserted, the Jewish people themselves are the cause of their exile, then surely he would have to address the question of women’s medical manuals not only for their medical inadequacies, but also for the ways in which they could compromise the devoutness of the women who read them, luring them into potential transgressions with the use of magic or the use of substances expressly prohibited to Jews. And indeed, Esther does not engage in any such sinful activity despite the environment in which she finds herself. For not long after we are introduced to her character, with her innate holiness, when she has been wed to the king, Israel assures us of her strict adherence to the mitzvot, which is confirmed in the rabbinical literature to which he so often defers.  

99 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50r, l. 204.  
100 It should be noted that even if the Hebrew text was not formally intended for a female audience by its author, his portrayal of Esther is quite plausibly meant to hold her up as a model for the men, encouraging them to seek such a woman and in turn, to hold her up as a model for Jewish women in the community. I address this question again later below and discuss further questions of audience in the chapters that follow.  
101 See for instance, Braude, “Psalm 22” in The Midrash on Psalms, Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah, etc.
(She made the traditional preparations to observe her holidays, new moons and her Sabbath and to find seven young girls standing by to help keep count. They will work each day and on the seventh they will make the Sabbath; Has there ever been such a wondrous thing? )

Thus there can be no ambiguity as to Esther’s credibility as a Jewish woman, even when she must live in the palace of a non-Jewish king. And as we learn later in Israel’s instructions for the celebration of the Purim festival, Esther, like the prophet Daniel and his three ministers, consumed legumes at the court to observe the laws of kashrut.

(Do according to custom and known traditions Remember the food of Esther and the three nobles Let the children of Israel eat pulses on this night.)

The degree of Esther’s piety in the Hebrew text, as mentioned earlier in this discussion, is more emphatic than in its vernacular counterpart, at least to the extent that is discernable from the fragmentary section that is available to us. As such, it is noteworthy that Israel’s approach to Esther’s beautification in the harem in the Judéo-Provençal version is not suppressed completely, nor is the breastplate imagery used. Instead, it falls somewhere in between the biblical original and Israel’s Hebrew version, with modifications to the former, rather than complete suppression, as in the latter. The Judéo-Provençal account of Esther’s preparation to go to king Ahasuerus has her being rubbed first with amber and musk, then bathed and anointed, unlike Israel’s Hebrew rendering of the narrative, wherein he mentions no such detail of an aesthetic ritual.

102 Ms. Bodleian hebr. e. 10, fol. 50v, ll. 237-40.
103 Ms. Bodleian hebr. e. 10, fol. 68r, ll. 877-80.
104 I have discussed this passage and its connection to the Book of Daniel in the previous chapter, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” beginning on page 87.
“Ester fon mesa enfre cambras.  
Penserlon lei de musc e d’ambrar  
Feron lhi far bons afachamens  
Elavamens e escuramens.”  
(“Esther was placed in the chambers.  
They rubbed her with musk and amber,  
they made her good beauty treatments 
and bathings and cleansings.”))

It is, nevertheless, comparable to what we find in the Megillah:

(When the turn of each and every maiden came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after she [had undergone the ritual treatment] according to the law of the women, twelve months for their anointing to be completed, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odors and ointments of the women.)

Several rather significant questions arise as a consequence of the differences between Israel’s versions relative to the original. Why, for instance, might Israel have made the authorial choices he did? Why is Esther’s righteousness more pronounced in the Hebrew version and why does he expound on her beautification in the vernacular text?

If, as Israel explains in his apologia, the Hebrew text is intended for the Jewish men, specific cosmetic description would be of little interest to them, whereas religious morality would, which could also account for his direction to them to seek such women through his depiction of Esther in this version. What’s more, again in terms of his apologetic remarks, Israel states that he had written his vernacular text for a different audience, one that would include women and “others.” Even if there were Jewish scholarly men among them, with the diversity of his intended Judéo-Provençal audience, Israel would have been concerned with a wider appeal. Surely the women he wanted to reach would appreciate the cosmetic details; and overall they would lend more entertainment value to the text, without any reference to “the law of the women” or the “women’s way,” thereby maintaining his silence about women’s bodily functions or fluids. The preparations here are purely superficial and would

106 Esther 2:12.  
107 My translation.  
108 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, ll. 9-11.
not compromise his status as a physician even if there were indeed scholarly men among his more diverse audience.

It is of interest to consider why, when Israel did in fact address the issue of beautification in the vernacular romance, he might have substituted amber and musk for the myrrh used in the biblical narrative. The women’s health and beauty manuals, such as the Book of Women’s Love, list a number of recipes that call for amber or musk, and the two together, sometimes in combination with other substances. The functions range from cosmetic purposes to remedies for physical ailments, spells dealing with love and sexuality and even for matters related to reproduction. Now, although Israel is likely to have disapproved of this type of literature, particularly when some of the recipes are magical in nature, referring to them in his romance could well appeal to the women in his audience. For, clearly, since much of this literature was geographically specific, presumably the substances they recommend would have been available. And it could therefore be conjectured that the women in his community were familiar with and making use of them. Moreover, since generically the vernacular text fits more into the realm of romance and entertainment, Israel might have felt freer to veer slightly from piety in it. In any case, Israel places Esther in a passive role in this scene, as he does in the Hebrew – Esther was placed in the chambers; she was bathed and anointed. Thus she did not actively make the choice to be “dolled up;” rather she was not only compelled to do so by the circumstances, but these circumstances under which her devout behavior was being somewhat compromised were ultimately for the good of all the Jewish people. Drawing on the popular culture of his audience in this instance would not convey an improper message. What’s more, neither of these substances would have been frowned upon by a physician; in fact both amber and musk are found in Dioscorides’ Materia Medica for medicinal uses.  

It is not the actual substance, then, that would have been problematic, but the manner in and the end to which it was being employed. It should be noted that myrrh is also used in a variety of recipes in the women’s manuals, so the motivation for replacing the biblical phraseology remains somewhat mysterious.  

110 Amber and myrrh are both tree resins, which could have some bearing due to their similarities. I hope to discover other possible explanations for this substitution.
One additional point should be made regarding what I have proposed to be Israel’s disregard for the popular women’s health and beauty care manuals, and that is, alongside the medical inaccuracies, there is a lack of correctness in the Hebrew translations. One of the criteria, according to Maimonides, for any translation of texts from Latin or Arabic is that it precisely convey the appropriate meaning of the original language and, at the same time, maintain a high standard for the quality of the Hebrew rendering.\(^{111}\) The women’s manuals, it would seem, are characteristic of late medieval Hebrew translations, which as previously noted, according to Lola Ferre, used loan words and transliterations to compensate for the linguistic limitations of the Hebrew.\(^{112}\) However, she adds that in the effort to adapt the Hebrew, “the authors paid little attention to style and created grammatical irregularities, making the criterion of utility more important than linguistic purity.”\(^{113}\) In fact, Caballero-Navas charts a number of recurrent grammatical errors in the *Book of Women’s Love*, such as the lack of agreement in gender and number, or nouns and verbs.\(^{114}\)

Despite the imperfections in Israel’s text, some of which might well be scribal rather than authorial anomalies, the breadth and knowledge of his usage, as well as his training and the Maimonidean influence on his work, suggest that respect for the quality of the Hebrew would have held some import for him. The fact, therefore, that these texts perpetuated a linguistic devaluation of the Hebrew, would have provided further cause for his critique against them. Moreover, the more pious of his sister texts, the Hebrew, the sacred language of the Torah, makes no mention of the use of cosmetics, which could in turn be construed as an expression of vanity, a most unholy posture.

Israel’s didactic agenda in terms of gender and the need for Jewish women of his day to stand firm in their proper comportment brings us back to his authorial stance. For here again he

\(^{111}\) García-Ballester, Ferre and Feliu, “Jewish Appreciation,” 92.
\(^{112}\) See Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles.” See also Lola Ferre’s “La terminología médica en las versiones hebreas de textos latinos.”
\(^{113}\) Caballero-Navas, *Book of Women’s Love*, 16.
\(^{114}\) Caballero-Navas dedicates a section in her first chapter of the *Book of Women’s Love* on the linguistic problems of the text, which include such phenomena as the disagreement between the gender of nouns, adjectives and pronominal suffixes (for example, "כף קטנה" for “cullera petita,” [teaspoon]), transliteration of the Romance preposition *de* (“ל or il) used as a substitution for the Hebrew *של* [of] (for example, “גומא דר גרגן” *gom’a de gargan* for “Gum dragant.”). Many of these errors, she proposes, are due to the influence of the Romance language. See Chapter 1.2, “Linguistic Analysis,” *Book of Women’s Love*, 15-23.
assumes an instructive role, emphasizing the lack of religious adherence as a key factor in the exiled condition of his community. And in this domain as well, we revisit forms of hybridity that bespeak tensions over cultural identity. Indeed, Israel makes much of Esther’s righteousness, holding her up as an exemplum to his coreligionists. Yet this gesture in fact serves multiple purposes in the text. His authorial choices reflect a desire to convey some sense of Jewish morals to his audience, but they also reflect adaptation to the ways of his non-Jewish contemporaries. I would argue, moreover, that there are complex layers of political conformity involved in this dichotomy which help him to negotiate his place in both worlds at once.

In his adoption of the prevailing convention of silencing, Israel both subtly communicates his professional views, and at the same time implicitly responds to aspects of anti-Jewish polemics as well. As discussed earlier in the present chapter, the “other” is so often associated with impurity, both intraculturally (women as “other” within a given culture, for example) as well as between groups. While this vilification of the “other” was not new to Middle Ages, the new knowledge made available to Europeans during this period led to what Alexandra Cuffel refers to as scientific discourse which rested on a “long tradition of religious polemic based on scatology, impurity, blood lust and expectations of divine vengeance.” And she continues:

“These threads of ‘science’ and polemic intertwined so that old ways of thinking about the religious other as spiritually and physically sick were reaffirmed and augmented according to the new standards of scholastic knowledge and inquiry emerging in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.”

Such tactics were employed by the three religious groups during this time, Christian, Muslim and Jewish. However, the role of Jews in economic and social matters made them a particular threat to Christians, who identified them within the framework of the medical polemic, targeting them as sickly and contagious, specifically linking them with blood and discharge. Jewish men were particularly prone to being stereotyped and branded with ‘female’ characteristics, namely having voracious sexual appetites and, even more

115 Cuffel, Gendering Disgust, 156-7.
significantly, menstruation. This feminizing trend began much earlier, becoming a motif in Christian religious literature. Caesarius of Heisterbach, in the 12th century, for instance refers to an illness with which Jewish men are annually afflicted, “a bloody flux” that marks the Passion during which their ancestors afflicted Christ with stigmata, a stereotype that derived from the Christian perception of how Jews thought about Christ’s birth, embodiment and crucifixion. The situation worsened when this “feminizing” phenomenon could be supported by scientific theories. Jewish bodies, female as well as male, were, according to the prevailing Christian medical literature, “in need of the purging of corrupt blood,” and according to Cuffel, there was often confusion between hemorrhoidal bleeding in men and menstruation. The former ailment was connected to melancholia and traits customarily deemed “feminine,” the conflation of which contributed to the feminizing of Jewish men.

The silencing of references to blood and discharge in this respect suggests Israel’s cultural ambivalence. He is at once establishing the influence of contemporaneous medical norms and at the same time implicitly rejecting their negative association with the Jews. For, even if it is quite improbable that his Christian colleagues would have been exposed to his Esther texts, Israel was keeping up with his profession and at the same time preserving his honor as a Jew. Cuffel tells us, moreover, that some Jewish intellectuals took on the Christian polemic that linked Jews with disease, darkness, disfigurement and femininity. Some explained this adoption of “femaleness” as a metaphor for financial weakness and disempowerment in exile, as in the case of David Kimhi. Others linked it to the notion of Jewish sin as the cause of exile itself. Others still, saw it in terms of the Jewish nation as God’s beloved in the Song of Songs 1:5, "שחורה אני ונאוה", “I am black, but comely.” I would suggest that just as he, a rationalist physician, would surely not condone such Christian polemics, he would, by the same account, not wish to encourage its espousal by his Jewish peers, even when it was an attempt to overturn derogatory stereotypes. Whether deliberately or inadvertently,

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116 Ibid., 158-9.
118 Ibid. There was a general belief that Jews mocked Christian rites and much literature existed depicting Jews as desecrating the eucharist and bleeding in response to Christ’s stigmata.
119 Cuffel, Gendering Disgust, 175-6.
120 Ibid., 190.
121 Ibid., 190-1.
therefore, Israel is defending the reputation of Jewish men against polemics. In fact, the same motivation could account for his absenting of the aggadic anecdote in *Genesis Rabbah* that confers upon Mordecai the ability to suckle Esther when he adopted her as an infant and could not find a wet nurse, a scenario which would fuel this notion of the femininized Jewish man.

There is further evidence that Israel was perhaps responding to the typecasting of Jews as predisposed to contagion and abnormal discharges, this time not related to bleeding, but to another bodily function. A number of different midrashic commentaries discuss Esther’s reactions when she learns of Haman’s decree against the Jews and Mordecai’s grief over it, one of which is addressed earlier in this chapter, namely that Esther miscarried out of fear. The same aggadic source states that Esther’s trepidation at that moment was so great that it caused her to lose control of her bowels. Again, the question arises as to why Israel chose not to incorporate this aggadah into his text, given his inclination to embellish it with midrashic material. Here as well, I would propose that this is precipitated by his dual loyalty to his people and his professional ideals.

One of the most rabid Jewish criticisms on the question of Christ’s incarnation rests upon his gestation in Mary’s womb. How could God possibly reside for nine months in a woman’s womb? For not only were its contents ritually impure, but its proximity to the intestines meant that Christ would be subjected to her unexcreted waste. Thus the mention of this, particularly in connection with Esther having been pregnant, might have suggested a parallel between her and Mary, both endowed with the responsibility of salvation. We could interpret this again, not only as a silencing of the feminine, but also a subtle hesitation to engage in polemics, in this instance, anti-Christian polemics diffused by his coreligionists. Such an identification between the two women could have been construed as mockery. At the same time, it could also have raised Jewish eyebrows that the figure of Esther, one of their great heroines, should in some way be compared with the mother of Christ. Indeed, despite the

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123 *Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah* 15a.

inherent polemics of the Purim story, despite the fact that it is a call for Jewish salvation, Israel does not overtly politicize his adaptation. For much the same way as he avoids anti-Jewish rhetoric, the didactic tenor he adopts is not anti-Christian, per se, but strangely bi-cultural.

To reframe the omission of this midrash, I would like to return momentarily to Esther’s sanctity. For connecting a female personage as important as Esther with excrement would be distasteful at the very least, especially when she is intended to serve as the model our author sets her up to be. His attempt to ground her in holiness, to elevate her to the level of the Temple High Priest, would surely be frustrated by demonstrating that she has lost control over her bodily functions, rendering her a person just like any other, a woman just like any other.

The risk of compromising Esther’s pious stature leads us to a novel adaptation (rather than exclusion, in this case) of rabbinical exegesis in the text, one which further deals with the embrace of ascetic values over carnality and base concerns. The commonly held view in the Middle Ages assumed women to possess an insatiable sexual appetite, due at least in part to their inferior physiology. The function of the uterus was such that it needed to “be fed,” a metaphor to which I shall return. The womb or vas was receptive, passive, as by metonymy was woman. In the Galenic sense, according to Cadden, “it draws to itself the male seed - in more colloquial sense came to regard woman as craving pleasures of the flesh.” When, in the Megillat Esther 5:2, Esther approaches the king without having been called to him, she finds favor in his eyes, and Ahasuerus extends his golden scepter to her, thereby granting her permission to approach.

(“And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight; and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. And Esther drew near, and touched the [head] of the scepter.”)\(^{126}\)

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125 Cadden, *Sex Difference*, 178.
In its primary, unadulterated form, this verse is already rife with sexual allusion: the scepter as phallus, with Esther touching its head. So for Israel, for whom the biblical heroine’s righteousness was so critical in 14th-century Provence, the need to modify the source text in this case would have been essential; for Esther could become prey to accusations that she does not necessarily belong in a category of her own, but rather, that she is, like most women, ever ready for carnal indulgence. The Babylonian Talmud softens the original somewhat, and at the same time introduces divine intervention, explaining that the king’s reaction was abetted by three angelic messengers.

"כראות המלך את אסתר המלכה אמר רבי יוחנן ג' מלאכי השרת נזדמו לה当时 השם של אחד שהגביה את צוארה ואחד שמשך חוט של חסד עליה ואחד שמתח את השרביט וכמה אמר רבי ירמיה שתי אמות היה והעמידו על שתים עשרה ואמרי לה על שש עשרה ואמרי לה על עשרים וארבע במתניתא תנא על ששים."

("And it happened when the king saw Esther the queen. Said Rabbi Yohanan: three angels came to help her at the same time: one angel made her head erect, one who endowed her with charm, and one who made longer the scepter which the king stretched out to her. How much did it become longer? Says Rabbi Jeremiah: It was two ells long and became twelve ells long. And others say sixteen, and others twenty four and in a Baraita we learn sixty.")

Here the imagery is equally sexualized, with the symbol of the phallus not only being extended, but its actual length the subject of rabbinic discourse. Nevertheless, the sexual overtone is mitigated by the fact that this was an angelic act, one that was divinely initiated. In other words, Esther’s role in the scene is less active, thus lifting at least a portion of the burden of potential transgression from her, and at the same time taking back the agency that the original text had afforded her.

Israel’s account of this interaction is different still; he draws on both the biblical story and its talmudic interpretation, but goes a step further to preserve Esther’s modesty; for when the king extends his scepter in Israel’s text, Esther does not touch it. An angel does arrive to help her to stand after her three-day fast, and another two hold her up on either side. Then a fourth comes to extend Ahasuerus’ scepter.

127 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah 15b.
(And on the third day she rose from her fast
and one angel lifted her up
and his assistant at her temples, like a pomegranate split open
one cherub on this side and one cherub on the other side:

And she stood in the entrance to the outer courtyard
and the king said, pleasant and delicate Esther
come, my spouse, sit on my right side and please take this scepter.)

However, this time rather than taking the scepter herself, she sent her handmaid to take it:

(Another angel extended his scepter
and she sent her handmaiden and [s]he took it
And they said that they didn’t know what it is
but surely God is in this place:)

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129 In this verse Israel has the king addressing Esther in the masculine form of the imperative, namely, שב instead of שבי, and קח instead of קחי. While there are certainly issues of gender that arise from this, there are also important issues about language. As such, I have chosen to discuss the few such anomalies in Israel’s text in the chapter that focuses on the latter, rather than in the present chapter. I have pointed put earlier in this chapter, that such phenomena occur in general in the later Middle Ages – and that they are especially interesting in the context of the manuals for women, but I elaborate on the phenomenon in general in Chapter Three, “We Are What We Speak.”

130 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 53v, ll. 477-8

131 Much of the language from this passage is taken from Song of Songs 4, the phrases כפלח הרימון, רקתה, רעיתי.

132 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 53v, ll. 485-8.

133 In this verse, the masculine continues to be used, even to describe the action done by Esther’s handmaiden: יקחה.
Thus with this seemingly minor adaptation, Israel in fact changes the dynamics of Esther’s relationship to the king. No longer is she alone with the king, which in itself is a statement of her modesty, but when his scepter is extended, she herself does not touch it, lest she compromise her purity. With the charge of eroticism in both the original verse as well as its extrapolation, clearly Israel felt it necessary to temper Esther’s involvement in any questionable actions. Consequently, the heroine remains a positive example both by preserving her religious rectitude, and also by rising above the negative typecast of women as sexually aggressive and insatiable.134

Driving home the significance that Israel places on this act in his text, moreover, is the biblical citation he uses to close the verse, taken directly from Genesis 28:16. It is this that Jacob exclaims when he awakens from the dream that would foretell the destiny of the Jewish people "אכן יש ייpaquev המה, והמביר לא ידעתי." ("Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not.") At the time of this vision, Jacob is on his way to the home of Laban, in Paddan-aram, where he will marry and father the nation of Israel. He stops to sleep when the sun has set, and proceeds to dream of a ladder with angels ascending heavenward and descending to this place where he lay. God himself then comes to Jacob and tells him that the land upon which he slept would be given to him and his children, and that no matter where they should wander, they would be blessed. Moreover, God promises him: “And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest, and will bring thee back into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” 135 Thus although this adaptation to the Esther source text is relatively brief, and the citation from Genesis amounts to no more than five words in the Hebrew, it is packed with meaning and relevance. Israel is “modernizing” the original narrative to make it particularly relevant to his community in exile. God has, after all, vowed to Jacob that he would return his people to that holy place, no matter where they should find themselves; therefore even the Jews in southern France could see the fulfillment of God’s promise if they remain loyal to his
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134 It should be noted that what follows directly after the discussion of the scepter’s length in the talmudic treatment is a comparison to the handmaid(אמה) of Pharoah’s daughter, whose arm is extended when she reaches out to take the basket of Moses from the water. I would conjecture that perhaps Israel was inspired by the comparison and chose to use a similar idea in his text, albeit for other purposes.
135 Genesis 28:15.
commandments and the teachings of the Torah. Esther’s righteous example here carries with it tremendous responsibility not only historically, but in the present – Israel’s present – as well.

For the most part in the current discussion, my focus has been on Israel’s exemplification of Esther for the Jewish women of his community. In this he follows the lead of his biblical source, then embellishing it with rabbinic expansions as well as modifications of his own. Thus the Jewish heroine of his story typifies the idealized aspects of the feminine. The counterpoint to this, representing the least desirable aspects of the feminine, comes in his treatment of her non-Jewish predecessor, Vashti. Of course, the polarization of these two figures is neither unique nor innovative in Israel’s retelling of the biblical story. However, it is, once again, the authorial choices, the how’s and the why’s of the inclusions, the adaptations, the extrapolations, and the resulting revelations about self and communal identity that are so compelling.

Israel approaches his Vashti in much the same way as he does his other characters, drawing heavily on midrashic interpretation to enliven the relatively moderate and brief depiction of her in the biblical tale. Since her appearance comes early in the narrative, there is a limit to how much can be done with her character. Nevertheless, he uses these limitations to his benefit in order to effectively place her in opposition to his Esther and thereby strengthen, and perhaps expand, his didactic objectives.

The rabbinical position on Vashti is not consistent in terms of her refusal to appear before his guests when summoned by King Ahasuerus. In the Megillah itself, the king orders his ministers to bring Vashti before him so that he can show her beauty to his guests:

"להביא את ושת המלכה, בת מלך-בכתר מלכות: להראות העמים והשרים את יפיה, כי טובת מראה נמה."  

(“…to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the royal crown, to show the peoples and the princes her beauty; for she was fair to look on.”)

136 I treat the Vashti episode again in the chapters that follow.
137 Esther 1:11.
The Sages expand on this verse, interpreting it to mean that Vashti was to appear only with her royal diadem – nothing more - that is, naked but for her crown,\(^{138}\) which carried on as a tradition in subsequent exegetical literature. The Babylonian school tends to portray Vashti in a negative light, asserting that the king’s demand for her nudity was recompense for having compelled the daughters of Israel to work naked on the Sabbath.\(^{139}\) The Babylonian sages liken her to the contemporaneous Babylonian woman, whom they saw as promiscuous and immoral. The Palestinian or Erets Yisra’el tradition, on the other hand, takes a less critical, almost complimentary stance, positing her refusal as an act of modesty and preservation of honor since she would not consent to participate in licentious activities or behaviors. Despite its more accepting, less demonizing stance, ultimately even the Palestinian school regards her as inherently evil since she did not permit her husband, Ahasuerus, to rebuild the Jewish Temple that her grandfather, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, had destroyed.\(^{140}\)

In his romances, Israel does incorporate something of both traditions in his depiction of Vashti, however his bias certainly tends more toward the Babylonian and the unfavorable aspect of how she is treated in the Palestinian Talmud. In fact, much of his rhetoric about Vashti is directly drawn from the Babylonian Talmud, which shows no leniency toward her behavior, but rather accuses her of immodesty and an immoral purpose equal to that of her husband.

(She also had intent for an immoral deed the husband between the old pumpkins, his wife between the young ones. And the heavens revealed her offense and one did not come close to the other:)\(^{142}\)

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\(^{138}\) *Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah* 12b.

\(^{139}\) Ibid.


\(^{141}\) Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 49r, II.85-8.

\(^{142}\) "היא גם היא לדבר עבירה נמכת איהו ביקרי ואתתיה כי בוצינא ומשמים גלו את עונה ולא קריב זה אל זה ".
Tractate Megillah 12b in the Babylonian Talmud explains that when the king is remorseful about his punishment of Vashti,

"שניהן לדבר עבירה נתכוונו..."

(“They both had intentions for immoral deeds.”)

The Babylonian Talmud also attributes Vashti’s refusal to appear naked before Ahasuerus and his guests not to modesty or to a desire to act appropriately. The rabbis say that she did in fact wish to appear, but could not because she had an outbreak of leprosy, a punishment from God for her evil-doings. Indeed, Israel follows suit with slight adjustments.

"דכאה אלהים בשחרית פורחת..."

(God afflicted her with an outbreak of boils…)

"א"ר יוסי בר חנינא מלמד שפרחה בה צרעת במתניתא תנא באGabriel ועשה לה זנב"

("Rabbi Jose bar Hanina said: this teaches that leprosy broke out on her…. It was taught that Gabriel came and fixed a tail on her.")

And where the Talmud has Vashti affixed with a tail, Israel says that “there are those who say she has one horn growing on her forehead,”

"וייש אומרים קרן אחת במצחה צומחת"

(perpetuating the rabbinic explication that renders her - the woman who the king calls the most beautiful woman in all of Medea and Persia - monstrous. Whereas he inscribes his Esther’s face with the a beauty born of her piety and warranting the stones of the High Priest’s breastplate, Israel inscribes Vashti’s face with a monstrosity born of evil, further warning his readers:

142 Translation of the Aramaic from Marcus Jastrow’s Dictionary of the Talmud, which explains the pumpkin metaphor to mean “a faithless husband makes a faithless wife.” 148. The pumpkin metaphor is cited again from The Babylonian Talmud’s Tractate Sota 10a

143 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah 12b.
144 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 49r, l. 89.
145 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah 12b.
147 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 49r, l. 90.
(And let this be a stumbling block for her and a waste tin for her shamefacedness on this day:)

Her refusal was motivated by vanity, and in her case, as in Esther’s, that which lies beneath, her moral character, is what influences her external appearance to the opposite effect.

As mentioned above, there are those in the rabbinic treatment of Vashti who perceive her outrage at the king to be praiseworthy; for despite her own failings, she defends her honor and scorns her husband’s unethical demand. It is common in Purim literature that Ahasuerus is portrayed as foolish, indecisive and generally lacking in uprightness. For, it is he who had yielded to Vashti in not rebuilding the Temple for the Jews, and later was complicit with Haman in the plot for their destruction. When Vashti speaks up for having been dishonored, this affirms the claims regarding the king’s nature. Thus she is permitted to have some degree of agency without being condemned for it.

Israel, too gives Vashti agency, but in his telling of the story, she is not wise, trying to convince Ahasuerus by offering hints about his unsuitable behavior, but rather vain and disobedient.

"..."149

(She dared, for she had a change of heart…)

And while he does have her use some of the same argumentation as in the midrashim, she goes so far as to call him “crazy,” insulting her husband, who is king in spite of his shortcomings.

148 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 49r, ll. 91-2.
149 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 49r, l. 93.
150 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 49r, ll. 94-6.
(And she said, ‘my father’s steward why did he come to humiliate me this crazy man?’)  

It is noteworthy that Israel gives Esther agency to speak out to the king further on in the text as well, in a scene not found in any of the rabbinic literature. Here Esther also refuses Ahasuerus when he questions her lineage and family. Esther, however, is not rash or angry when she responds, being upstanding as she is. Instead she remains obedient and loyal to Mordecai, who told her that she must keep her identity hidden, and answers the king with great respect.

"אדני המלך זכה במקחך  
הסר כעס מלבך ומשלו ברוחך  
ועמי ובית אבי אל תרבה שיחך  
ל德拉 עו"  

(My lord, the king, take control of yourself.  
Let go of anger from your heart and think with your mind.  
Don’t continue to dwell on my ancestry or that of my people:)

The king responds in kind:

"הозвращает אם במשפחתך אין מלך ואין שר  
הנך רעיית אחותי השכל בת מוסר  
וכל מדה כבודה בך לא תחסר  
ל德拉 עו"  

(He replied to her, if there is no king or prince in your family behold you are my beloved and my sister; the intellect is the daughter of instruction and you have not been lacking in any noble characteristic from the time you came to me until today:)

The difference is striking both in how Esther speaks to the king as well as his manner of response. Both female figures take action, speaking up to the most powerful man in the realm. But where Vashti speaks haughtily, with arrogance and insults against the king, Esther is anything but proud in her manner. She lives up to her reputation, addressing

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151 L. 94, "בר אהרורייריה אמא " my father’s steward" comes verbatim from the associated passage in Babylonian Talmud. Tractate Megillah 12b.
152 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50v, ll. 213-16.
153 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50v, ll. 217-20.
Ahasuerus with honor, calling him “my Lord,” fending off his interrogation in such a way that she appears submissive to him in spite of her actual disobedience, all the while maintaining her sincerity and most importantly, her fealty to Mordecai and her people.

As a consequence, Ahasuerus not only accedes to her, but finds her praiseworthy; and this not for anything superficial, but rather for her comportment and her character. Not only does he show his admiration for Esther, but Israel has him address her using the language of the Song of Songs, as the lover to his beloved, [“ra’ayati ’ahoti”] “my spouse, my sister,” suggesting a level of depth and intimacy which borders on the sacred. Indeed, in the allegorical interpretation of this biblical text, the lover is God and the beloved the nation of Israel, which is in accordance with how Israel would like us to understand Esther, both as God’s beloved, a female embodiment of holiness, and as a manifestation of what the Jewish people could and should be.

Vashti, on the other hand, is insolent and overt in her defiance, which incites the king’s wrath and garners a severe penalty - the loss of her life. With the insertion of the exchange between Esther and the king, Israel creates an opening to showcase her righteousness, and in turn sets up another interesting analogy that becomes part of his didactic aim. For Vashti, the non-Jewish wife, acts out; and when she does not comply with the king’s wishes, he is moved to rage and she is punished with death. Esther, the Jewish wife – though the king does not know her religion, the audience does – acts with grace and nobility; yet when she flouts the wishes of the king, he is moved to compassion and exacts no penalty whatsoever. In fact, it is at this point in the text, that he takes Esther as his bride.

(He placed the royal diadem on her head and a wreath…)

It is clear that Israel wishes to align Esther, representing the Jewish woman, with the notion of obedience, in particular when it relates to her association with Mordecai. We find indications to this effect even in very subtle changes from the Megillah. For example, when Esther is introduced to the reader and her description given, we are told that “there is

154 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50v, l. 221.
no other like her in this thing.”  "אין אחרת ולחה בהד".  This is followed directly by a line that originates in the _Megillah_, but is changed ever so slightly, by our medieval author:

"מאמר מרדכי אסתר עשתה ומעמה ומלדה לא רצתה לנהל כן מפומי גרהו ולא תגידי את דברנו זה:"

(What Mordecai said Esther did; and she did not wish to tell of her people or her kindred because she had been charged by him do not tell what we speak about:)

Whereas in the source biblical text :

"לא הגידה אסתר את עמה ואת מולדתה: כי מרדכי צוה עלי ולא תגידי את דברנו זה:"

("Esther did not make known her people nor her kindred; for Mordecai had charged her that she should not tell.")

Such a modification would seem to be inconsequential, for the meaning remains essentially the same. I would argue, however, that by making the shift into the passive voice, Israel emphasizes Mordecai as the originator of the command, thereby shifting the power that much more into his hands, a fact which is affirmed by Esther’s explanation to the king that she must not reveal her identity.

It is certainly not difficult to comprehend Israel’s motivation for Esther’s complicity when he is following the biblical narrative. However, the emendations to both Esther and Vashti, in particular the enhancement of their respective moralities, that is, the amplification of Esther’s obedience and her counterpart Vashti’s disobedience, are meaningful for his purposes of instruction as the text’s _auctor_. They are, I suggest, germane to the time and place of composition, indicative perhaps of a greater socio-cultural phenomenon tending towards acculturation.

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155 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50r, l. 204.
156 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50r, ll. 205-8.
157 _Esther_ 2:10.
We have already seen that there was concern over Jewish women’s intercultural exchange with regard to the health and beauty manuals both in the interest of avoiding contravention of halakhic standards, and for the sake of preserving their modesty and religious propriety as well. Indeed, despite the existence of sumptuary laws meant to deter Jewish women from adopting the clothing styles of Christian women, despite the various restrictions on Jewish communities, there was at the same time laxity in their enforcement. Day-to-day interactions, moreover, rendered interreligious and cross-cultural influence all but inevitable. So much was this the case, that it became the source of great anxiety for the Jewish authorities, who were vocal about maintaining communal boundaries, with perhaps the most problematic breaches being of a sexual nature and those involving intermarriage.\footnote{Jonathan Ray, “Beyond Tolerance and Persecution: Reassessing our Approach to Medieval "Convivencia," \textit{Jewish Social Studies (New Series)} 11.2 (2005): 4-6.}

While intermarriage itself would not have been possible in Christian-ruled lands, scholars have shown medieval rabbinic apprehension about excessive social contact, and “the seductiveness of gentile society, and of gentile women in particular.”\footnote{Ibid., 5.} It was, moreover, a common topos in biblical literature, which Israel adopts in his texts. Yet the concern over partnerships with non-Jews, above all those that involve Jewish men and gentile women, date back to the Mishnah and Talmud, wherein the rabbis warn explicitly against such relations. The most commonly iterated fear revolves around the question of menstrual purity, or more precisely its lack, among non-Jewish women; for this would invariably lead to further, more severe forms of sin.\footnote{Scholars such as Yom Tov Assis, David Nirenberg, Jonathan Ray, for example, document that sexual encounters across religio-cultural lines were fairly common. The very notion of miscegenation was a great threat to Jewish identity and harkens back to passages throughout the Tanakh, as we will see. I discuss this question again in the chapters that follow, in particular with a view to linguistic purity. See Chapter Three, “We Are What We Speak.” beginning on page 153.}

That such a phenomenon existed in southern France and Spain during the later Middle Ages is attested to in the halakhic literature of the period as well.\footnote{Cuffel, \textit{Gendering Disgust}, 56.} Moreover, in this setting, concern over miscegenation was exacerbated by pressures for conversions, and the Jewish authorities certainly addressed these issues. The Kabbalists, spoke openly against
intermarriage, reverting to the ancient argument that since non-Jewish women did not observe the laws of ritual purity, Jewish men would turn to the practice of idolatry.\textsuperscript{163}

Indeed, the disquiet over sexual contact which oversteps social limits is echoed in the Christian literature of the day as well,\textsuperscript{164} and it can be attributed in part to communal integrity and the notion of cultural pollution. And while historical research had long focused on Christian fears of infiltration by the minority other, today it is commonly recognized that such fears were not exclusive to the dominant social group; religious leaders in the Jewish communities expressed similar fears. For, otherness is by no means reserved for the minority, particularly where religious mores were at risk of compromise or contamination. Bearing this in mind, we return to Israel, whose desire to discourage just such a crossing of bounds is expressed in part through the two primary female characters, Esther and Vashti. We can infer Israel’s unease over miscegenation in his community in the very first lines of the text, couched as a linguistic reference in his apologia, where he states that he wrote the two versions of his text for distinct audiences.

(I succeeded to elucidate this epistle first and foremost in the vernacular for the speakers of the vernacular, children and women, grandchildren and great grandchildren, and the rest. This second is in the Hebrew for the Jewish men, the work of my hands, in which I glory. Keep silence and listen, Israel, on this very day:)

Needless to say, this passage is laden with allusion; while it might appear to be a straightforward explanation on the author’s part, it raises question after question about language, audience and intent. Given its inherent complexity, I will, as such, be exploring this passage in much greater detail in the subsequent chapters of this work. Here, however, I introduce it specifically for its relation to gender and the hints it offers about miscegenation.

\textsuperscript{163} Koren, “Menstruant as Other,” 34 and 40. In Christian lands, moreover, intermarriage would have required that the Jewish spouse be baptized.

\textsuperscript{164} Cf. for instance, Cuffel, \textit{Gendering Disgust}, Elliot, \textit{Fallen Bodies}.

\textsuperscript{165} Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 48r, ll. 9-12. See my discussion of this passage as it relates to genre in Chapter Four, “A Poem by Many Other Names,” pg. 193.
in the community. For, Israel creates a patent demarcation in terms of both gender and religion. Not only does he prescribe a different readership for his vernacular and his Hebrew versions, whose multiple hierarchies favor Hebrew-speaking men, but within the confines of the vernacular text’s audience, Israel also implies a distinction that supersedes the gender question of Jewish versus non-Jewish women.

In various places in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the rabbinic literature we find reference to children and women using the same idiom, taf ve-nashim, ("טאф והנשים") including Megillat Esther 3:13 and 8:11. It is not uncommon, nor is the combination nin ve-nekhed ("녕ה והכסד"). We also find the idiom nin ve-nekhed u-she’ar ("녕ה והכסד והשאר") in Isaiah 14:22, when the prophet foretells the Messiah’s salvation of the Jewish nation from the exile brought upon it for having strayed from God’s commandments; a reiteration with obvious relevance to the circumstances of Israel’s own exiled community. It is in Israel’s use of these familiar phrasings with the addition of the word le’ozot that calls attention to his apologia. For he indicates two different groups of women among his audience, making a distinction between nashim ("נשים") and le’ozot ("לעוזות"). The word nashim is the generic word for women; le’ozot, on the other hand, is more specifically derived from the Hebrew לעז, which stands for לשון עם זר translated literally as “the tongue of a foreign nation,” here presumably referring to the local vernacular. However, where he indicates the speaker of a foreign language in the apologia, he uses the feminine plural form of the word, thus implying that these are female speakers of the vernacular, separate from the other women who he calls nashim. This, in turn, leads to the possibility that he was addressing the Jewish women in his audience as nashim, and the non-Jewish women as le’ozot, bringing with it further possibilities.

Here we return to the role of the two queens in Israel’s text, who are intended as exempla of two moral poles: Jewish purity and non-Jewish impurity. Cuffel points back to the Babylonian Talmud tractate ‘Avodah Zarah [Idol Worship] wherein “daughters of idolaters [gentile women] are niddah [ritually impure] from their cradle,” in an attempt to “make gentiles repugnant as potential partners……[drawing] on the growing fear about menstrual impurity to create a strong barrier between the non-Jewish and ‘bad’ Jewish woman and any
‘upright’ Jewish man who might seek her as a mate.”\textsuperscript{166} It was critical, therefore, that Israel render Vashti as undesirable – or ‘bad’ – as possible, at the same time extolling Esther’s goodness and beauty, in order to make his didactic point.

Once again, Israel’s authorial maneuvers reveal an ongoing tension that ultimately points back to questions of identity, on a personal level perhaps, but more importantly, on a level of communal religious and cultural identity. The book of \textit{Ezra}, which deals largely with the return of the children of Israel to Zion, defines the notion of national identity in gendered terms, when the issue of intermarriage is taken on in the same terms as a woman’s menstrual cycle. Speaking to God of the sins of the Jewish nation, Ezra cries:

\begin{quote}
"כי עזבנו מצותיך, אמר צוים ביד עבדיך הנביאים, אמר -- האפרים Appreciations of the Holy Books, 6:57--58 –のですה, אמר נדה כי מותרת: בתרועת תכין, אמר מלאוה פמה אל פאה -- בםמאמה.value=""
\end{quote}

“For we have forsaken thy Commandments, which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying: The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land through the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, through their abominations, wherewith they have filled it from one end to another with their [impurity].”\textsuperscript{167}

Yet here \textit{niddah} is used as a blanket term for contamination, describing the land and its people, who are unclean referring back to Israel’s culpability, which he explains earlier in the chapter:

\begin{quote}
(‘The people of Israel, and the priests and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of [married] their daughters for themselves and for their sons; so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the peoples of the lands; yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been first in this wrongdoing.’)\textsuperscript{168}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{166} \textit{Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Avodah Zarah} 36b, as quoted. in Cuffel, \textit{Gendering Disgust}, 56.
\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Ezra} 9:1-2. Ibid.
God’s children, the Jews, whose men had married non-Jewish women, thereby breaching his purity laws, had been punished; and Ezra pleads to God for help to prevent this from recurring so that the Jews might return to their promised land and reap its fruit.169 So polluted are these women that their very land and all its people are filthy by extension. It is specifically the non-Jewish women who have rendered the Israelites impure and led them into sin. Furthermore, the Jewish men have been responsible for the infringement of communal boundaries, both literally and metonymically.

In keeping with this model, our author becomes an Ezra of sorts, warning against the contamination of the community, lest that prolong its state of exile. Consequently, it is the figure of his Esther who the Jewish women would wish to emulate, and they in turn, who emulate her goodness, would make alluring wives for the Jewish men. In fact, we might note that even on the one occasion when Israel does mention Esther’s menstruation as I discussed earlier in the present chapter, he refers to it specifically using the word דָּמִיה [damehah], (her blood), not נידה [niddah] or נידדתא [niddatah], which would carry with it the intimation of impurity in Ezra’s context. Instead he cites an expression, מקור דמיה [mekor damehah] (the source of her blood) from the purity laws of Leviticus170 and the Palestinian Talmud,171 in order to keep Esther from any negative implications – in Jewish terms. It would, moreover be neutral in Christian terms as well, since דם [dam] would simply signify blood in the language of medicine, bearing no moral overtones at all.

In this same vein, one further exclusion from the rabbinical literature by Israel is worthy of remark: the controversy over whether Esther was actually Mordecai’s wife, rather than his adopted daughter (or cousin/niece). This debate stems from a linguistic question which suggests the possibility that one letter was not represented by an alphabetic character in the original text.172 Thus when the Megillah states that Mordecai "לָכַח אֱלָהָה לֶבֶת [le-vat] (took her [Hadassah-Esther] as a daughter), the rabbis argued over whether it might have been intended to read "לָכַח אֱלָהָה לֶבַת [le-vayit] (took her as a wife), where the character י yud was

169 Ezra 9:12. Ibid.
170 Leviticus 20:19.
171 Tractate Niddah, Chapter 2.
172 Barry Walfish, in “Kosher Adultery,” 308, attributes this primarily to a baraita of Rav Meir, though he does state the the word בָּיָת is used throughout rabbinic literature to mean “wife.”
not written out, a not altogether uncommon phenomenon in Hebrew. Generations of scholars have treated the dispute, fraught with religious complexities and inferences of adultery, in depth.\textsuperscript{173} I raise the issue here to point out that despite the flurries of rabbinic discussion, Israel does not allude to it at all. This could be explained rather simply as a move to evade any potential blemishing of Esther or Mordecai’s character. For while the great part of the sages did not condemn Esther either for her marriage to an uncircumcised man, nor even the possibility that she might have been involved in triangulated, adulterous relations, there were certainly those who spoke of her in a less than favorable light in this matter. Rava bar Lima in the Babylonian Talmud, in fact, states: “She would stand up from the bosom of Ahasuerus, immerse herself, and sit down in the bosom of Mordecai,”\textsuperscript{174} Any such statements would belie Israel’s portrait of Esther as well as his role as \textit{auctor}.

Yet it could also be conjectured that there is more to this exclusion, some link to the euphemistic use of the \textit{bayit} (house) trope in rabbinic discourse. The word, which literally means \textit{house}, also came to mean \textit{wife} as a consequence of the mishnaic and talmudic definition of women’s reproductive organs. The rabbis construct the interior of woman’s body architecturally, as Charlotte Fonrobert explains. Her organs are labeled with spatial metaphors such as ‘upper chamber’ (עליה), ‘chamber’ (חדר), ’vestibule’ (פרוזדור), ‘outer room’ (בית החיצון), describing her vagina, vulva and uterus.\textsuperscript{176} The principal concern among the rabbis was that of purity in terms of the locus of a woman’s blood, depending upon its proximity to “the source.”\textsuperscript{177} This would in turn determine whether sexual relations with her husband were permissible, as delineated by \textit{Leviticus} and subsequent halakhic prescriptions.

That Israel makes the choice to disregard this controversy in his text can once again be put down to \textit{auctoritas}, I would suggest, based on connections between the exegetical debates over menstrual blood and the motif of wife as ‘house’ or \textit{bayit}. Fonrobert points out that the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 309.
\textsuperscript{174} \textit{Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah} 13b.
\textsuperscript{176} Fonrobert, \textit{Menstrual Purity}, 49-55.
\textsuperscript{177} There is extensive treatment of this trope in the rabbinic literature and a lack of agreement as to which term in fact corresponds anatomically. See Fonrobert, “Woman as House,” in \textit{Menstrual Purity}, 40-67.
\end{flushleft}
metaphoric construction is, in effect, inscribing “the social location of woman as household” with “the female body as an object of the androcentric imagination of the rabbis [serving] to reinforce the social function of women in the patriarchal culture,” – literal interiority. 

Israel is not preoccupied with Esther’s interiority from either a spatial or a physical perspective, but rather, that of character. Thus, while he does make one reference to her physical interior, his focus lies in her person and her nature. To do otherwise would only subvert his purposes of rendering the exemplary Jewish woman and potential wife. At the same time, it would call attention to carnality in an environment where the dominant culture seeks to silence it and give preference to the spirit. For his Jewish sensibility, describing Esther in anatomical terms, especially in accordance with its framing in rabbinical hermeneutics, would bring Esther’s near-perfection into question. For his professional sensibility, one clearly aligned with popular rationalism, it would be inconsistent at best, even eliciting criticism from his Jewish colleagues.

Cuffel has remarked that in the Middle Ages, reason became “a gauge by which to measure the validity of religious belief;” and Sapir Abulafia asserts further that the “Christian scholastic response was to label Muslims and Jews as irrational, almost equating them with beasts.” Is it any wonder, then, that while Israel assures his readers that Esther observes the laws of kashrut and Shabbat, in spite of her righteousness, he makes not even the slightest nod to the third mitzvah for Jewish women: menstrual purity, niddah. Nor is it peculiar that though Vashti is the epitome of the seditious impure gentile woman, in his Judéo-Provençal version of the romance, he concedes (via the king’s ministers) that even she did not deserve the death-by-fire punishment proclaimed by a drunken, melancholic king.

The notion of pollution thus becomes laden with ambiguity for Israel. On the one hand, women’s physiological pollution must be kept in check by repression or omission in order to maintain his professional integrity. Woman’s otherness. Yet the question of religious purity

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178 Ibid., 101.
179 Cuffel, Gendering Disgust, 91.
“Se dison dreg non fon aucida; si avia fag com decauzida.” (“Justly speaking she shouldn’t be killed; she had indeed behaved as an insolent one,” with slight modification) I discuss the complexities in the translation of this line in Silberstein as well as Notz-Grob and Méjean-Thiolier and why I prefer the former’s translation in Chapter Four, “A Poem by Many other Names,” 238, n. 186.
is key for the redemption of his people. As such, Jewish *otherness* must at once be embraced and rejected. Contact and separation are at odds with one another, and the bounds of identity are confused.
Chapter Three

We Are What We Speak: Language and Identity

That the notion of purity, along with the paradoxes naturally growing out of it, is at issue for Israel has already been attested in the expression of his concerns as a Jewish physician. Yet far from being contained to this one thematic pattern, purity lies at the very heart of the text, permeating it even on the level of language. It plays a critical role in what Israel is attempting to convey in his epistles; and language, as such, acts as both as its medium and its message.

Israel inherited the legacy of his Jewish literary forebears, who, throughout the Middle Ages, struggled to revivify the language of the Bible, the language revealed by God to the Jews, to prove its beauty and honor, to restore its sanctity and save it from influence by foreign vernaculars. For Israel, as for many of his predecessors and contemporaries, the question of linguistic purity is polysemic, pregnant with political and religious undertones and deeply bound up with Jewish identity. And for Israel, the physician as author, preservation of linguistic integrity moreover is akin to his expression of Esther’s bodily purity.

This connection between bodily purity, or more accurately, woman’s bodily purity, and that of language is not new to Israel. Here again, he shows himself to be typically medieval, drawing on topoi encountered in earlier texts. In the highly popular 12th-century rhymed prose makama, Tahkemoni, by Judah al-Harizi, for instance, the Hebrew language appears to the author in the form of a beautiful maiden, who in fact shares many of the attributes Israel ascribes to his Esther: she is virginal and untainted, a fitting embodiment of God’s sacred language, a figure suited to act as his representative. And when, in the introductory chapter, al-Harizi inquires as to her birth, his maiden replies, “I am an orphan” who has been neglected and defiled by her kin. She goes on to explain who she is and why she has come to the author: “I am your mistress, the Holy Tongue: if I find favor in your sight, I will be your heart’s delight….be you my redeemer from every slanderer, renegade, blasphemer.”
Together, she and al-Harizi will bring the Jewish people back to God’s ways, for she is also a prophetess, as al-Harizi tells us, "ואקרוב אל הנביאה/ והורר חולד מבנמות אלהים..." 1

Al-Harizi’s maiden figure is not at all unlike the biblical Esther: orphan, prophetess and bearer of great beauty. Interestingly, in al-Harizi, the Hebrew language, even before its personification as his maiden, was also a queen. "וכל הימים אשר נשאר שם בברכה/ ואני ייחי כשתא/ ויהב את נכון/ הליגי למק ידך/ וה軍 העלם והורו." 2 ("All the while the glory of God dwelt in His sanctuary, I was a queen sitting beside Him in order to tell you His secrets and shed His glory over you.") 3 Although Israel does not explicitly allegorize Esther as language, the parallels one can make between his portrayal of Esther and al-Harizi’s maiden, particularly in their beauty and purity, are noteworthy. 4 What’s more, just as al-Harizi and his prophetess will bring redemption to the Jewish people through linguistic purity, so too, Israel, carrying on the salvific role of Mordecai, will, together with his near-perfect prophetess, deliver his brethren in southern France.

Thus if, according to al-Harizi’s trope, the Hebrew language is a woman - a Jewish woman’s body - the preservation of its purity, assumes a Levitican import; for this was God’s commandment to his people in the Torah. Indeed purity, with its multiplicity of applications laid out in Mosaic law, is one of the very foundations of Judaism. It is what sets the Jewish nation apart from all other nations and has, as such, functioned as a key definer of its identity.

3 Al-Harizi, Book of Tahkemoni, ed. and trans. Reichtert, 32. Segal in The Book of Tahkemoni, 11, translates, “I was the Queen in God’s holy court, standing you and heaven between, that you might know what God’s injunctions mean.”
4 Al-Harizi’s embodiment of woman as language also bears some resemblance to Woman Wisdom, the female personification of wisdom, whom we encounter in Proverbs 1-9. I will be discussing this figure in greater depth in the following chapter as she relates to the genre of wisdom literature in the text. While Israel does not portray Esther as the embodiment of language per se, we can indeed see analogous characteristics in the female figures of al-Harizi’s maiden/prophetess who represents purity as language and Esther, whose feminine purity was discussed in Chapter 2 of the present work.
The truth of this fact is all the more palpable in diasporic Judaism, where religious and cultural identity were under constant threat, due not only to persecution, but to trends of acculturation. Separateness, therefore, a direct consequence of the prescriptions for kashrut, for example, or the consecration of the Sabbath, and ritualistic cleansing of the body, is not only inevitable in an observant community, but at the same time essential to safeguarding its sense of self. By extension, it serves as a tool for resistance and control in situations of political powerlessness so often the reality for post-exilic Jews.

Although itself not a formal religious dictate, linguistic purity and the use of Hebrew, came to possess a contiguous, if not equivalent function in the diaspora. Indeed, while Hebrew’s sanctity and its particularity to God’s chosen people are certainly addressed in the Jewish Scriptures, its ideological significance was partially born out of Rabbinic (Hellenistic) Judaism, with the recognition that the majority of Jews in the diaspora did not know Hebrew, and that language could not only serve as “a culturally unifying mechanism, but also as a way to secure its [rabbinic] control over practice and politics of their [dispersed] religious communities.” Thus, advocating for the notion of *lashon ha-kodesh* (holy language), establishing Hebrew’s unequivocal sanctity as well as its cultic association, ultimately became a way of maintaining control and preserving identity within the confines of the various communities. This shared language fostered cohesiveness between the diasporic communities, and at the same time, it created very distinct boundaries for hierarchy and exclusivity, not only within the Jewish communities themselves, but also in their relationship vis-à-vis the “other.” In medieval Europe this “other” was invariably Christendom, more

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5 Aside from the references to *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, which will be addressed at length later in the present discussion, we find in Zephaniah 3:9 a reference to “pure language,” *[safah berurah]* "شفה ברורה": “For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve Him with one consent.” (*כי אז א十七条 אל עמים שפה ברורה, כל אוף יידא ירא, ירא מלך בשם יהוה, יברר בית יהוה.*). Ibn Ezra, in fact uses this term in his writings on language, Salo Wittmayer Baron, *Hebrew Language and Letters*, Vol. 7, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 50. *Jeremiah* 5:15 speaks of the language of a foreign nation, *lashon goy*, and of course, refers to the story of Babel and the pre-Babel state of unilingualism.

alien in its customs than Muslim culture, which not only possessed Semitic roots and similar laws of purity, but also a common oppressor in the Church.\(^7\)

Throughout the European Middle Ages intellectuals lamented the sad state of the Hebrew language, which was perpetually in danger of being polluted or overshadowed by the dominant language of the land, be it Arabic, as in Andalusi Spain, or the romance vernaculars of Northern France, Provence or Catalonia. Time and time again, such men expressed concern over misuses of Hebrew and the need to restore its sanctity as well as rally for its revivification.\(^8\) Often, however, this was little more than a literary conceit or was tied up with religio-cultural ideals and did not reflect the bilingual or bicultural reality of the Jewish communities.

In her book, *Islamic Culture through Jewish Eyes*, Esperanza Alfonso discusses the notion of “imagined communities,” using Benedict Anderson’s term, often applied to religious communities who “build their identities by means of a language or script they hold to be sacred.”\(^9\) Religious categories, she says, are imported to create a sense of linguistic community. Surely for Israel, this is the case, as we see quite clearly in his Hebrew language text, where he uses language both as a didactic agent to petition for proper religious adherence by the members of his Jewish community, and as a vehicle for the expression of his own *auctoritas* as physician and Jewish intellectual.

Nevertheless, Israel’s Esther text is no simple composition or adaptation, nor is its linguistic agenda always unambiguous; for we must remember that the first version of his text is in the vernacular. In both versions, the author makes significant connections between linguistic purity, religious purity, intellectual purity, and even bodily purity. Yet while the problems being addressed in the two versions are quite similar, their treatment in the respective texts

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\(^9\) Alfonso, “Attitudes Toward Language,” in *Islamic Culture Through Jewish Eyes*, 1. I discuss this term in the “Methodology” section of the introduction as well.
comes with discrete attachments and implications, which ultimately lead us back to the bicultural ambivalence of the texts and their milieu.

And though the two versions are linguistically distinct, we might in fact consider them as a diglossic entity, very aptly belonging to a diglossic community, wherein, in its most basic designation, different languages are used for different functions. Our author and his texts are both constituents and products of a bicultural Jewish community. But where, according to Fishman, “bilingualism is a characteristic of the individual, […] diglossia is characteristic of the community.”10 What is central to this phenomenon is less a question of the respective languages or dialects being used, but how they are used and what purpose they serve. Hebrew was commonly the “high” language in medieval Jewish communities, used for law, religion, and education; whereas the vernacular tended to be the “low” variety, used more regularly for day-to-day interaction and informal communication.11 Such a situation would naturally possess in-built constructs for exclusion, and both foster and be fostered by purism, which, as Wexler asserts, is “the manifestation of the native speaker’s will to defend his language against the threat of displacement.”12

In keeping with these medieval diglossic Jewish standards, Israel’s Hebrew text, would be considered the “high” text, written in what Fudeman terms the “father tongue,” the language passed on through male figures, often in educational institutions, nearly always outside the home.13 The terminologies scholars have assigned to describe such linguistic phenomena, themselves show the exclusionary nature of the situations in which they operated; for they inherently signify dichotomy, if not dominance. “Whenever a Jew put pen to parchment,” says Fudeman, “it was to write in Hebrew.” Any learned text or legal document, anything that dealt with official matters amongst the Jewish community, would have been written in the “father tongue,” in a language accessible only to the men, only to the Jewish men, to whom it rightfully belonged, and who could preserve its purity, not only resulting from their

10 As quoted. from “Societal Bilingualism” in Elaine Miller, Jewish Multiglossia: Hebrew, Arabic and Castillian in Medieval Spain (Newark, Delaware: Juan de la Cuesta, 2000), 28.
11 Miller, Jewish Multiglossia, 30.
religious prerogative as Jews, but also by dint of their male bodies. The vernacular, aptly called the “mother tongue,”\textsuperscript{14} was the language learned in the home, the first language, transmitted from mother to child, comparable almost to breast milk, and equally impure - an interesting point when we consider the trope of the Hebrew language as the body of a pure woman.

What then, are we to make of the Judéo-Provençal version, a vernacular text, but written in the characters of the “holy tongue?” It is not unusual that Israel would have used Hebrew characters to write the vernacular, for “all of the Jewish idioms are written in Hebrew characters,” according to Cecil Roth.\textsuperscript{15} We need look no further than Maimonides, who composed the majority of his works - even his most significant religious works - in Judeo-Arabic. There are, it is true, few extant texts in Judéo-Provençal, though this does not necessarily indicate that there were as few in the Middle Ages. Israel was not original, by any means. Influenced heavily by his intellectual predecessors and contemporaries, his work exhibits little in the way of innovation. Silberstein, in fact, suggests that the very idea of composing a Provençal text in Hebrew characters might well have come from a passage in the Purim parody of Kalonymos ben Kalonymos, Sefer Masekhet Purim, (The Book of Tractate Purim) finished shortly before Israel produced his texts. Kalonymos wrote a satire of the rabbinic disputations found in the Mishnah and the Talmud. Responding to the injunction of Tractate Megillah that the Scroll of Esther must be read in Hebrew, though in reality it would be more comprehensible to its listeners in the vernacular, he offers a solution: a vernacular translation written in Hebrew characters.\textsuperscript{16} It would not be implausible that

\textsuperscript{14} Fudeman uses this term in reference to French, but it is equally applicable to Provençal or other vernaculars used in the Middle Ages. In fact, this would have been the case not only for Jews, but for Christians as well, for whom Latin would have been the “high” language of scholarship, the “father tongue.” \textit{Vernacular Voices}, 13-4.


> הכתאר את המגילה לفاءפירה, ולא צא. קריאה בעיל פה, קריאה בתרנגול, בלעשון, ולא צא. וכן קריאהheit לועזות, בלעונת.

> “If someone read the Megillah out of sequence, he had not fulfilled his obligation. If he read it by heart or in a translation in any other language, he has not fulfilled his obligation. However, he may read it for those who speak a foreign language in a foreign language. And one who speaks a foreign language and heard it [read in
Israel took his cue from Kalonymos, for there are other connections that can be made between the works of these authors. Nevertheless, it is the reality that his work is characteristic of his day and age that is particularly important. What is also of interest are those elements that depart - even slightly - from the norms, elements that do display some level of individuality and that reinforce the assertion that Israel had didactic and authorial motivations in the composition of his work.

Where the term *lashon ha-kodesh* had been commonly used by intellectuals and religious figures to refer to the Hebrew tongue, according to George Jochnowitz, the Jews of Provence used it to refer to their own vernacular tongue. In fact, those who were literate in Hebrew or used it on a regular basis in their daily lives, would have been relegated to an elite social stratum. In his commentary to *Masekhet (Tractate) Sanhendrin*, Rabbi Menahem ha-Me’iri, a contemporary of Israel, in fact discusses language among the people of his community. Chapter 11 of the tractate treats the question of ‘*olam ha-bah*, (עולם הבא) future eternity, and discusses who precisely is to have a place there. This question of ‘*olam ha-bah* and what it signified in Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian terms, was one of great complexity and controversy among Jewish philosophers in the Middle Ages. It posed the problem of God’s corporeality, hearkening back to the prooftext from the book of *Isaiah* 60:21* in the Hebrew Bible. It was also tied up with the question of resurrection, *מחיה מתים* and the prooftext for that in *Ecclesiastes* 12:7. The general consensus was that in *olam ha-

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18 “יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּלֵּם צַדִיקִים, לְעָלָם יִירְשֹׁו אֶרֶץ; בָּאָרָץ (משה) מַעְצָה יְרֵא, הָלָהוּ.” This was the locus for the rationalist explanation of ‘*olam ha-bah*.

19 The controversy was also tied up with Maimonides’ inclusion of the resurrection of the dead in his “Thirteen Principles of the Faith” in Chapter 10 of his *Commentary on the Mishnah*.

20 *Ecclesiastes* 12:7, “The dust returns to the earth whence it came and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”
there was nothing physical at all, but that those who were there would bask in the “crown of ideas” and have access to God’s knowledge. However, while the mishnah tells us that “all Israel has a portion in ‘olam ha-bah,” this statement is immediately followed by the exceptions, specifications as to who is not considered righteous enough to share in God’s radiance, זיו השכינה [ziv ha-shekhinah]. Among these are the people who read heretical books, also perhaps to be understood as secular texts.

The relevance of the Me’iri’s commentary here is that he addresses the matter of using the vernacular insofar as it pertains to his own time and location. He uses a term that we find in Israel’s text, derived from the book of Isaiah 28:11, [la’agei safah]. While the foundational mishnaic text addresses the use of God’s name specifically and its improper use outside of the Temple, medieval commentators expanded on it to make it more germane to the contemporary circumstances of the Jewish communities. The Me’iri treats it fairly broadly, responding not simply to the unlawful use of God’s name, but to the use of “unholy” language, as a counterpart to transgressions such as forbidden sexual acts or the consumption of prohibited foods among the “masses.”

21 Later in the current chapter, I will elaborate on Israel’s use of the expression in the context of his text.

22 Menahem ben Solomon Me’iri, Sefer Hidushei ha-Me’iri ha-nikra Beit ha-Behirah; ‘al Sanhedrin, makot Shevu’ot, ‘Avodah Zarah, Horayot, ‘Eduyot: sudar ve-hugah me-hadash ‘al-pi mah she-kvar nidpas bi-Halberstadt: ve-gam nosaf bi-zeh perush ha-mishnah le-ha-Rambam ha-nimtsa bi-kiitevi yad shel hidushei ha-Me’iri (Book of the Me’iri’s Insights Called ‘The Chosen House’ on Sanhedrin, etc., Reorganized and Emededed According to That Which was Previously Printed in Halberstadt; With the Addition of Maimonide’s Commentary on the Mishnah Found in the Manuscripts of the Mei’iri’s Insights (Zikhron Ya’akov: ha-Makhon le-hotsa’at sefarim ve-khitvei yad shel Zikhron Ya’akov, 1977), Chapter 11, 90.)
In its original biblical context, the term לָעָגֶי שִׁפְחָה \( la'agei safah \), has been translated as “stammerings of barbarous language.”\(^{23}\) The word לָעָג \( la'ag \) itself can mean “mockery or derision.” Its initial use in \textit{Isaiah}, given the context of that book, comes with negative judgment, denoting those who are non-Jews and not on God’s path, thus the notion of any language that is not Hebrew implies sinfulness and corruption. But the Me’iri excuses the use of the vernacular, particularly when it is not being used as an intentional expression of contempt for the Torah, but rather out of ignorance - and especially illiteracy. It is clear from his remarks that at least some portion of the community - if not the majority - did not know Hebrew; and furthermore, that unlawful sexual conduct and the consumption of unsanctioned foods were also not uncommon. He takes the position that matters must be left open and each case judged on its own, rather than offering a blanket condemnation. What is significant in the Me’iri’s commentary is what it conveys to us about the community in which he was highly influential. Correct observance of Jewish law was by no means absolute in it, nor were those engaged in what would technically be considered transgressive behavior necessarily to be blamed or precluded from ‘\( \text{olam ha-bah} \). And if the Jews under his jurisdiction were less than righteous, whether in their use of language, or in their other practices, it could often be attributed not to malicious intent or religious denunciation, but to lack of knowledge, plain and simple.

In his Hebrew Esther text, Israel uses the phrase לָעָגֶי שִׁפְחָה \( la'agei safah \) more than once, signifying that it held a certain importance for him. The term, however, which is loaded with religious overtones, does not have a Provençal equivalent. Yet this itself, I would argue, plays directly into Israel’s dichotomous treatment of language in his texts.\(^{24}\)

In the two versions of his Esther narrative, Israel maintains a clear boundary between their respective languages. In the Judéo-Provençal version, which we must remember is only fragmentary, he makes no mention of linguistic purity as it relates to the Hebrew language. Nevertheless, he does incorporate into the vernacular text an embellishment which, while cryptic (and this possibly because the remainder of the text is lacking), alludes to a general


\(^{24}\) Some of these are also related to genre and audience and I discuss them in the following chapter, Chapter Four, “A Poem by Many Other Names: On the Mixing of Genres.”
concern about the connections between language and identity, whether the Hebrew or the vernacular.

In the *Megillah*, after Vashti has been condemned for her insolence in refusing to appear before the drunken Ahasuerus, the king’s advisors announce her punishment in a decree. The text of *Esther* 1:17-22 says simply, that in her refusal to comply with the king, Vashti has committed a crime not only against Ahasuerus himself, but against all of the princes and peoples of all his provinces. And lest other women take example and contempt against their husbands arise in them, a decree would go out with the judgment that Vashti would never again come before the king. This would ensure that “all the wives shall give to their husbands honor, both to great and to small.” Thus, letters were sent to every province “according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man shall bear rule in his own house and speak in the tongue of his people.”

The biblical passage is itself rather enigmatic; for while it would seem apt to address the question of women honoring their husbands in response to Vashti’s actions, the language issue is quite unclear. The sages offer little more in the way of explication of the source text. The Babylonian Talmud, for instance reiterates the original with only minimal explication.

"לדואת כל איש שחרר בכיתו? פושותא! אפוי קרחה בכייה פרדשא לודו, ומבר כלאש טמו..." ("Every man shall be ruler in his own home…even a bald man shall be policeman in his home…and shall speak in his own language…")

This talmudic expansion is revisited many times by later commentators and Israel follows suit in his Hebrew version as well. The rabbinic treatment of this passage offers little to enlighten us about the meaning of the source text beyond its emphasis on Ahasuerus’ foolishness, or as Segal states, “The fact that Ahasuerus had to issue an edict proclaiming so obvious a principle as the husband’s authority in the home served to call into question the

25 *Esther* 1:20.
26 *Esther* 1:22.
27 *Babylonian Talmud* [Bavli], *Tractate Megillah*, Chapter 1. Bar Ilan Responsa Project Database.
28 For instance, *Yalkut Shimoni*, Rashi, Midrash Lekah Tov.
king’s intelligence and credibility.”29 And while this perspective might suffice to explain the king’s motivation for issuing such an edict, it does not address the question of why language is foregrounded in the decree.30 Yet, what is particularly significant for the present study is Israel’s lengthy and complex expansion to the biblical passage in both his vernacular and his Hebrew adaptations of the text.

In engaging with this passage in the Judéo-Provençal text, Israel has added nearly 20 lines to the original narrative. His elaboration, moreover, includes specific geo-cultural references that seem to point to a contemporaneous political phenomenon and at the same time to an authorial stance regarding the critical role of language in maintaining identity.

“[E] cascun parle son lengage, Sia son profieg o son damnage, Qe non engane sa companha; Se es de Fransa o d’Espanha, Car om non sap aquel que es, E el non deu parlar frances, Qe om si creirian veraiamenz Q’el fos frances naturalmenz. Darian li om molher francesa, E pueis, après qu’el l’auria preza Sa senhoria seria perduda, Car se tenria per esperduda, E el n’auria d’aiso gran tort Se sa molher lh’avia front. Mes cant ela lo conoissera, Pueis en ren non s’escuzara. Per que sia volem conegut A son parlar dont es mogut.”31

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30 There is an interesting treatment of this passage in the Erets Yisra’el version of Esther Rabah. More accurately, the midrash begins with some exegetical material on language, where the sages elaborate that there are 4 languages - Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Assyrian, each with its own specific purpose. The beginning portion of the conversation is intriguing in terms of the verse in question. However, it moves forward into a very long and complex discussion about the dangers of wine. This becomes the primary focus of the midrash, and while it offers food for thought on the connection between Ahasuerus’ excessive consumption of wine and Vashti’s rebelliousness, the language question loses ground. http://www.tsel.org/torah/midrashraba/esther.html.
31 Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob, eds., “Roman de la Reine Esther,” in Nouvelles Courtoises Occitanes et Françaises (Paris: Librairie Generale Française, 1997), 146-9, ll. 321-338. Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob’s translation. Silberstein transcribes dont as da ont since there is an ș in the manuscript (ש). [fol. 28r] and while she explains that it was probably a scribal error and makes her transcription plausible, pg. 183, I prefer this version. I provide here Silberstein’s English translation of this passage with some modifications (shown in brackets):
Israel’s expansion is, at face value, quite esoteric. Indeed, in his transcription of the Judéo-Provençal, Pansier admits outright that he is baffled by it. Silberstein offers something more of an explanation in her notes, wherein she suggests that Israel’s Fransa and Espanha might be thought of as contemporary parallels to the Megillah’s Persia and Medea, and puts forward a relatively literal reading: that the wife would resent her husband for having deceived her and would become insolent as a result. In a more recent edition, Méjean-Thiolier asserts the possibility that Israel is drawing on verses from the biblical books of Nehemiah and Ezra, which deal with issues of miscegenation and intermarriage, or more specifically Jewish men taking non-Jewish women as wives. It is, in fact, in the spirit of the latter edition that I would propose to treat the passage, for despite its abstruse nature, there are elements in Israel’s two versions that would make a socio-linguistic reading plausible.

First however, let us contrast this with the parallel section of the Hebrew language text.

קרחא ביתיה פרדשכא ליהוי
והיתה רבתה והיתה כמ ריה
גם אתה גם העם הזה:
ולדבר בלשון עמו יצו להיות
ההושיבו נשים נכריות
ולא ינהג בנות הארץ כשבויות
אל ארץ אחרת היום הזה:
בנות עמו ומולדתו תהי מכרת
ונקה האיש מעון אם עמו תהי נקשרת
עגי שפה ובלשון אחרת כי בל
ידבר אל העם הזה:
37

“And let each man speak his language/ be it to his benefit or his detriment;/ let him not deceive his companion(s),/ whether he be from France of Spain;/ for they don’t know which he is,/ and he must not speak French,/ [f]or they would truly believe/ that he was a natural-born Frenchman./ They would give him a French wife,/ and then after he had married her,/ his authority would be lost,/ for she would consider herself misled,/ and he would be greatly wronged/ if his wife stood up to him./ [But if she had known him,/ she would then have no excuse./] Therefore we want it to be known/ by his speech where he comes from.”


35 Nehemiah 13:23-27, Ezra 10:1-7. I will be returning to these in the course of the discussion that follows.
37 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 49v, ll. 146-56.
(Let even a bald man be an enforcer in his home and let him live and multiply as a well-watered garden
Both you and this nation:

Let him command that she speak in the language of his people
For did they not marry foreign women?
Let him not lead the native women as captives into another land this very day:

Let it [the Hebrew language] be known to the women of his nation and his birthplace And let the man be cleansed of wrongdoing if it [the Hebrew language] adorn his nation, for he would otherwise speak in the vernacular and in another language to this nation:)

The two versions are quite different from one another in the literal sense, as are the sources upon which they draw. What they both convey, however, is Israel’s general preoccupation with language, identity and authority. The notion of linguistic boundaries and the creation of an “other” through language play directly into this concern, and by extension, the question of exclusivity. Yet his treatment of the original Megillah passage in his own texts brings us back to his biculturalism and his authorial intent in differentiating between the vernacular and the Hebrew language versions.

In both cases, I would argue, Israel is dealing with linguistic purity and accessibility, which is in turn linked to the specific audience he had in mind for his two versions, and taken a step further, to his purpose in their respective composition. Thus, the Hebrew language version, with its didactic religious and cultural messages, takes on the integrity of its own language, conforming to a tradition of medieval literary scholarship that claimed Hebrew as lashon hakodesh, “the holy tongue,” whose rightful custodians are the Jewish people.

Indeed, Israel’s Hebrew language text addresses this issue with little compunction, carrying on the line of Jewish thinkers, both forebears, such as the previously cited Judah al-Harizi, as

38 It is probable that Israel is referring here to the Hebrew language, though he does not make the subject explicit in the Hebrew - he writes, "לדבר בלשון עמו" “to speak in the language of his people.” The antecedent of the feminine pronoun is "לשון" tongue, but I have understood it to refer to the Hebrew language since he clearly contrasts that with "לעגי שפה" which we have seen means the vernacular (or Isaiah’s “barbarous language.”)

39 I refer here to the apologia of the Hebrew text, discussed below, wherein Israel specifies that the vernacular text is for women and children and the Hebrew for the Jewish men. Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 48r, ll. 9-12. I will be returning to this passage for a more detailed treatment in the upcoming chapter.
well as contemporaries like Kalonymos ben Kalonymos, who bemoaned the state of the *holy tongue*, either unknown to many Jews - perhaps even a majority - or corrupted for the lack of accuracy with which it was spoken. Yet these men, it must be remembered,- and they were exclusively men - those who grappled with the language problem, were not average members of their community, but rather part of an elite group of individuals, who had the advantage of formal education, both religious and secular. In fact, it would be fair to say that their linguistic pining became something of an intellectual conceit. This is not to bring their religious integrity into question, for most of them were quite pious. Indeed, Judaism and its preservation in the face of persistent threat, both internal and external, was clearly the motivating force in their work. Yet, it offered them a stage, a voice, and by extension, a sense of authority. Some of them actually held influential political and religious positions within their own community as well as outside in the “official” system of governance and many certainly had a privileged view into the world of Christian scholarship.  

It is here that a certain paradox about Hebrew purity and its correlation to Jewish identity begins to reveal itself. There was, of course, concern that Hebrew had lost ground among the Jews in the diaspora, but at the same time, acquisition of the language was not readily available to everyone. Indeed, as we might understand from the Me’iri’s commentary, a large portion of the community probably never learned Hebrew at all, or only to a degree that would allow them to use it ritually. As a physician and a man of letters, Israel would have belonged to what Einbinder calls a homogeneous class of elite male Jewish writers in Provence. And we need only look to the apologia of the Hebrew text to discern its restricted accessibility - a result in part, of the author’s own designation, and in part perhaps, of the circumstances of his community. Israel tells us that he wrote the Hebrew text for the Jewish men, a statement which unambiguously excludes both non-Jews and women and carries with it implicit biases about language, purity and agency.

Returning, thus, to his treatment of the edict issued after Vashti’s condemnation, Israel culls biblical verses and aggadic matter, adding to it his own articulation, the outcome of which is

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40 See Susan Einbinder, introduction to *No Place of Rest*, 3-13.  
41 Einbinder, *No Place of Rest*, 5.
a tapestry of sorts, pregnant with layers of allusion, (to be understood differently, perhaps, by different audiences.) Indeed, a literal reading of the passage pays homage to his source texts, but I would argue, there is more at stake for him here, both as a Jew of privileged status and as author.

In his Hebrew version of the passage, Israel seems to bring together a number of social and religious issues, which engage notions of identity and purity as they are connected to language. He, like his sources, undeniably raises the question of gender. But where the Megillah in this passage addresses woman’s status vis-à-vis her husband as a matter of fact, and the rabbis simply reiterate and intensify the claim to male authority, dismissing Ahasuerus’ edict as an expression of his foolishness, since man’s dominion at home is naturally presumed, Israel renders it in such a way that seems to indicate something more immediate for him. Indeed, it is decreed that a wife should speak in her husband’s language in order to be obedient to and honor him. However, when in line 78 he asks "[ha-hoshivu nashim nokhriot]’ ‘Have they not married foreign women and let not the local women be like captives in another land…’,” is Israel alluding to sexual relations with foreign women? While we cannot be certain, there is some suggestion in the Me’iri’s commentary that such things were occurring in his community. And he goes on to say that a foreign woman must know the language of her husband’s nation in order that the man who has taken her be cleared of his crime. She must not use Isaiah 28’s “barbarous language,” [la’agei safah] with its nuanced meaning of mockery, referring also to the vernacular, if the Jewish man is to be pardoned for his relations with an impure woman.

Thus not only is the use of the Hebrew language here a means of preserving his religious identity, imbued even with the ability to rectify a transgression, it also establishes multiple levels of hegemony: over the woman herself, to be sure, but further over the foreignness that she would represent if she were to use the language of the dominant culture. In other words, the Jewish man, who lives in an economy where he is the “other” and consequently without power, can use language to reverse the situation, albeit symbolically, and claim a certain sense of control through it.
Israel’s use of this particular biblical phraseology is doubtless not arbitrary, drawing on the same root for the verb to marry ישב which we see in Ezra and Nehemiah, in passages dealing with marriage to non-Jewish women, referred to also as [nashim nokhriot] from נשים נוכריות [‘amei ha-’arets]. 42 Indeed, all of Ezra 10 deals with this act of breaching religious bounds, the intermingling of the exiled Jewish people living among the “people of the land,” repeating the same idiom, a form of the verb נשים נוכריות with ישב. 43 So common was this transgression that even sons of priests had married foreign women and more than 20 verses of the chapter are dedicated to naming those who transgressed.

Chapter 13 of Nehemiah, wherein this issue of unlawful marriage is again addressed with the same wording repeatedly, introduces another element of concern, this a consequence of such unions: the loss of linguistic purity. Verse 24 articulates the dilemma of the loss of the language:

"ובניהם, וazı מדבר אשדודית, ואוים ממרית, ונדר יהודית, וכלשת, וס עמה."

“...and their children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people.”

Not only does the prophet Nehemiah intimate the gravity of tainted language here, but he links it inextricably to religious identity, calling it not ['Ivrit (Hebrew), but [Yehudit] יהודית (Jewish), reminiscent of the phrasing 'עברית לעברים in Israel’s apologia. In both cases, there is a blurring of the distinction made between language and religion - certainly interchangeability in how they are named - and a direct connection established to the impure

42 In Ezra 10:2 - ויען שכניה בן יחיאל מבני עולם, ויאמר לעזרא -- אנחנו מעלנו באלהינו, וישב נשים נוכריות - מעמי הארץ; והנה יש -- עוהב, יז - 2:3. מקוה לאישא ועל האהל.  "And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra: 'We have broken faith with our God, and have married foreign women of the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing."

43 Cf. Ezra 10:10, 11, 14 (in this verse, we find the form closest to that which Israel borrows: ישב נשים נוכריות.)


women who are the cause of it. For he states in verse 26, referring to Solomon, the beloved
and great king of Israel, "גַּם אָוֹר הַחֲיָ֣ים, הַנְּשָׁ֔ים הָכַּ֖רִית" (“...even him did the foreign
women cause to sin.”)

Israel, in his turn, using the biblical model and indeed portions of its phraseology, makes
very similar connections in this passage. Yet, this section, like the whole of the Hebrew text,
takes the form of the “mosaic,” as we have seen, and Israel draws on other biblical
articulations in it. The lines that follow, lines 151 and 152,
"לֹא יַגְוִ֥יא בָּתֵ֖ל בָּנָ֣ה אֱוָ֑ Croat אֶל הָאָ֖֟רץ מְזִֽוְּרָ֖הgregated..."
"...and let them not lead the native women as captives to another land as
on this day...”, hearkens back to two sources in the Tanakh. The first, from which Israel
borrows literally is Genesis 31:26, where Jacob, who had fled with his two wives, Leah and
Rachel, from their father Laban’s house, is caught and confronted by him, and Laban asks:
"מה עָשִּ֥ית, וַתְּגַנְּבִּ֖ית בְּנֵי אֵֽלֶֽהָּ..."

(“...What have you done that you have outwitted me and carried away my daughters as though captives of the sword?”). Israel
interpolates this verse from Genesis, using it to refer not to Jewish women, certainly not of
the class of the matriarchs, Leah and Rachel, but rather to the native women, the foreign
women with whom the Jewish men have been associating, the בנות הארץ [benot ha-’arets] in
apposition to the נשים נכריות [nashim nokhriot] of the previous line. And while the wording
is most directly recognizable from the Genesis verse, there is a contextual allusion to a
passage in Deuteronomy that deals with foreign women taken as captives by Jewish men.
Chapter 21:10-13 speaks of non-Jewish women, of great beauty who are taken as captives in
battle, delivered into the hands of their captors by God. These men would be permitted to
take a captive woman as wife only once she has been brought to his home and stripped of all
her seductive adornments.

"הָבוֹאֲתָ֣ה אל נִ֑וכַר, בָּטַ֖֫ק אָתֻּהֲ֣א רַעְשָּֽׁה, וְהָפַּרְגֵּיָ֥ה אַתֵּ שְׁמַלְתָּהָ֖ מֵעָלָּ֣ה וְיִשְׁבָּֽה..."

(“then you shall bring her to your house, and she shall shave her head and pare her nails and
she shall put the raiment of captivity off her and she shall remain in your house...”)

Israel manipulates these pieces of biblical verse, weaving them together in such a way that both generates a new narrative, and at the same time preserves the sense of their original context, which the learned Jewish male audience he is writing for would surely recognize. Thus the captive women of Deuteronomy, together with the foreign women of Ezra and Nehemiah produce a subtext, alluding not only to the primary meaning of the respective verses, but also conveying something deeper in the new context that is born of this synthesis.  

This is not to suggest that intermarriage itself was at issue, for formal marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew would have been implausible in the time and place in question. Nevertheless, commingling between the religious groups did exist and the temptation of illicit relations between their members was a reality. And according to the model of his

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46 Here I would like to make note of Carolyn Dinshaw’s discussion of St. Jerome’s treatment of the Deuteronomy passage on the captive women in her introduction to Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics. She refers to Jerome’s use of this passage as a metaphor for the reading and interpretation of the classical biblical text, which he equates with Deuteronomy’s captive woman, who must be divested of her ornamentation and carnal seductiveness, so that her essence might be revealed. It is only after the rigorous acts of purification prescribed in the passage that she, represented as the pagan text, may be embraced by Christians. Whether Israel would have had any awareness of Jerome’s exegesis is difficult to conjecture; it would not, however, have been impossible given his professional circles and the contact he would have had with Latin-literate clerics in his medical community. I raise this here not to suggest that Jerome’s treatment of the passage was necessarily influential on Israel’s own composition, but to point out the parallels in allegorizing the text as woman, and in this case, a captive foreign woman. In both cases - for Jerome, the text is a pagan (i.e. Jewish) woman, and for Israel, a Christian woman - inherent in her alien status, her “otherness” is impurity, of which she must be strictly purged if she is to be accepted by her male captor. Carolyn Dinshaw, Chaucer's Sexual Poetics (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 22-4.

47 According to Moshe Halbertal, the Me’iri offers three basic rulings vis-à-vis Christian culture, one of which is the prohibition of marriage. The most prevalent concern was that, given the fluidity of the day-to-day interactions between the religious groups, Jews would be prone to idol worship. Thus limiting this possibility was the primary motivation for his rulings. Moshe Halbertal, Ben Torah le-Hokhmah : Rabi Menahem ha-Me’iri u-va’alei ha-halakhah ha-Maimonim bi-Provans (Between Torah and Wisdom, Rabbi Menahem ha-Me’iri and the Maimonidean Halakhists of Provence) (Jerusalem: Y.L. Magnes, Hebrew University, 2000), 82-3 and Pinchas Roth’s recent dissertation, “Hakhmei Provans ha-me’uharim-halakhah ve-poskei halakhah be-Derom Tsarfat, 1215-1348” (Later Provençal Sages-Jewish Law (Halakhah) and Rabbis in Southern France, 1215-1348” (Ph.D. Diss., Hebrew University, 2012), 252. Ray, in “Reassessing our Approach to Medieval Convivencia,” 4, points out the problem faced by Jewish spiritual and communal leaders in the acceptance rather than the exclusion of Jews: “How do you maintain social cohesion, religious identity and a controllable taxbase when Jews are allowed to settle outside their designated quarters, dress like gentiles, socialize with gentiles, and even take gentile lovers?” Yom Tov Assis writes much of the sexual indiscretions occurring amongst the Jewish communities under the Crown of Aragon (which included parts of southern France). Sexual intercourse between Jewish men and Christian women was among these, though there was not always enough evidence for accusations to hold up in the justice system. “Sexual Behaviour in Medieval Hispano-Jewish Society,” in Jewish History: Essays in Honor of Chimen Abramsky, eds. Steven J. Zipperstein and Ada Rapaport-Albert (London: Peter Halban Publishers, Ltd., 1988), 42. While the Comtat Venaissin was not under the same dominion, it was still heavily influenced culturally by Spanish Jewry - and was in fact considered to
biblical sources, maintaining the integrity of the Hebrew language would have meant
protecting it from contamination by the impurities of non-Jewish women. *Nehemiah*, as we
have seen, is explicit in its warning about the enticement of non-Jewish women and the
dangerous implications of union with them for God’s holy tongue. It is the נשים נכריות who
cause Jewish men to sin. Thus, I would argue that Israel’s diction is quite deliberate. In fact,
there are only three instances of this exact phrase in the Bible: in *Ezra*, *Nehemiah* and in 1
*Kings* 11:1, the account of Solomon, who succumbed to their allure and “loved many foreign
women…” "והמלך שלמה אהב נשים נכריות רבות", all of which treat the matter with little
sympathy. *Nehemiah* and *Ezra* are particularly harsh in tone, condemning those who
transgressed and jeopardized their people’s relationship with God, urging their repentance.

Israel’s design as author and his intent for the Hebrew text is very much in keeping with the
tenor of his biblical sources. For, as we have seen, in his authorial role, he projects an image
of himself as something of a prophet as well. Thus to evoke the passion of a Nehemiah or an
Ezra, also lends an exhortative register to his own work and allows him to appeal to the
emotions of his educated male audience, something he would have been unable to
accomplish to the same extent in his vernacular text, since he could neither rely on the
quotations from the Hebrew Bible, nor the familiarity with their context, nor, indeed, the
responses they might arouse.

That Israel adopts this stance as teacher or preacher, as it were, is not meant to be understood
literally; it is by no means an indication that he actually conceived of himself as having a
messianic role, per se. It can perhaps be more accurately understood as an intellectual
conceit, a stylized portrayal of himself for the benefit of his colleagues, conforming to a
longstanding convention among Jewish writers. The text becomes a stage for its author to
exhibit both his intimate knowledge of the Jewish canonical tradition, as well as to flaunt his
literary prowess. It is an arena to show his adeptness with language and form, in being able
to playfully knit together a new work using fragments from his textual heritage, a long-

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be part of the same region. Thus it was very possible that Israel was referring to this kind of behaviour. The
region was also considered by Franco-Ashkenaz Jews to be very lax in its morals and observance of Jewish law.
established practice among Jewish liturgists and secular poets. In fact, here I might add that even if Israel’s messages about foreign women are not speaking to an actual state of affairs within his community, but rather the possibility of comingling, the text would have the same rhetorical effect upon its audience, underscoring its dire consequences for linguistic purity. Israel’s moralizing stance, whether addressing a literal or feared situation, was in part an intellectual exercise, a nod to his peers, and a way of taking his place among them.

Consistent with this argument, I should like to revisit the last verse of the Hebrew passage, cited above "כי בלעגי שפה ובלשון אחרת ידבר אל העם הזה", taken verbatim from Isaiah 28:11. Here again, we find Israel borrowing from a major prophetic work of the Hebrew bible, a book dealing with judgment and repentance, and the foretelling of the Babylonian exile, showing his skillful juxtaposition of the original voice with what he interprets as an analogous condition of the Jews in his community. By using this verse, he evokes the visionary message of one of the great Hebrew prophets and at the same time insinuates his own into it.\(^{48}\)

Israel’s discursive posture in the Hebrew, the voice of the prophet, the mediator between God and his people, fits neatly into the linguistic hierarchy of medieval Jewry. As the “high” language, the “father tongue,” as Fudeman aptly calls it, Hebrew belongs not only to a distinct nation, and to a distinct gender, but also to a distinct class, of which Israel was surely a member, and the preservation of its purity was contingent upon its limited accessibility. This does not mean that a Jewish man of a lesser stature in the community, or even a woman who had some familiarity with Hebrew, could not understand its literal sense, but only the learned Jewish men would be keyed in to the nuances of its composition.\(^{49}\)

Thus Israel in his Hebrew text offers a rhetorical response to - and an expression of unity with - his peers. Indeed, as we have seen, Jewish intellectuals in Provence, were woeful of

\(^{48}\) It is interesting to note that this chapter of Isaiah begins with another reference to the misuse of wine and its dangers.

\(^{49}\) Einbinder, No Place of Rest, 16-7, writes of a “second tier” of Jewish scholars who were “less sophisticated” for their lack of formal education, but for whom some of the new philosophical and scientific ideas of the period were of interest. I mention this to point out that the class lines were not so clearly defined that the text would have been impenetrable to anyone who was not of the “elite,” but rather to suggest that Israel was consciously operating on more than one hermeneutical level in his work.
the state of Hebrew, not only carrying on the tradition of their Spanish predecessors, who had long seen it as their duty to re-establish its sanctity and its stature vis-à-vis Arabic, but at times criticizing them for the ways in which they chose to do that. For while many were heavily influenced by the Spanish school, even transmitters of its principles and style, there were dissenters, and those who favored other schools. Avraham ha-Bedersi, for instance, whom Silberstein calls “the most characteristic of the manerism of the Provençal school, while not considered a great poet in his own right, was certainly prolific and in his writings outspoken in his criticism of the songs of wine and love.”

A Purim Epistle written to David Caslari bespeaks his nostalgia for the French school of Hebrew poetry and his opposition to the Spanish school. In another work, he praises the writings of the troubadour poets, Peire Cardenal and Folquet of Marseille, and ha-Bedersi also engaged in poetic disputes with Isaac ha-Gorni, to whom some have given the moniker of Hebrew troubadour.

I raise these figures here to point out that while Jewish writers were heavily influenced by their own Jewish predecessors, they were surely not uninformed about what was happening in the Christian literary and intellectual milieu as well. Indeed, there is believed to be at least one poet of Jewish origin who wrote in the troubadour fashion in Occitan in a slightly earlier period.

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50 Avraham ha-Bedersi refers specifically to vernacular works such as “The Thousand and One Nights and the Tales of Sandovar,” which according to Doniach, tells the “wiles of foreign women,” a sensitive subject, perhaps for ha-Bedersi as well.

51 I note here that the Purim epistle Bedersi composed to David Caslari was to accompany a piyyut for Purim which was lost. Since it is not known when the piyyut was lost, it is not impossible, given that it is of the same genre as Israel’s text, that he might have known it and that it might have had some influence on his own work. Ha-Bedersi is known for his play with words and form. A possible model for Israel? N.S. Doniach, "Abraham Bedersi’s Purim Letter to David Kaslari,” The Jewish Quarterly Review 23.1 (1932): 63-4.


53 Isaac ha-Gorni has been referred to by some, including Schirmann, , Toldot ha-Shirah ha-‘Ivrit bi-Sefarad ha-Notsrit uvi-Derom Tsarfat, 484-7, as a Hebrew troubadour, though Einbinder disputes this moniker in her chapter on the poet in No Place of Rest. Einbinder, “Isaac b. Abraham HaGorni: The Myth, the Man, and the Manuscript,” in No Place of Rest, 15-36.

Moreover, given the time in which he was living and working, and the fluidity of borders, multilingualism was a common phenomenon, particularly with migrations resulting from regular shifts in political circumstances. The great mix of languages necessarily led to cross-pollination, with one language affecting another to greater or lesser degrees, depending upon the circumstances. In the midst of this instability, language was a political tool, which, according to Simon Gaunt, “played a role in the erection of boundaries that begin to define what is foreign.” This was true respectively for Jews and non-Jews alike. For just as the Jews used Hebrew as a means of preserving religious and cultural identity, non-Jews often used vernacular languages in similar ways.

The climate in southern France following the Albigensian Crusade saw considerable resistance to French colonialism and an almost emotional attempt to cling to the Occitan language in the face of French taking over as the lingua franca in the region. While in the early 14th century there were Francophone administrators in place and influences of French on the Occitan language can be discerned in some texts, its reception was ambivalent at best. The literary world, in fact, saw the production of various manuals for poetic composition in Occitan, such as the Toulousain Gai Saber Consistoire, which had ambitions of reviving the fin amor style using a contemporary Christian twist, and Raimon Vidal’s Razos de Trobar, which offered instruction to foreigners wishing to compose lyrics in the language of the troubadours.

Returning thus to Israel’s vernacular treatment of the post-Vashti edict, I would suggest that there are a number of phenomena at work, all of which point to a general preoccupation with

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55 For example, there was what Kay calls a troubadour diaspora - poets who resettled in Catalonia and Italy after the Albigensian Crusade, bringing their language with them. Kay, “The Monolingualism of the Parrot, or the Prosthesis of Origins, in Las Novas Del Papagay.” Romanic Review 101.1-2 (2010): 23. Moreover, the French expulsions resulted in Jewish migration from the northern regions and Provence to the Papal territories and those ruled by the Crown of Aragon.


the importance of language as a marker of identity and authority. What Israel seems to be dealing with again are questions of foreignness and ownership of language. Technically, as an inhabitant of the Papal territories of Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin, Israel belongs to a community in which Northern France and Spain might both be considered foreign. The passage evidences anxiety about the notion of “foreignness” overall, but echoes an attitude toward the French that was more overtly expressed by other Provençal writers, an ambiguous attitude: antipathy toward an oppressive rival of a higher social status tinged with a touch of admiration.58

At the same time, the Spanish side of the equation in Israel’s passage implies a lower class level, perhaps alluding to the works of those of his contemporaries who have some disdain toward the Spanish. Hence, a woman of French origin would be resentful if she learned that her French-speaking spouse was actually not speaking in his own language, deceiving her about his status and nationality. He, in turn, would be humiliated and emasculated - certainly not in accordance with the prescribed “every man should be the ruler in his home” of the Megilllah.

In keeping with this notion of foreignness and authority, the Judéo-Provençal passage is again reminiscent of the Deuteronomy verses that deal with the captive women. Israel writes, “Darian lhi om molher franceza...”, (“They would give him a French wife.”)59 Although it is unclear why “they” would give him a French wife, the woman is “given” to her husband, as though she were property, or even booty. She would be from the camp of the “other,” a French woman, and thus a foreigner, probably of a higher social rank, and would feel duped if she were led to believe that her husband was of equal stature. She would need to be acculturated, made one of his people, divested of her Frenchness and thus her presumed arrogance. By speaking his own language and compelling her to do the same, her husband would be exerting control over her, which is what the source text was calling for.

58 This admiration was perhaps more apparent in literary genres that originated in northern France, such as epic. In the romances, while we see imitations of the northern genres, they were often parodic, as is the case with Jaufre, for example.
The vernacular passage is rather problematic and indeed not easily interpreted, as those scholars who previously worked on Israel’s text have indicated. It might have been more readily explained in the context of the full narrative, raising questions about which we can only speculate. Nevertheless, it does suggest - albeit in the guise of parody - an anxiety vis-à-vis language that is not specifically Jewish, and in turn, draws attention once more to Israel’s biculturalism. For this version of the text addresses language not from the ethno-religious perspective of the Hebrew, but from a geo-political perspective, in an environment where languages are “literally fighting for supremacy.” Here Israel is contending with the trespass of linguistic boundaries in the household not by non-Jewish women, but by women of a different national identity.

Another possible reading for this passage might be linked to the forced migrations of the Jews in France during this period and their relocation in parts of Spain and southern France. Many of the Jews who were victims of expulsion sought refuge in these regions. However, according to Noël Coulet, there were cultural boundaries that existed between the “Provençaux - both Jewish and Christian - and the Tsarfatim.” Moreover, the French exiles were often critical of their southern co-religionists, particularly in the way they held to Jewish halakhic tradition. Einbinder, in fact, suggests that the displaced northerners “cherish[ed] an indistinct memory of ‘Frenchness,’” which came with “wonderful declarations of French descent as claims to social status or religious correctness.” She also indicates a trend, based upon the liturgical texts, wherein they maintained “a stubborn desire to sustain French ritual practice, and the authority of those who knew it, in new surroundings.” This phenomenon would also imply that the French Jews made efforts to

60 I will be discussing this further in the following chapter, “A Poem by Many Other Names: On the Mixing of Genres.”
61 Maria Rosa Menocal as quoted. in Catherine Leglu, Multilingualism and Mother Tongue in Medieval French, Occitan and Catalan Narratives (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 100.
64 Einbinder, “Recall from Exile,” 228.
preserve their “native” tongue as well. One can easily imagine that there were very real tensions between those already settled in the Mediterranean communities and the new arrivals.

Thus, Israel’s somewhat sardonic allusion to the French language as having a certain level of clout - or at least being perceived that way - takes on the mood of the times in some way. Such an interpretation of the Judéo-Provençal passage becomes even more plausible when we consider some of the marital practices in the sefardic communities. The responsa literature from this period in southern France attests to the recurring problem of fraudulent marriages, sometimes based upon economic arrangements, 65 and while bigamy was no longer permitted in the northern regions, it was still tolerated in the sefardic communities. 66 Einbinder cites the case of a well-known Jewish physician, Abraham Caslari (probably one of Israel’s own clan 67), who came from Narbonne to Besalu and wed a second wife, the member of a prominent local medical family – possibly to further his career – an example which, she says, is “probably not unique among French refugees in Aragon.” 68

This confluence of circumstances might enlighten Israel’s allusions in the Judéo-Provençal text. While it is still rather difficult to parse the passage precisely, he is again bringing to the fore the question of language and identity. But rather than linking linguistic identity with religious ideologies, here the indicator of foreignness in language, and therefore “otherness,” is related to cultural and political factors. Yet it is in line with the more parodic tone of the vernacular version, poking fun at some of the customs of his confrères, remaining faithful all the while to the gendered constructs of the biblical text. In this instance, again, the two versions of the Esther romance manifest their distinct roles and the ambiguous affinities of their author.

67 Ernest Renan, “La Famille Caslari,” in Les Écrivains Juifs Français, 644-50. Of course, Renan’s reference takes us back to the confusion over the identity of Israel versus Crescas (see biographical note in Introduction). However, we can conjecture that there would have been such a familial relationship between our author and Abraham.
68 Einbinder, “Recall from Exile,” 229.
Despite the particularity of tenor to the individual texts, however, we do find hints of overlap in the respective versions. In the Hebrew, for instance, Israel closes out his expansion of this section with a verse that brings a tinge of satire to the more pious treatment of the language issue.

"וכל אשה חכמה ילעג ותעמל
והلاء הנכר הוקם על
אתם תריבון לבעל
עמ אמרתי און דיבור ההוה":

(And every wise woman will mock and loathe
for has the foreigner not been exalted.
Will you not contend for the husband
because you have said this thing:)

Israel’s clever punning in these lines refers back to the wife who might be tempted to haughtiness by Vashti’s example, and again to foreignness. It stands as an interesting parallel to the close of the vernacular passage, which we have seen above. I revisit it here for comparison; since it is, like the Hebrew, an authorial intervention into the text:

“Mes cant ela lo conoissera,
Pueis en ren non s’escuzara.
Per que sia volem conegut
A son parlar dont es mogut.”

("Et, même quand elle saura ensuite sa langue,
Elle ne s’excusera en rien.
C’est pourquoi nous voulons savoir
à sa langue d’où il vient.”)

And ever the wordsmith, Israel calls up a biblical verse in the Hebrew text, "האתם תריבון לבעל", from Judges 6:13, that creates a double entendre. For the tanakhic verse refers to Ba‘al, the false god, while Israel uses it as a pun on “husband” or “master.” In so doing, his interjection takes on religious overtones, sustaining his rhetorical effect even when he is being whimsical.

In this verse, moreover, Israel implants the word תילג (will mock) with yet another play on words, this time referring back to the word לילג, [la'agei safah], the vernacular. The reversion to this root word indicates its importance to Israel, for we encounter it in its connections to the vernacular as “other” on numerous occasions throughout the Hebrew romance. It recurs next

69 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50r, ll. 165-8.
70 Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob, Roman de la Reine Esther, 148-9, ll. 335-8.
in an interesting adaptation to the biblical original when we learn of the plot to kill Ahasuerus. Where the Megillah narrates this episode in the traditional terse fashion of the Bible, stating simply that two of the king’s eunuchs, “Bigtan and Teresh, of those that kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus,”71 סריסי המלך משמרי המלך/Delete: המלך Ahasuerus, Israel embellishes the passage both to heighten its effect, but also to add his own commentary, building on the earlier rabbinic interpretations.

(And he [Mordecai] was seated at the threshold of the king[‘s palace]
Two of the king’s eunuchs, guarding the threshold,
called to one another for advice:

From the day he took that maiden
the flame of lust has burned within him.
Even at night our sleep wanders [is disturbed] and we waken.
And those useless ones said ‘what will save us from this?’:

To put the king to death was their advice
in the vernacular, the language of their land:
They did not know that the interpreter was among them73
hearing this matter:)

The Megillah offers very little background or context for the episode, and the exegetical material on the passage is concerned primarily with how the event fits into the overall

71 Esther 2:21.
72 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50v-51r, ll. 242-52.
73 See my note on the term “melits” (מְלִיתָּס), (interpreter or rhetorician), in Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” 71 n.75. See discussion that follows.
plot of the story. The rabbis explain it as part of God’s larger plan, in that it provides
the opportunity for Mordecai to save the king’s life, thereby not only winning Ahasuerus’
favor, but also setting the stage for Haman’s humiliation and ultimate downfall. The
relevance of the intrigue rests largely in how it propels the narrative forward to its miraculous
conclusion. Israel, in his turn, uses the episode as an opportunity; for him, however, the
occasion lies in reinforcing the alterity of the characters. He makes a direct correlation
between their malicious intent and their foreign status, highlighting the fact that they discuss
their evildoings in a foreign vernacular [be-la‘agei safah u-ve-lešhon ’artsotam]
"רלשהיאר툼". The Babylonian Talmud tells us that they were from Tarsus and conversed in
their native language, Tarsi. Mordecai, who was sitting at the threshold of the palace with
hopes of learning news about Esther, overheard them and understood them since he was a
member of the Sanhedrin and knew 70 languages. 74 That Israel makes no mention of their
specific nationality, that he doesn’t reiterate the place name attributed to them in the Talmud,
again seems to indicate that he was confident in his audience’s familiarity with his allusion.
Moreover, by not naming a particular place, the reference could easily be applied to his own
setting and the association made between that and Esther’s Persia.

In another expansion only several lines earlier, Israel offers further evidence for the otherness
of these figures. Here, writing about Hagai and Shasgaz, the two eunuchs charged with
supervising the king’s wives and concubines, he says:

(Hagai and Shasgaz chaste eunuchs set apart
dried up and castrated, their manliness destroyed76
they were the guardians of the women
one on this side, one on the other:)

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74 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50v, ll. 229-32.
75 The word [ma-‘akh] literally means “pressed or squeezed out,” however Brown Driver Briggs cites a
verse from Leviticus 22:24 in which the meaning is used as a reference to emasculation.

The rabbinic literature does not expound on this aspect of the *Megillah*, on the figures of the eunuchs; the commentary is original to Israel. While it may seem to have only minimal significance, his remarks about their sexuality - or asexuality - are not arbitrary. Jewish tradition certainly did not condone the practice of castration, which defied Mosaic law. *Deuteronomy* 23:2 states explicitly: “He that is crushed or maimed in his privy parts shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord.” And while sexual abstention was encouraged in medieval Christianity, spiritual chastity was the goal, that is, the ability to overcome temptation through faith. Castration was in fact frowned upon as “reminiscent of pagan worship,” and was a source of humiliation. Israel’s qualifying statement about the eunuchs carries a tone of judgment and criticism. Where the eunuchs would have been seen as “other” even in the dominant Christian society, to Jews they were abominations, as Israel cites from *Leviticus* 22:24, but also stand in opposition to one of God’s first commandments and the *mitzvah* to be “fruitful and multiply.” By reminding his audience of this, Israel again points to the difference of these figures, reinforcing their alienness to Jewish mores. Thus it is not by chance that Bigtan and Teresh also conspire in a foreign tongue.

Of course, their plot is not successful because Mordecai was nearby, and Israel refers to him here by his moniker, *melits*, quoting a verse from *Genesis* 42:23, which recounts the story of Joseph’s encounter with his brothers, who do not recognize him as their sibling and one of their own people. As they spoke amongst themselves, in their language, about the wrong that they had committed against him, they “knew not that Joseph understood them; for the interpreter was between them,” "וַיַּדְעֵה יַעֲבֹר הָאָן יַעֲבֹר יֵדְעוּ שֶׁיָּשְׁמַע יוֹסֵף: כִּי הַמֶּלִיץ בְּינָם."

Joseph, a courtier, was known for his wisdom and his facility with languages, and the rabbis accorded Mordecai that same skill. Linguistic aptitude would have been quite standard for a courtier, whether

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78 The interpretation of the scriptural source for this is *Matthew* 19:12, where Jesus differentiates between eunuchs, the last category of which are those “who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” and “the one who can accept this should accept it.” *NIV Bible*.


80 See above, n. 75.

in biblical times or, indeed, in Israel’s own day. And indeed, as we have already seen in his colophon, Israel identifies himself with the tradition of Joseph and Mordecai; although he himself was not a courtier, his status as an erudite Jewish physician and his involvement with others in the medical establishment who were, affords him some liberty in making this assertion.

The word *melits*, moreover, had a contemporary meaning to which he is certainly alluding as well. In the Middle Ages, *melitsa* was the term used by scholars for “rhetoric,” as well as a descriptor for poetic composition, and can be found in the Hebrew works of countless writers, including Israel’s contemporaries. One, in fact, Yedaiah Bedersi, the son of Abraham ha-Bedersi, came to be called by two appellations, *ha-Penini*, “the pearl” and believed to be a reference to his birthplace, as well as *ha-melitz*. He was known for his witty didactic style, as in בקשת המים [*Bakashat ha-memim*] (Request of the Memis), a poem consisting of nine chapters, wherein every word begins with the Hebrew character מ [mem], a religious study that ultimately pleads for the redemption of Israel. Thus in citing this verse, Israel is engaging in word-play, punning both on the biblical definitions and the popular referents of the term, that also leads back to his own role as author of this adaptation, his own *melitsa*, at once clever in its own poetic conceits - i.e. ending each of his verses with the Hebrew word ז [zeh] - and instructional, like that of his colleague. Indeed, Israel closes off the episode in his text with another expansion on the *Megillah*, drawing on the rabbinical interpretations that view it as part of God’s providence, with another combination of punning and moralizing.

 catégorie pour le développement des musulmans 

**וישלח מרדכי מלאכים אל אסתר**

**חרש לאמר בגתנא עם תרש מסתתר**

**ודם המלך זה لهذا יר**: יי לאדני המלך נקמות היום הזה.

**ויבוקש הדבר והנה אמת ותמים**

**וניתלו שניהם להיות לנס עמים**


83 Schirmann, *Toldot ha-Shirah ha-'Ivrit*, 467, says that no one has been able to identify the specific place, though it may be a reference to Perpignan.

(And Mordecai sent messengers to Esther unable to say [himself] what Bigtan and Teresh were hiding And they sought from one another the blood of the king. God would avenge his majesty the king this day:

The matter was questioned, and here true and sound, and they two were hung that day as a miracle for the people and the name of Mordecai was written to be a boon in later days. Remember this day:)

Here Israel is showing his dexterity with the language, using Hebrew roots to pun on the name of Esther, אסתר, highlighting the word hiding [משרה, מסתתר]. For the notion of hiding is, after all, central to the story: Esther hides her identity, her Jewishness, from the king in order to save her people. He follows with part of a verse from 2 Samuel 4:8, "יתן יי לאדני המלך נקמות, היום הזה" that also invokes the name of King Saul, who is responsible for the perpetuation of the Amalekites, hence, Haman.

In the final line of the account, we find a pun on the word שכר [sakhar], which here we would naturally understand as gift or reward. However, it is being used here also to conjure drunkenness, which has the same root letters, crafting a double entendre. Clearly, one would have to be quite fluent in the construction of Hebrew words to understand these playful gestures: a comment on what Israel expected of at least a section of his audience, and another indicator that the text was a stage to flaunt his literary prowess.

With this in mind, however, the final line in this passage reminds us of Israel’s didactic purpose as well, for it is a directive: Remember this day. This notion of remembering is a very common topos in Jewish culture, and the Purim holiday is heavily tied up with it. The Sabbath before the Purim celebration is, after all, called Shabbat Zakhor, שבת זכור, (Sabbath

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85Ms. HUC 396, fol. 21b, II. 253-60. The top of the folio in the Bodleian manuscript where these lines appear is damaged.
86 2 Samuel 4:8:

of Remembrance) and it is a solemn reminder of God’s commandment to the Jews after the exodus from Egypt. The exhortation comes in Deuteronomy 25:17-19:

"Remember what Amalek did to you as you came forth out of Egypt: how he met you by the way and smote the hindmost of you, all that were feeble in the rear, when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear God: Therefore it shall be when the Lord, your God, gives you respite from the enemies that surround you, in the land which your God has given you as an inheritance to possess, that you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heaven; you shall not forget.)

This is read during the prayer service every year on the Shabbath preceding Purim, part of the Torah portion Ki Teitsei, and all of the commentaries emphasize the transgression of King Saul in 1 Samuel 15, when he spared the life of Agag, the Amalekite king, against God’s strict order. For, it was this grave misstep that eventually gave rise to Agag’s descendant, Haman, who sought to destroy the Jewish people in Persia. And in fact, later in the narrative, once the reversal has taken place, Esther herself reiterates God’s commandment to erase the memory of Amalek,

(And Esther made another request of the king
let the seed of Haman be destroyed tomorrow in Shushan
For God, the exalted, commanded us to erase the memory of Amalek and we have not been cleansed of it until this day:)

Thus Israel’s invective is not made lightly. The charge to his audience that they remember is laden with biblical overtones. Yet it brings with it that topos of memory and in turn, its association with writing, both integral to the story of Purim itself. Ahasuerus’ regular bouts

88 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 57v, ll. 845-8.
of amnesia, brought on by his excessive consumption of alcohol, precipitate the writing and dissemination of decrees throughout the narrative - in the respective language of each satrapy. Even more important, however, is the king’s book of chronicles, his ספר זכרונות [Sefer zikhronot]. For that is where Mordecai’s deed, saving the king’s life when Bigtan and Teresh were plotting against him, had been written, and it is the reading of that record, the written words, that impels Ahasuerus to honor Mordecai, setting in motion the reversal that is God’s plan.

Israel adds an interesting twist to the latter scenario that harks back to the verses from Deuteronomy. When the king orders that his book of chronicles be taken out and read to him, Shimshi, one of the royal scribes, and the son of Haman, instructs that the name of Mordecai be erased from the entry. However, an angel sent by God repels Shimshi and instructs that they “inscribe this man.”

(Shimshi, the son of Haman, read to the king
And he instructed that the name of Mordecai be erased.
An angel of God repelled him and instructed instead
‘Inscribe the name of this man:’)

The notion of writing and memory, particularly Jewish memory, takes the stage again at the end of the Megillah, when the events are recorded for posterity. And Israel brings it to us with even greater emphasis in lines 869-76 of the Hebrew text.

89 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 54r, lines 545-8. Midrash Panim Agerim on Esther, Solomon Buber, ed.. Sifre de ‘agadeta ‘al megilat ‘ester: ha-lo hemah kevutsat midrashim shonim: Midrash Aba Guryon, Midrash Panim ‘Agerim, Midrash Lekah Tov (Vilna: Ha-‘Almanah veha-‘ahim Rom, 1886), 2:1; Midrash Lekah Tov on Esther, Chapter 6: "...and we learn that Shimshi would erase, and [angel] Gabriel would write.”
(So ‘the hind of the dawn’ and the gazelle, the young hart wrote
this revealed epistle until the end of days,
for they found propitiation
with God, the beloved one:

And after all the visions and prophecies were sealed
as the sages established with feasting and merriment
the scroll of Esther shall never be annulled.
Remember this day:)

Israel’s modifications to the original text are striking for a number of reasons. The most
germane to the present discussion, is his directive “Remember this day,” which is of course
implied, but not explicitly stated in the scroll. Clearly, he considers it important to remind
his audience both of their duty, and that it derives from a revealed text, [sefer galui].
In so doing, he again claims his right as author and didact to pass on its message.

In the biblical text this epistle is one of three that signify the reversal of fortune for the Jews
in Persia. Israel’s narrative likewise sees a flurry of writing as it draws to a close. His
treatment of this first of these decrees, however, parallel to Esther 8:9, both a retraction of
Haman’s edict calling for the destruction of the Jews, and a mandate for them to kill the
enemies that surround them in turn - omits a significant detail. The Megillah recounts the
dissemination of this edict with the same rhetorical style employed for all of the preceding
edicts throughout the narrative. They were sent to each of the king’s 127 provinces in its
respective script and language:

メギラ הוא המגדה את בדלאה לכולים
במשתה ובשמחה קבעו חכמים
זכור את היום הזה:”

Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 58r.
91 ‘Ayelet ha-shahar, the moniker attributed to Esther in Psalms 22.
refer to the 127 provinces as the *Megillah* does in 8:9. Nevertheless, his omission of the Jews being addressed in “their own script and language,” raises interesting questions.

That the *Megillah* intentionally specifies the transmission of the decree to the Jews in their own language is meaningful. Adele Berlin notes in her *JPS Commentary*, “Language signifies peoplehood. By saying that the Jews of the Persian empire retain their own language; the verse signals that the Jews have preserved their Jewishness.”\(^92\) What, then, might we understand from Israel’s omission of this verse that carries with it crucial information about Jewish language and identity in Persia? Given the parallels Israel draws between his own diasporic setting and that of Esther, is it not plausible that in his silence, he is commenting on the shortcomings of his own community in preserving their language and by extension their Jewish identity?

It is commonly agreed by scholars that the Jews in southern France, like their co-religionists in other parts of medieval Europe, spoke the language of those among whom they lived, that is, their Christian neighbors. The contemporaneous Jewish writings attest to this phenomenon as well, as we have already seen in the Me’iri’s commentary. Even a religious and intellectual authority as highly regarded as David Kimhi glossed his Hebrew texts in Provençal.\(^93\) And of course, we need only consider the extent to which the Jewish authors lamented the state of the Hebrew language and its lack of use, to surmise that the vernacular was the primary language in daily use in the diaspora.

While we cannot be certain that the omission of the verse on the Jews being addressed in their own language shows some sort of judgment on his part, the purposefulness of his adaptations would suggest that this might indeed be the case. The importance of such an implication is particularly remarkable in terms of language in his two versions of the Esther text. Since, as I argue, the Hebrew adaptation is more didactic in nature, then this omission

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93 Silberstein, *The Provençal Esther Poem,* 39. Silberstein provides a list of Hebrew texts, including Kimhi’s *Sefer ha-Shorashim* and the Meiri’s commentaries on *Proverbs* and *Psalms* that are glossed in Provençal. In addition, she cites three anonymous 14th century commentaries on *Job* with Provençal glosses. Meyer, “Le Roman Provençal d’Esther,” 195, cites a 14th century addition in Judéo-Provençal by Leon de Bagnols to his Purim parody.
could well be a means of communicating a message to his confreres, suggesting that in not preserving the language given to them as the “chosen people,” particularly, in light of the potential to cause further transgression, they had failed to preserve their Jewishness and in turn strayed from their covenant with God. And yet, his first adaptation was itself in the vernacular! In her Multilingualism and Mother Tongue in Medieval French, Occitan and Catalan Narratives, Leglu makes the point that “language choice may carry an ideological or didactic element.”94 While we could surely make a case for this in Israel’s Hebrew language version, the Judéo-Provençal bears a different weight. Here, I would propose, he is responding to the reality of his community.

The rabbis, even in the Mishnah, conceded that knowledge of Hebrew was not ubiquitous among the Jewish people, even for ritual purposes. Tractate Sotah, in fact, allows for the recitation of certain prayers in the vernacular when one’s understanding of the Hebrew would prevent him from fulfilling his obligation.95 Naturally, Hebrew would have been the preferred language for performing all sacred acts, but the rabbinic authorities agreed upon the necessity to relax the stringencies of the law in order to conform to the state of the Jews in exile. This flexibility is also reflected in the gemarah, the talmudic expansion of the oral law, and continued into the Middle Ages. Indeed, we have encountered a medieval example with the Me’iri, who tailored his ruling about ‘olam ha-bah to include the masses, those from עמי הארץ, [’amei ha’arets] to reflect their linguistic situation. The rabbis recognized that the ideals in Jewish law did not always dovetail with the truth of diasporic life. Thus, where the Hebrew version speaks to Israel’s aspirations toward an ideal, the Judéo-Provençal speaks to the practical context of Jewish life in Occitania, responding, at least in part, to the actual circumstances - and needs - of his community.

While there are no extant siddurim (prayer books) from this period in the Provençal, it is very possible - even likely - that part of the prayer service would have been recited in the

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94 Leglu, Multilingualism and Mother Tongue, 85.
95 Order Nashim, Tractate Sotah 7:1: “These may be recited in any language [that one understands]...” This is followed by a list of those prayers that may be recited in a language other than Hebrew; included among them are the Shema (קריאת שמע) the Eighteen Benedictions. The next mishnah lists those prayers that must be recited in lashon ha-kodesh, the “holy tongue.” Mishnayot: Order Nashim, Vol. 3, ed. Philip Blackman, (New York: The Judaica Press, 1963), 360.
vernacular. Just as Tractate Sotah deals with daily prayer, Tractate Megillah addresses the issue of permissibility for the reading of the Scroll of Esther in the vernacular.

("If one read it by heart, or if he read it in translation in any language, he has not carried out his duty. But they may read it to such as speak a foreign tongue in their foreign tongue; but if one who spoke a foreign language heard it in Hebrew, he has done his duty.")

According to Jewish law hearing the scroll aloud is an obligation. As such, I am not suggesting that either of Israel’s adaptations would have been intended as replacements for the recitation of the Scroll. And while a number of parodies and adaptations from this period exist, none are in the vernacular. Thus it is quite possible that Israel was using the Judéo-Provençal romance in part as a way of bringing Purim material to the general populace, including excerpts of the midrashic literature. For he tells us at the beginning of the narrative:

("Et si mon histoire est plus détaillée qu’on ne l’attend n’y voyez pas un excès; en plus du recit elle raconte avec abundance les gloses de l’Histoire Sainte, et comme tout est vrai et certifié je ne laisserai rien dans l’ombre.")

97 Order Moed, Tractate Megillah 2:1. Blackman, Mishnayoth: Order Mo’ed, pg. 446. In his notes, Blackman states that here “translations” refer to translations in Aramaic or Greek and perhaps also Coptic, Elamite and Median. However, this Mishnah is the basis for rabbinic rulings on the matter beyond this period and would have been used to determine the legitimacy of readings in other languages.
98 The Hebrew, we know, was part of the liturgy for Shabbat Zakhor, an addition to complement the Megillah.
99 I defer here to the reading of Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob over that of Silberstein, who has transcribed this line as “Cont alas glozas dal prosest.” Although the spacing of the words and characters can be inconsistent in the manuscript, here, the words are quite plainly laid out: "פִּיר קִי רִין נַו נַוְּךָו לְלַעְנָהוֹת בַּלְעָנוֹת, וַיַּחְצֶּמֶנָה אֵשֶׁרִים"). Both Meyer, 205, and Pansier, 10, also transcribed the line as “Conta las glozas del prosest,” and the latter explains in note 40 that this is an “allusion aux gloses interminables des traits juridiques.”
100 Silberstein translates this line as “the commentator’s glosses recount.” Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob relate the word “prosest” to “prozel,” which they define as “prose liturgique,” stating further, “Là encore les termes choisis par Crescas ne le sont pas au hasard.” “Le Roman de la Reine Esther,” 127, n. 3. Pansier, in his note, explains that this is an “allusion aux gloses interminables des traits juridiques.” 10, n. 40. Meyer also signals this as a reference to rabbinic commentaries, 201.
101 Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob, have slightly altered the reading of line 42. Silberstein’s transcription of the Hebrew characters, "פִּיר קִי רִין נַו נַוְּךָו לְלַעְנָהוֹת").
It is not completely clear in this passage what Israel is referring to in the *glozas del prosist* of line 40. Silberstein translates the phrase simply as “commentator’s glosses.” Méjean-Thioli er, however, transcribed the line differently, “Conta las glozas del prosest,” preferring to read *prosest* as a cousin of *prozel*, “prose liturgique” according to her note,\(^\text{103}\) and then translates the phrase as “gloses de l’Histoire Sainte.”\(^\text{104}\) According to both readings Israel admits to expanding the biblical narrative. In a parallel verse of the Hebrew he states:

\[
"אספרה אל חק ספר ומדרשים
מגילת אסתר תבורך מנשים
במוקם הלא הור צעד קדושים
ביום ההוא יושר השיר הזה:"
\]

(Let me speak to the tradition, story and lore [midrashim]
of the Scroll of Esther, most blessed among women
in a place of praise among the holy congregants
on that day this song will be sung.)

In the latter, however, Israel is quite explicit about his source material, for in that text, his reliance on the exegetes is central to his more pious intentions.

While Israel addresses the question of language in the passage we encountered earlier in the present chapter - the edict issued after Vashti’s condemnation - that dealt specifically with vernacular language, in fact, the only direct remark he makes about the Hebrew language in the Judéo-Provençal text is in a reference to Haman. Here he draws on midrashic material, but the tone is notably not one of instruction.

\[
"Cel cavalier avia dos noms:
Aman era son nom en laic,
Mes on l’apelavan en ebraic
Memucan en aquest envit
Qe vol dir en roman ‘amanovit’
(“This gentleman had two names:
Haman was his name in the vernacular,
but they were calling him in Hebrew.
Memucan in this banquet
which means in Provençal ‘prepared;’
\]

Poem,” 192) is more accurate. I also prefer Silberstein’s translation of this line, “For that reason, I won’t omit anything.” (or my own “For that reason, I won’t leave anything out”).\(^\text{102}\) Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob, “Roman de la Reine Esther,” 126 (transcription) and 127 (translation), ll. 37-42.\(^\text{103}\) Ibid., 127, n. 3.\(^\text{104}\) Ibid., 1. 40.\(^\text{105}\) Ms. Bodleian, heb. e. 10, fol. 48v, ll. 41-44. See my treatment of this in relation to genre in the following chapter, “A Poem by Many Other Names,” 198.
De mal a far era ben aparelhat He was well prepared for evil doing;
En aco era ben talhat he was well cut out for that.
So nom meteus era garent His very name was a guarantee
Qe el anava mal qerent; that he went about seeking trouble;
Per aco ac nom Memucan.”)

Indeed, Israel’s midrashic enhancements in the vernacular romance, such as this one from the Babylonian Talmud, tend to draw on the aggadic tradition, generally parabolic in nature, in keeping with its more colorful narrative style. And while the Judéo-Provençal text is sprinkled with substance from Jewish sources, the Occitan identity of both the author and his audience is far more pronounced here.

Hebrew - as a subject - is noticeably absent from the Judéo-Provençal version of the romance. While this might seem to be an obvious aspect of a vernacular text, I mention it to address the linguistic question of a southern French Jewish idiom that has been prevalent in the scholarship over the last century. By and large, the deliberations over whether the Jews in the Comtat Venaissin and Avignon had their own variety of Occitan or a Jewish dialect have been resolved and it is now generally agreed that the Jews spoke the same language as their non-Jewish co-citizens. Although there is some evidence of specifically Jewish locution, most would concede that the Hebraisms that occur would have been words and phrases associated with religious rites or prayers that had no equivalent in the vernacular, phrases used to refer to something particular to Jewish culture. However, we find no

106 Transcription of Méjean-Thiolier, “Roman de la Reine Esther,” 144, ll. 286-95.
108 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah, 12b: “We have learned in a Boraitha: Memuchan was Haman. Why was he called Memuchan? Because he was destined for the troubles that befell him afterwards. R. Kahana said: From this we see that usually an ignorant man comes forward first (as he is mentioned last in verse 14).” Also Yalkut Shimoni, Chapter 1.
110 The question of whether there was a specific Judéo-Provençal idiom, that is a distinct dialect, specific to Jews, has been debated at length by scholars. The general consensus is that Comtadin Jews spoke the same regional vernacular as their non-Jewish confreres. There were certainly words or phrases that belonged to the lexicon of the local Jews, but these were words or terms that were particular to religious ritual contexts or culturally identified. According to George Passerat, if there were indeed discernable differences in the language spoken by the Jews, they were primarily phonetic: “Quant au corpus lexical, dans l’état actuel de nos recherches, il ne dépasse guère le millier d’entrées. C’est donc du côté de la phonétique qu’il faut orienter la recherche.” “Le Judéo-Occitan existe : essai sur la "lenga juzieva", de Marie-Claire Viguié,” in Diasporas 2 Langues dépaysées (Toulouse: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Universite de Toulouse, 1988),
instances of this in Israel’s vernacular fragment other than the explanation about Haman’s name, which is quite a deliberate insertion. In fact, where in the Hebrew Israel creates a pastiche of midrashic and biblical phraseology, in the vernacular version, he draws on adages from Provençal, sayings that would have been well-known to most at the time, regardless of religion. All of the editions of the Judéo-Provençal point to traditional expressions and adages that Israel incorporates into the romance, either directly or by way of allusion. When, for instance, in an expansion of the Megillah, the ministers have a long discussion about Vashti’s insolent behavior, apprehensive that other women in the realm will take her example and advocate for her execution, they use a well-known saying, “portar las braias.”

“Tornaran s’en a los maritz.
Ben en poiran estar marritz.
Encars vos dic saran tant gaias
Qe elas voldran portar las braias.
Ieu dic, senher, qe Vasti mora,
E aco ses tota demora.”

(“They will turn against their husbands who might well be afflicted by it.
Moreover, I tell you they will be so unruly that they will want to wear the pants.
I say, Sire, that Vashti should die and that without any delay.”)\(^{112}\)

Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob have, moreover, indicated a connection between the passage cited earlier regarding the man who must speak his own language at home and the Provençal adage “Fau basti mé de peiro de soun endré,” “one must build a house with the stones of his country.”\(^{113}\) Yet another refers to the lines introducing Haman, before Israel’s explication of his Hebrew name. Among the king’s seven advisors, the one who liked to speak:

“…Aisi con la plus avol cavilha
Del carre premiera crenhilha.”

(“…de meme que la chev ille la moins importante du chariot est celle qui grince en premier.”)\(^{114}\)

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111 Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob, “Roman de la Reine Esther,” 145-6, ll. 307-12, n. 1 states: “’porta li braio’ qui signifie “commander son mari.” I will return to this saying in the following chapter in my discussion of genre.

112 Silberstein’s translation of lines 307-312, with my emendations.

113 Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob, “Roman de la Reine Esther,” 147, n. 7, cite Marie Mauron’s Dictons d’Oc et Proverbes de Provence, 76. The entry for “endré” in Mistral’s Lou Tresor dou Felibrige lists “country” as a possible usage for the word.

114 Ibid., 144-5, lines 283-4.
Meyer also cites these lines with Mistral’s (and other) entries for the proverb, “Le plus pichoto caviho dou carri meno lou mai de brut - Es la mendro caviho dou carri la plus marrido caviho dou carri.” These proverbs are not meant to replace the midrashic additions to Israel’s Judéo-Provençal text. Instead, they serve as rhetorical devices intended to strike a familiar note with the vernacular audience, functioning in this text as the midrashic embellishments do in the Hebrew text, grounding it in its native setting.

The vernacular text further reveals its cultural milieu with romance terms that cannot be accurately replicated in Hebrew. Thus, when Israel recounts the festivities at the king’s opening banquet, guests arrive on horseback and participate in torneis e jostas e biors, “tournaments, jousts and contests,” activities that would not typically have been associated with Jewish life. In fact, Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob define the word biors as “exchanging blows of a lance,” and associate it with the expression “Faire son behours,” the apprenticeship for knighthood. To render such a specialized term into Hebrew in such a way that would capture its true sense would not have been possible. It would have required a lengthy explanation, not only upsetting the compositional quality of the Hebrew text, but interfering with its mosaic schema.

Israel’s diction in the vernacular text is also highly specific to its geographical setting. When, for instance, the king is introduced, we learn of Ahasuerus’ great power and the extent of his reign, as in the Megillah. Yet he rules not over 127 satrapies, but over 127 “comtatz” or counties, according to the common political divisions of the time.

“...E fon senher e pozestat De cent et vint e set comtatz.” (“...and he was lord and ruler of one hundred and twenty-seven counties.”)

Several lines later, Israel puns on a midrash from the Babylonian Talmud, also treated extensively by medieval commentators wherein Ahasuerus is faulted for and incorrect in

116 Ibid., 128, l. 64.
117 Ibid., 129, n. 6.
118 Ibid., 128, l. 48.
calculating the destruction of the Temple and the Jewish exile,\textsuperscript{120} using a similarly specific label:

\begin{quote}

``Non cre que fos ni rei ni comte  
Que tant pauc saupes de comte.''
``I don’t believe there was ever a king or count
who knew so little about counting.''
\textsuperscript{121}

\end{quote}

And while the idiomatic delineations are quite evident in the Judéo-Provençal text, the melding of traditions at times creates something of a linguistic hybridization. This manifests itself in passages such as the previous one where midrashic and local topoi are joined. In another instances, it is even more pronounced. When, for example, we first meet our heroine, she is introduced as “Esterela,” in a diminutive form, which Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob translate as “petite, jeune Esther,”\textsuperscript{122}

\begin{quote}

``En Suzan, denfre las filhas  
De las juzieus, I ac una orfanela 
Qe era paura e mesquenela 
Mot condela e mot irnela, 
C’on apelavan Esterela..'
``Dans Suze, parmi les jeunes juives
il y avait une orpheline,
qui était pauvre et miserable,
mais très gracieuse et vive
qu’on appelait Esterelle…’’
\textsuperscript{123}

\end{quote}

clearly a vernacularized version of the name from the Scriptures. Yet further on in the narrative, after she has found favor in the eyes of the king and is sent for her cosmetic preparations, Israel defaults to her biblical onomastic, “Esther,”\textsuperscript{123}

\begin{quote}

``Ester fon mesa enfre cambras.  
``Esther fut place dans les appartements royaux.
Peseron lhi de musc e d’amba…’’
``On prit soin d’elle avec du musc et de l’ambre..’’
\textsuperscript{124}

\end{quote}

The shift from the diminutive form, when Esther is an unknowing virgin, to the full form of her name might be explained by the change in her marital status. Yet the shift does not explain Israel’s inconsistent spelling. With her initial introduction, her name is written in a transliterated version with the Hebrew characters ש [sin] and ט [tet] - אֶ스ְטֵר / Esterela. However, when her name is written the second time, it is spelled exactly as it is found in the

\textsuperscript{120} Tractate Megillah, 11b; Cf. Segal, “Ahasuerus’ Calculations,” in The Babylonian Esther Midrash, 157-92.
\textsuperscript{122} Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob, “Roman de la Reine Esther,” 152, n. 6.
\textsuperscript{123} Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob, “Roman de la Reine Esther,” 152-3, ll. 402-7.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 154 -5, ll. 433-4.
Megillah, with the Hebrew characters ס [samekh] and ת [taf] - אסתר / Esther. Such inconsistencies in the transliterated Hebrew are certainly not uncommon in the manuscript, yet this discrepancy is remarkable given Israel’s intimacy with his Hebrew source material, and seems to point to his dualistic tendencies.

One of the most remarkable differences between the two versions - one which also illustrates these tendencies with great clarity - is Israel’s insertion of the medical material in the Judéo-Provençal text. To be sure, Israel uses the vernacular text to display his literary acumen in his “native” language, but at the same time, it becomes a stage for his expertise as a rationalist physician, which was discussed in Chapter One of the present study, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles.” Israel, we have seen, was prolific in his description of the foods at Ahasuerus’ first banquet, offering his audience a luscious account of the dishes served, their ingredients and preparation as prescribed by the popular dietaries and regimina sanitatis. Yet the question that arises about this account from a linguistic perspective is why Israel restricted his medical additions to the vernacular text and chose not to include any of these into the Hebrew version. Indeed, in the parallel section of the Hebrew version, Israel’s description of the victuals at the banquet is a mere two lines long, with only the slightest degree of specificity about the menu.125

"איל וצבי ויחמור שור שה כבשים
עגלי מרבק וברבורים אבוסים
לכלם נתן ובדם ענב מתבוססים
אלה מזה ואלה מזה."

(Ram and deer, roebuck, lamb
Fatted calves and stuffed swans
steeped in the blood of grapes [wine] he gave to all
some from here, some from there:) 126

To be sure, as a translator of medical texts into Hebrew, Israel would have faced the limitations of the Hebrew language and its ability to accommodate Latin and vernacular terminologies in science and medicine. This question has been explored by scholars in the field, who generally agree that the Jewish translators faced many obstacles in rendering their

125 See my discussion on this passage in Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles.”
126 HUC Ms. 396, fol. 20a, ll. 77-80; Ms. Bodleian heb. e.10, fol. 48v, ll. 77-80 [this folium of the Oxford Bodleian ms is damaged and the text of these lines corrupted]; Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 99. See also Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” 84.
source material into Hebrew accurately. They dealt with this problem in several ways: sometimes drawing on locutions from biblical or rabbinical Hebrew that could, with the appropriate explanation, serve as substitutes, in other instances, transliterating them from the Latin or vernacular. And while these options were perhaps not the ideal, they were nonetheless a solution and came to be the standard recourse. Susan Einbinder’s argument attributing the abbreviated description in the Hebrew to these very linguistic barriers is compelling. Yet, given the present reading of the texts, another perspective might be worthy of consideration.

Israel had already completed his translation of Arnau of Villanova’s *Regimen Sanitatis ad Regem Aragonem* and its abridged version, the *Arnaudina*, and in the course of this endeavor, would have been likely to encounter challenges in rendering dietary and medical vocabulary into Hebrew. By the time of the Esther compositions, he would necessarily have solved any problems posed by the translation process, finding ways to express such terms in his target language. Since he routinely worked with such specialized terminologies, both in his translations and in his practice as a physician, he would not have been without the tools to incorporate them into the Hebrew romance, just as he did in the Judéo-Provençal. A number of the ingredients he mentions in the vernacular romance do indeed have Hebrew equivalents, which can be found in contemporaneous medical texts and synonym books. For instance, in relating the details of the meal, on lines 135 and 136, he refers to one of the dishes, “beef and mutton came with pepper sauce, with rocket and with mustard”, “bueu e mouton venc am pebrada, amb eruga e am mostarda.” While “rocket” [*eruga*] or “pepper sauce” [*pebrada*] might not have had a direct Hebrew counterpart, beef and mutton are meats mentioned in the Bible and thus not an issue for translation. Hebrew also has a word for *mostarda* (“mustard”) - מַשְׂרוֹד - which, moreover, is listed in dictionaries of medical

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The chicken [galina] of line 139 is also easily translated into Hebrew and appears in the book of medical synonyms: perditz (“partridges”) is פירדיץ, "parsley" [jurvert] is פרישיל, feizans (“pheasants”) is פאישאן.

In keeping with this line of reasoning, we mustn’t fail to consider the fact that the Judéo-Provençal text is written in Hebrew characters by design, and naturally required the transliteration of all of the vernacular terminologies anyway. Many of these transliterations became the accepted Hebrew forms for the same words in their source language. We find, for example, the transliterated form of “sumac,” סומאק in the Medical Synonym List from Medieval Provence, based on Shem Tov ben Isaac of Tortosa’s 13th century Sefer ha-Shimmush, written precisely as Israel did in the romance. In fact, the entry lists a variation on that spelling in the Hebrew, but also a transliteration, featured in Maimonides’ own Medical Aphorisms as "סומק or סמאק.

Thus, Israel was not completely without recourse if he had desired to offer a similarly detailed description of the banquet in the Hebrew text. Einbinder points out that the Hebrew text, “despite its lexical limitations, also pays acute attention to the consumption of food and alcohol.” And as we have seen in Einbinder and in Chapter One of the present work, he does include a medicinal remedy in the Hebrew text when he suggests the use of garlic and honey for a dry throat:

"לשה השמן לאכול היום אם תבחר
השמר פן יחל גרונך ונחר
שום תשים עליה ואל ת achter"

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133 Bos and Mensching, “The Literature of Hebrew Medical Synonyms,” 192.
137 Bos and Mensching, “The Literature of Hebrew Medical Synonyms,” 192.
139 Bos, et al., Sefer ha-Shimmush, 93.
141 “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” 49.
(And if you should choose to eat marrow on this day
be careful lest it stick to your throat.
Put garlic on it with a little honey
and don’t delay:)\textsuperscript{143}

Yet the medical material in the Hebrew text is rather abstruse, where in the Judéo-Provençal
Israel is very explicit about his therapeutic recommendations. In his narration of the feast,
for instance, he tells us that the preparations have been carried out “\textit{a la novela maneira},”
“according to the new fashion,”\textsuperscript{144} which Einbinder associates with the dietary model, “in
serial courses.”\textsuperscript{145} And after the meal, the guests:

"Mangeron tartas per fizica
Aisi con medecina poblica.
En redier det am sumac
Per confortar lor estomac,
Piment e neulas ben calsadas
Que semblavan encanonadas."\textsuperscript{146}

Israel even defers unambiguously to Galen several verses later,

“Galenus o dis: de l’aiga mais,
Dal vin escaira que ieu m’ais.”\textsuperscript{148}

making quite clear that he is using his rationalist medical tradition as a source. When, in the
Hebrew, Israel recommends using garlic and honey for a parched throat,\textsuperscript{149} or when he
conveys the dangers of excessive alcohol consumption to humoral balance,\textsuperscript{150} he does so in a
more subtle fashion and one that still allows him to draw on the biblical and midrashic
citations of which his \textit{shibbuts} or mosaic is composed.

\textsuperscript{142} Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 58v, ll. 466-7.
\textsuperscript{143} Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 104.
128.
\textsuperscript{145} Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 97.
\textsuperscript{146} Silberstein, “The Provençal Esther Poem,” 195, ll. 149-54.
\textsuperscript{147} Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 99. This is also discussed in Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,”
83.
\textsuperscript{149} Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 58v, ll. 466-7.
\textsuperscript{150} See Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” and “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” Chapter One of the present work.
This point might help us to understand, at least in part, why the description of the feast in the Hebrew romance is so radically reduced. While he might well have transposed the menu from the vernacular into the Hebrew, he chose, instead to remain loyal to his Jewish sources, not tainting the purity of the language. Indeed, the foods in the Hebrew do actually have a parallel in the vernacular. Included on the menu, on line 145 of the Judéo-Provençal, are “Cabrols, brufols, cervis salvages” (“roebuck, buffalo, wild deer”) which appear as near translations in the abbreviated Hebrew passage above: ”איל וצבי ויחמור (Ram and deer and roebuck). But where they are only one of tens of dishes elaborated in the vernacular, they account for half those on the Hebrew bill of fare. These foods, however, cited verbatim and listed in exactly the same order, are drawn from a biblical source; they appear in a chapter on prohibition and permission, *Deuteronomy* 14:5, as “beasts from which you may eat,” things which are not “abominable” [הטעה]. In the preceding verse, the other animals from Israel’s Hebrew are noted, "שור והכבשים (Ox, sheep, lambs). This seems to suggest, once again, that Israel assumes a different posture in the Hebrew text, inclining more toward his Jewish identity. We might bear in mind that not all of the foods or combinations of ingredients served at the vernacular feast would have been sanctioned by Jewish dietary laws, a matter which invariably entered into the rabbinic discussions of Esther’s adherence to kashrut while she was at the king’s palace. As such, he might have wished to downplay her exposure to forbidden foods. Line 80 "אלה מזה ואלה מזה (some from here, some from there) comes directly from *Joshua* 8:22 and conforms to Israel’s standard of ending each verse with the word "זاي." The abridged version of the banquet in the Hebrew might also be attributed to stylistic factors. Given its form as a mosaic *piyyut* (sacred poem), drawing so heavily on biblical language, Israel could not easily have incorporated a 14th-century medical lexis without compromising its literary integrity and in turn thwarting his attempts to conform to belletristic conventions. Interestingly, his contemporary Kalonymos ben Kalonymos, uses the very same phrasing in describing the Purim meal in his ’Even Bohan.

152 *Deuteronomy* 14:3-4.
153 *Deuteronomy* 14:4.
154 This also begs the question of audience and genre, which I will explore further in the following chapter.
155 This question of genre will be treated more fully in the subsequent chapter.
“...ולעת ערב סעדת פורים. איל וצבי ויחמור וברבורים...

("And at the time of the meal on the eve of Purim, ram and deer and roebuck and swans..."

That Kalonymos’ ‘Even Bohan is believed to have been written at much the same time as Israel’s Esther romance and that he was living in Avignon at the time\textsuperscript{157} leads to much speculation. Since the biblical source is not related in any specific way to the Purim festival, is it coincidence that both texts not only use the very same verse from the bible but also add the "ברבורים" [barburim] (swans) into the mix? ‘Even Bohan, one of Kalonymos’ most known works, is also a biting satire and moral critique of some members of the local intelligentsia, one of whom is Abraham Caslari,\textsuperscript{158} another physician and possibly a relative of Israel, whom we have met earlier in relation to his practice of bigamy.\textsuperscript{159} Kalonymos was himself a physician and skilled man of letters and composed a Purim parody of his own, \textit{Sefer Megillat Setarim} and \textit{Sefer Masekhet Purim}.\textsuperscript{160} Given his milieu, therefore, it would have been in Israel’s interest to maintain a sense of propriety, both as a Jew and a physician, and to safeguard his respective identities in both instances.

Israel’s romances are exemplary of the interdependence between language and self-definition. Each has its own set of inherent linguistic issues, but they are bound to one another by the very distinctions that separate them. And the matter of language, whether on its own terms or acting as a cultural hybrid, in turn, opens up questions of audience and genre, which we are about to explore.

\textsuperscript{157}Chotzner, “Kalonymos ben Kalonymos,” 129.
\textsuperscript{158}Kalonymos ben Kalonymos, ‘Even Bohan, 120; Chotzner, “Kalonymos ben Kalonymos,” 136.
\textsuperscript{159}See supra, 167.
\textsuperscript{160}Chotzner, “Kalonymos ben Kalonymos,” 137.
Chapter Four

A Poem by Many Other Names: On the Mixing of Genres

Genre is one of the most remarkable facets of Israel’s sister texts - surely equal in richness and complexity to all of the others discussed thus far. It is, in fact, in attempting to approach this question, to define the generic parameters of the texts, that we discern its very defiance of clear-cut definition. Although we can identify patterns that would appear to place them into a specific literary category, to suggest such a conformity would belie their polysemous qualities, either as individual works or considered as a textual unity. They are the locus (or loci) of a confluence of genres. Their author probably did not embark on his compositions with any such objective; yet in their hybridity, they are an expression of his biculturalism, their elasticity, symbolic perhaps of a movement between worlds.

The three editions of Israel’s Judéo-Provençal Esther text by French scholars come under the title of “roman.” Indeed, Israel, himself, refers to the text as such: “םונרומן,” מון רומאן. While the term “roman” might be loosely translated as “romance,” in the way we would think of the northern French romance genre, the “roman” in Occitania, is generally not constrained to that specific genre, but rather describes a less formalized variety of works in the “langue vulgaire,” according to Jean-Charles Huchet in Le roman occitan médiéval. Huchet divides the “tradition romanesque” into several categories - nova, roman and dictat - designating Israel’s text as a “roman.” Although there seems to be some lack of cohesion in the way the term “roman” is used, for the purposes of this study, it is meant to refer to the

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1 Meyer’s “Le Roman Provençal d’Esther par Crescas du Caylar,” Pansier’s “Le roman d’Esther de Crescas du Cailar,” and Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob’s “Roman de la Reine Esther.” Silberstein, on the other hand, is more descriptive in her title, “The Provençal Esther Poem Written in Hebrew Characters c. 1327 by Crescas de Caylar: Critical Edition.” While she does not explicitly refer to the poem as a romance, she does discuss influences of that as well as the epic genre in her chapter, “Themes and Sources,” 55-63. At the same time, she does not specifically define how she uses the term “romance.”

2 JTS Ms. 3740, fol 23r, l. 5.

3 Particularly in the style of Chrétien de Troyes, or the Tristan romance.


5 This lack of cohesion regarding the use of the term, seems to occur particularly in the crossover from French to English. While Huchet explains that the French word “roman” does not refer to analogous northern French “roman,” in his breakdown of the categories that it comprises, he in fact uses the term as a designation for two of the four 14th-century texts, “porteurs d’indications générique que l’on peut inscrire dans l’orbe du
roman courtois, the courtly romance, modeled on the Northern French tradition of Tristan or
the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, for instance, with the Occitan paradigms of courtly
narratives, Flamenca and Jaufré.

The Hebrew text, on the other hand, is most readily identified as a piyyut, or sacred poem. In
its extant forms, the Hebrew text lives in manuscripts of mahzorim (books of liturgy),
collections of liturgical works for festivals and the four special Sabbaths, used in synagogue
to supplement and adorn the fixed prayer rites. It is a Mi Kamokha poem intended for the
morning service, the shaharit ( charm), of Shabbat Zakhor, one of the three commemoration
days of Purim, mandated for the remembrance of Amalek.

From the outset, the narratives appear to fit into their respective, almost self-circumscribed
genres. And while these are very broad - and not inaccurate - descriptors, they do not
adequately convey one of the most remarkable features - perhaps even eccentricities - of the
texts: the mixing of genres. Each version is itself a hybrid, a meeting of genres, which are
thus difficult to delineate. Where, for instance, does midrash become folklore? Where does
religious didactic merge with parody? Where does biblical narrative bleed into romance?
Where do the boundaries of Southern France converge on those of Persia and Medea? We
can certainly say that all of these elements are present to some degree in the individual texts.
Yet we can also identify generic strains that are more developed in one over the other.
Certainly, the Hebrew text blends multiple literary forms and contains moments that reflect
popular culture and conventions. Yet it is irrevocably wed to its biblical sources, to its

romanesque, l’un est qualifié de novas (La novas del heretge), deux de roman (Guillaume de la Barre et Le
Roman d’Esther) et le dernier de dictat (Blandin de Cornouaille)” Huchet, Le roman occitan médiéval.1. 23-24. He classifies two earlier Occitan narratives, Flamenca and Jaufré, as “novas.” Those same texts are called “romances” in English by Simon Gaunt and Ruth Harvey in “The Arthurian Tradition in Occitan Literature,” although only Jaufré is an Arthurian romance, per se. Harvey and Gaunt, "The Arthurian Tradition in Occitan Literature," in The Arthur of the French, eds. Karen Pratt and Glyn S. Burgess (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006) 528-45. At the same time, Huchet uses the term “roman” later in his study to refer to Flamenca, and what he calls the two Arthurian romances in Occitan, Jaufré and Blandin de Cornouaille, presumably using it in its broader sense.

6 Shabbat Shekalim, Shabbat Zakhor, Shabbat Parah, and Shabbat ha-Hodesh, named for the additional Torah portion which is read when they occur each year. Two occur before the Purim festival and two before Passover, respectively

7 Mi Kamokha, מי כמוך ואין כמוך ומי דומה לך - The mi kamokha (“Who is like you?”) is part of the morning prayer cycle.

8 Shabbat Zakhor (Sabbath of Remembrance), Tu’anit (Fast of) Esther and Purim.
Jewish literary heritage and to its pious messages, even when it takes on a parodic or romance tone. And although the Judéo-Provençal draws on religious motifs, it is often stylistically more consistent with secular European literary traditions, such as courtly romance, romance parody, at times even with fabliaux.

This chapter explores such questions, looking at the range of genres that inhabit or influence Israel’s Esther texts: *piyyut* (liturgical poetry), romance, novas and fabliaux, wisdom literature, and parody, among others. Yet genre and generic mixing are invariably tied up with the problem of audience in these works, a problem which we encounter most patently - or so it would seem - in Israel’s apologia to the Hebrew text.

Both versions include a conventional apologetic component, wherein Israel extrapolates on his sources and his motivations for undertaking the compositions, taking on an affect of humility that is all but standard in medieval texts, whether written by Jew or non-Jew. In the Hebrew apologia, however, Israel does something which is less common in that he actually specifies his intended audience for the two texts. As we have seen in previous chapters, he indicates that the vernacular version is for women and children, for great-grandchildren (progeny) and “the rest,” while the Hebrew is for the Jewish men.

(I succeeded to elucidate this epistle first and foremost in the vernacular for the speakers of the vernacular, children and women, grandchildren and great grandchildren, and the rest. This second is in the Hebrew for the Jewish men, the work of my hands, in which I glory...)

True to style, Israel’s proviso is an assemblage of scriptural and rabbinic locutions, beginning with a phrase from the mishnaic treatment of the reading of the *Scroll of Esther.*

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9 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 48r, ll. 9-12.
10 *Order Mo’ed, Tractate Megillah* 2:1

...קראת על פי קראת הרגלים בכל לשון לא צא. אובל לקרין או האחת לול嫚וח בלעט, הלעט שמשתא ראית, זא'.
followed by טף ונשים [taf ve-nashim] of Esther 3:13 and 8:11 and a re-ordering of part of a verse from Isaiah 14:22, "ושאר ונין ונכד," which is also visited at the very beginning of the Babylonian Esther Midrash, and in Esther Rabbah, bringing in further levels of allusion.11றיברצליבר ogl

“Far from constituting a rote application to an otherwise useful but plain poetic surface, biblical quotation and the other ornaments of this poetry act like tiny turbines to the current of the verse, thousands of finely constructed stations-of-power set out along its flow.”13

11 In the Biblical Talmud, the Isaiah verse is treated with a particular set of interpretations:

“... כיום עולם, אמר צבאות יהוה, על בבל יאמרו, שם ונין ונכד, אמר יהוה.”

“...And I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts, and cut off from Babylon name and remnant, and offshoot and offspring, saith the Lord” (Isaiah 14:22), defining the terms in the verse from which Israel draws part of his pastiche: "שם", [shem], (name) refers to script, and "שאר", [she’ar] (remnant) to language, "נין", [nin] (offshoot), " to coinage (or royalty), and "נכד", [nekhed] (offspring) to Vashti. Esther Rabbah offers another reading, wherein "name" = Nebucadnezzar, “and remnant” = Evil-Merdoach, “and offshoot” = Belshazzar, “and offspring” = Vashti. Midrash Panim Aherim cites the same verse with regard to Vashti as the reason for her downfall. Segal, The Babylonian Esther Midrash, 70-73.

12 “…if one has read in Coptic to Coptic, Hebrew to Hebrews, Elamic to Elamite, or Greek to Greek Israelites, they have done their duty.” Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah, Chapter 2, הפּוּרְעָה לְפַרְעָה [ha-kore’ le-mifra’] (“One who reads out of sequence”).

Israel shows his hand at ornamentation, and at the same time, confers upon these lines the weight of their biblical and mishnaic sources, assuming the now familiar hybridized posture of belletrist and moralist.

Here we might wish to consider this question of Israel’s intended audience, for it is not as uncomplicated as his pronouncement sets out. Nor is the delineation across gender lines in terms of language as unambiguous as it appears. To understand Israel’s comment in its most literal sense, would be to ignore notions of class, education, and the setting of its consumption, not taking into account the possibilities of a variegated public.

We might better think about Israel’s apologetic by applying the expected paradigms to the texts. The vernacular, in line with more secular conventions, and written in the language of daily life in the community and at home, would invite a general audience, whereas the Hebrew, with its learned references to a specialized body of religious literature in a language which required education, would invoke an erudite audience.

It is true that the majority of women would not have been schooled in Hebrew, at least not to the extent that they would have grasped the sophisticated allusions of that version of the text. Nevertheless, it is plausible that there were women in the upper echelons of the community who received some education, even if indirectly, in the holy language and in Torah. That the Hebrew poem is a piyyut [liturgical poem] and would have been recited in the synagogue along with the traditional morning rites [shaharit], suggests that the women would have been among its [listening] audience. We can suppose, moreover, that most women would have known enough Hebrew to participate in the services and chant the prayers in their original

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14 While it is unlikely that women would have had in-depth learning of Hebrew language and Torah, the limited scholarship on the topic generally agrees that most women would be educated enough for recitation of prayers and knowledge of the hilkhot (laws) that pertained to carrying out their duties as Jewish women. Some women in the higher classes, might well have had more schooling at home. The question of Torah study for women in the Middle Ages was debated. Maimonides first stated that teaching women Torah would lead to “tiflut” or leniency, but he later amended that and said that the written Torah was permitted for women; it was the Oral Torah that was not. Cf. for instance, Avraham Grossman, Pious and Rebellious, “Women’s Culture and Education,” 154-74, on the stance of Jewish sages, 160-2; Judith R. Baskin, “Hinukh nashim yehudiot ve-haskalatan bi-yemei ha-beinayim be-‘artsot ha-‘islam ve-ha-notsrut,” (“Education of Jewish Women and their Literacy in Lands of Medieval Islam and Christendom”) Pe-amim 82 (2000): 31-49.
language. And while not every woman would have had the level of Hebrew required to access the deeper meanings of that text, a superficial comprehension of it, at minimum, would not be improbable.

At the same time, we ought not to assume that by dint of their gender all of the men in the congregation would have recognized the nuanced references of the Hebrew text. While most boys would have had an education in Hebrew language and in sacred writings, it is only the men belonging to the elite class who would have engaged in the exhaustive study required for entry into Israel’s rather esoteric Hebrew text, with all its subtleties. We need only look back to the Me’iri’s commentary on Sanhedrin to appreciate that the general populace - men included - would not have used Hebrew in their quotidian activities, if at all. As such, the audience for the Hebrew text can be assumed to have a more diverse range of understanding than Israel proposes in his apologia.

In the case of the Judéo-Provençal version, we can likewise presume less homogeneity than our author suggests. Here, the question of setting arises, that is, under what circumstances this text would have reached its audience. Since only a fragment has come to us, and since the manuscript itself is from a later period, it would be difficult to determine with any accuracy whether it was intended for a performance context or for reading. That it is written in Hebrew characters, moreover, requiring literacy in both languages, suggests performance or recitation over personal reading as the mode of its delivery. And certainly as a performed text, we can imagine that its appeal would have been broader than Israel asserts. For while its tone is less sober, it would have been appreciated even by learned Jewish men as belonging to the category of Purim parodies, which they both composed and consumed. In fact, Susan Einbinder has proposed that while the women would welcome its medical

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15 Cf. Chapter Three, “We Are What We Speak: Language and Identity,” beginning at page 149.
16 M. Banitt as quoted in Silberstein, “The Provençal Esther Poem,” 14, and referring to the spoken language of French Jews states: “Tout porte à croire, au contraire, que les Juifs de France, avant leur expulsion à la fin du XIVe siècle, parlaient la langue, le dialecte et le patois de ceux au milieu desquels ils vivaient....” This is generally agreed upon in terms of the Jews in southern France as well. See Chapter Three, “We Are What We Speak,” and references, e.g. Pansier, Szajkowski, Jochnowitz.
17 It is not impossible that the vernacular text would have been read aloud in synagogue since parodies and texts not directly part of the standard liturgy were permitted for the Purim holiday. Silberstein, “The Provençal Esther Poem,” 33. And although this text is a vernacular text, the allowance of reading the Megillah in the vernacular would make this even more plausible.
elaborations for their culinary value, other physicians, or “medically sophisticated male listeners” in the community might well have found interest in them as well.\(^\text{18}\)

What becomes important at this point is that Israel’s apologetic statement is quite probably a rhetorical device rather than a definitive instruction. As we have seen, his shibbuts, even here, draws on canonical citations and he is quite probably relying on the mishnaic allowance for recitation of prayers and the Megillah itself in the vernacular. And while there were likely women in the community who could engage with the Hebrew text, Israel seems to be asserting his authorial clout, as it were, gesturing to a socially constructed - even mythical - male advantage vis-à-vis language and learning. This is consistent with the more pious inclination of the Hebrew text and its more edifying tone.

Both the Judéo-Provençal and the Hebrew romances contain introductory remarks preceding their respective apologetic components, wherein Israel offers his praises to God, and laments the current condition of his people. In the Hebrew, this is far more elaborate, with florid, highly poeticized language:

(Once in Israel they would sing a song of praise to God about [the] exile, all of the events in the Megillah for this occasion. Let me recall God’s mercies and his miracles guardian and shield for all who seek his protection telling his people his strength and deeds for our survival on this very day:)

\(^{18}\) Einbinder, “A Proper Diet,” 89 and 97.
\(^{19}\) Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 48r, ll. 13-20.
This stands in contrast to the pithy opening of the vernacular text:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{“Tot tems per aquesta sazon} & \quad \text{ (“Always in this season} \\
\text{Dieu nos a donat razon} & \quad \text{ God has given us a reason} \\
\text{De servir lo e de grazir} & \quad \text{ to serve him and to give thanks} \\
\text{Sos mandamenz a obezir.”} & \quad \text{ and obey His commandments.”)}
\end{align*}
\]

Thus, from their respective opening verses, the generic distinctiveness of the texts begins to reveal itself, the Hebrew vividly displaying devotional characteristics which are de-emphasized in the Judéo-Provençal.

Israel introduces both of his narratives similarly with the explicit account of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel. In the Hebrew he elucidates his sources, referring to the original biblical text and the midrashic expansions specifically,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{“אספרה אל חק ספר ומדרשים} & \quad \text{“Let me speak to the tradition, story and lore [midrashim] the Scroll of Esther, most blessed among women} \\
\text{מגילת אסתר תבורך מנשים} & \quad \text{In a place of praise, among holy congregants} \\
\text{במקום הלל תוך עדת קדושים} & \quad \text{on that day let this song be sung:)}
\end{align*}
\]

while in the Judéo-Provençal he alludes to unspecified commentaries. In the vernacular apologia, Israel also resorts to romance practices, both justifying his elaboration and assuring his audience of the veracity of his story.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{“E non vos o tengas a carc} & \quad \text{ (“Et si mon histoire est plus détaillée qu’on ne l’attend} \\
\text{Se mon roman sera plus larc;} & \quad \text{n’y voyez pas un excès;} \\
\text{Ganren mais otra lo test} & \quad \text{en plus du recit elle raconte avec abundance} \\
\text{Conta las glozas del prosest,} & \quad \text{les gloses de l’Histoire Sainte,}
\end{align*}
\]

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20 Silberstein, “The Provençal Esther Poem,” 191, ll. 1-4. Meyer and Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob have added “be” to l. 2 of the Provençal transcription of the text; Pansier has added “ben.” In their texts the line reads: “Dieu nos a [be(n)] donat razon” However, “ben” is not present in the Hebrew character original of the Judéo-Provençal, which reads: ”יְהוָה קָנֵא אֶל תַּבּוֹר כְּנַשְׁמַן גְּלָיִת אֶפֶר תָּברֹכֶל כְּנַשְׁמַן “. Silberstein omitted the emendation, which would seem to have been a correction to the metre of the line, stating that “the author was much less preoccupied with questions of metrics,” 203. I would suggest for this line, that perhaps the pronunciation of “Dieu” according to the Hebrew "יְהוָה" might actually have been pronounced as two syllables, in which case, the line would still be octosyllabic.

21 Silberstein translates this line as “in obeying his commandments.”

22 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 48v, ll. 41-4.
E car es tot cert et verai          et comme tout est vrai et certifié
Per qe ieu ren non laisarai.”          je ne laisserai rien dans l’ombre.”) 23

We might compare this to the well-known Provençal romance, *Jaufré*, where the author
makes an analogous statement in his prologue:

“D’un cumte de bona maneira          (“…Of a pleasant and polished story
d’asauta rasun vertadeira…          and truthful in theme…
…Pudetz ausir la comensaila,          …you can hear the beginning,
Qe, si-us voltez, ie-us en dirai…24      which, I will tell you if you wish…) 25

Israel has maintained his romance tone, using the convention of authorial commentary, as the
introduction proceeds. In the previous verses, he has addressed his audience with direct
discourse to lead them away from Nebuchadnezzar and into the story proper:

“Se voles aisi estar          (“If you are willing to remain here,
E vos plasa d’escotar,          and if it please you to listen,
Auzires una legenda26          you will hear a story
Que es mot bela e genta,…”27 which is very beautiful and pleasing…” 28

And similarly in *Jaufré*:

“E digatz m’en so q’en volretz,
Si eus en dic, si m’ausiretz
Nim volretz de bon cor entendre…”29

(“But tell me now what you expect of it if I tell it to you?
Will you hear me out and listen with a good heart?”) 30

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23 Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob, “Roman de la Reine Esther, 126 (transcription) and pg. 127 (translation), ll.
37-42. I discuss the transcription and translation of this passage in the different editions in the previous chapter
on language, “We Are What We Speak,” 179-80. I prefer Silberstein’s translation of the last line of the
passage, “For that reason, I won’t omit anything.” (or my own “For that reason, I won’t leave anything out”).
26 Meyer, Pansier and Silberstein emended this line to read “legenda,” meaning story or tale. Méjean-Thiolier
has preserved the direct transliteration of the Hebrew characters, “legista” לגיישטא, which she explains as
having been drawn from “legir,” “lire une text sacré, la Loi”: il s’agit d’un commentaire du Midrach,””Roman
de la Reine Esther,” 126-7, n. 2.
27 Meyer, Pansier and Méjean-Thiolier have made emendations to this verse for metrical purposes. I have
preserved the transliteration from the Hebrew characters in keeping with Silberstein’s edition.
29 Brunel, *Jaufré*, 3, ll. 11-3.
In his treatment of the Judéo-Provençal text and its place in the corpus of the medieval Occitan “roman,” Huchet raises some critical points about its prologue and apologia, particularly on its blending of rhetorical conventions from secular literature with a narrative whose context is essentially religious, and perhaps, even more importantly, its departure from those same conventions. Aside from the obvious “romanesque” use of rhyming octosyllabic couplets,31 he indicates its adherence to ordo artificialis, which, according to the Poetria of Jean de Garlande, “invite à placer un prologue en tête de l’œuvre et à réduire l’initium à des proverbia ou à des exempla.”32 Where Israel is loyal to this form is in line 5, with “Mon roman vuelh acomensar,” which emphasizes the artifice of the initium, and as Huchet remarks, conforms to a “mandamenz moins religieux que formel.”33 In contrast, the body of the prologue deviates from the norm in that it introduces the story of Nebuchadnezzar, rather than laying out the primary object of the narrative. Making a convincing case for the bipartite structure of the prologue, Huchet both confirms the hybrid nature of the vernacular text, and at the same time, demonstrates Israel’s inclination toward secular practices in it.

As each text opens, therefore, it appears to position itself into a quasi-recognizable genre: the Hebrew as piyyut, or liturgical poetry, the Judéo-Provençal as romance.34 Given the occasion for which they were written, it is quite likely that their audiences - to the extent that the audience might have been concerned with generic matters - would have known that they were going to be hearing Purim parodies. For a large portion of the contemporaneous Purim literature, while religious in nature, was also rife with satire. While we do find it as the narrative progresses, Israel does not lead into either text with humor. Indeed, his tone is rather serious, on the one hand, reminding his audience of the events that set in motion the persecution of the Jews in Persia, namely their deviation from their covenant with God, and on the other hand, his prefatory remarks exhibit an almost formulaic modesty, whether in his compunction about the amplified vernacular text, as we have seen, or in his expiatory declaration in the Hebrew:

30 Ross. Jaufre, 3.
31 Fittingly, they are also the usual form of all longer narrative and didactic literature.
33 Ibid. Here Huchet is referring to the previous verse, which appears above on page. 9, “Tot tems per aquesta sazon/Dieu nos a donat razon/De servir lo e de grazir/Sos mandamenz a obezir.”
34 Both texts belong to manuscripts containing other complementary Purim parodies. Although the manuscripts themselves are later, they attest to a tradition of parodic Purim liturgy in the region.
"צור הנותן רוח חדשה בקרבי
לנחמני מרוגזי ועצבי
סבותי אני את לבי
כאשר עשיתי זה:" 35

( [My] rock, who proffers a new spirit within me
To comfort me in my anger and sadness
I turned my mind
by doing this:)

Yet, while we can immediately identify distinct generic characteristics, neither of Israel’s
texts fits neatly into any one designation.

**Piyyut (Liturgical or Sacred Poetry)**

By the 14th century, the composition of sacred poetry had been established as a tradition in
southern France. While the earliest *piyyutim* in the region date to the 11th century, the 12th-
century migrations of Jews from Muslim Spain, contributed to a flowering of the form in the
region, with the influence of Arabic meter and lyricism, maturing with poets such as Isaac
ha-Shniri, Yehosef Ezovi and even members of the Caslari family in the 13th century.36

*Piyyutim* written for the three commemorations of Purim were profuse in Provence and
ranged from sober legalistic themes, for instance, the obligations of reading the Scroll, to
humorous treatments of the primary figures of the biblical story and its retellings.37

Israel modeled his *piyyut* on Judah Halevi’s famous 12th-century poem, מי כמוך אדון חסדך,38
[Mi kamokha ’adon hasdekha...] (Who is like you, Lord, let your kindness…), which is a
“girdle poem,” *shir ‘ezor* "שיר אזור" in Andalusian style, consisting of four-line stanzas.40
The last line of each stanza is usually a biblical citation and ends with a rhyme that recurs throughout the poem. In Halevi each stanza ends with the word "לו [lo],"

[Who is like you]
Lord, let your kindness not cease
Your truth, a fortress of towering strength
You are a force to the wretched
And a strength to the impoverished in his time of sorrow.42

where Israel uses the word ה [zeh] either on its own or with a grammatical prefix:

(Who is like you
who created man’s spirit to teach him
that in the flame of his soul he might know and discern the secret of His [God’s] work.
Let His name go forth to His people; let him send a shepherd, [re]build Zion and His Temple
Let Him judge your people, this great nation:)

There are very obvious similarities between the two compositions, most notably the poetic form and the recounting of the story of Purim. Nevertheless, Israel’s poem diverges from its generic model on many counts. While Halevi’s poem is comprised of 82 strophes with 328 lines, which Ezra Fleischer has called “monumental” for this type of piyyut,44 Israel’s is considerably inflated to 240 strophes, numbering 960 lines in total.45 Consequent to the difference in length is the detail with which the story of the Megillah is recounted. Halevi’s poem decidedly draws on midrashic matter, however, it is, for the most part, expressed

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42 My translation.
43 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 48r , ll. 0-4.
45 It should be noted that Ms. HUC 396 is 239 strophes, 956 lines. One strophe that appears in Ms. Bodleian is missing from the later manuscript.
inconspicuously and without the liveliness of Israel’s references. In Halevi’s *Mi Kamokha* for instance, we find only a bare bones treatment of Vashti’s refusal to appear before the king, the entire account covered in less than three strophes, beginning with the summons and up to the search for her replacement. Israel’s account, on the other hand, is filled with colorful dialogue, such as Vashti’s expression of outrage to the ministers who are sent to call her to come to the king naked, emphasizing his foolishness and his fabled lowly origins:

(And she said, why has the son of my father’s steward come to shame me, this crazy man?)

He also includes the aggadic portrayals of the physical manifestations of her evil nature:

(God caused her to break out in boils and there are those who say that one horn was growing on her forehead…)

All in all, the Vashti story takes up more than 20 strophes in Israel’s text. Halevi, moreover, makes no reference to the Scroll’s edicts dealing with language or women, whereas these are central to Israel’s narration of the episode, as we have seen. Thus, while Israel’s Hebrew text is, strictly speaking, a *piyyut*, we can already see how its abundant detail along with the breadth and flavor of its narration suggest influences of the romance genre, even as it conveys pious messages.

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46 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol.49r, ll. 94-96. Israel uses a direct quotation from the *Babylonian Talmud*, *Tractate Megillah* 12b, "בר אhoriaריה דאבא", telling us of King Ahasuerus’ lowly origins, which Vashti refers to here and one of the reasons for her outrage.

47 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol 49r, ll. 89-90. *Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah* 12b says that her skin erupted in leprosy as a punishment for making the Jewish women work on the Sabbath and that the angel Gabriel affixed a tail on her.

48 I will be returning to the treatment of Vashti later in the present chapter.

49 See my treatment of these passages in the previous chapter, Chapter Three of the present study, “We Are What We Speak.”
Israel’s colophon is in many respects the most ceremonial portion of the text, with its heavily ritualized tone and its language drawing on traditional prayers and biblical verses. But here, too, he diverges from common practices. The acrostic was a convention in liturgical Hebrew poetry since its beginnings in the Pre-Classical period - generally arranged in a pattern that followed the Hebrew alphabet. The signature acrostic, on the other hand, was an innovation of the Classical period, and became a standard of the genre. According to Michael Rand, the signature form was highly stylized and only rarely in Classical piyyut did it reflect a literary persona, a fact which he attributes to the liturgical nature of the poetry. This relative anonymity persists even in the later Classical piyyutim. In Halevi’s Mi Kamokha, for instance, the acrostic signature is woven into the section of the poem with the first letter of each strophe and reads:

"אני יהודה הלוי הקטן ברבי שמואל הלוי"

(“I am Yehuda Halevi the younger [son] of Rabbi Shmuel Halevi”)  

Generically characteristic, Halevi’s signature is an unadorned, rather unpretentious claim to his authorship of the poem. The elaborate closing strophes as well as the layout and placement of Israel’s autograph is, however, different, as we have seen in Chapter One of the present dissertation. For, while he assumes a posture of humility, Israel is highly self-conscious in his colophon. Unlike Halevi, and many of his school, who composed a simple signature using his name with the first letter of each stanza of the second section of his four-section poem, Israel is not discretely embedded in the text - his colophon is an entity unto itself. Fleischer, it should be noted, discusses a variant of this convention in the Classical Mi Kamokha, where the poet would add several introductory strophes which were not connected to the body of the poem. While these often included their own signature, they were generally of a short formula. Israel’s signature acrostic, on the other hand, is an extensive claim of authorship. His identity is conveyed in a series of words, each the beginning of its own line,

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51 Spanning approximately form the 6th to the 9th centuries. Fleischer, Shirat ha-Kodesh, 117-9.  
52 Halevi used the alphabetic pattern following the 22 characters of the Hebrew alphabet in the acrostic in Sections 1 and 3 of the same piyyut. Section 4 repeats the same pattern as section 2 with a second abbreviated signature: “I am Yehuda Halevi,” "אני יהודה הלוי".  
53 Cf. Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” 67.  
54 Fleischer, Ha-Yotsrot, 577.
rather than single characters starting an entire strophe.\textsuperscript{55} Israel inhabits the text in a way that Halevi did not, marking his divergence in the genre of the classical “girdle” piyyut.

That Israel does depart from the earlier model would seem to fit into the trends of his milieu. For as Bar-Tikvah points out, Purim \textit{piyyutim} were abundant in Provence and the \textit{paytanim} [liturgical poets] there tended to keep true to standards but usually made expansions and additions that were relevant to their own situation.\textsuperscript{56} And as Jonathan Decter points out, “In varying degrees, [the Hebrew literature of the Christian Mediterranean in general] exhibits an extraordinary hybridity wherein authors borrow, recombine, and augment prosodic styles and themes in original ways.”\textsuperscript{57} This notion of generic intermingling is most conspicuous in his use of the form of the liturgical poem in the Hebrew text, and the parody and romance style of the Judéo-Provençal. However, we can identify elements of other literary categories ranging from medical poetry to wine songs and fabliaux in the individual compositions as well as across the pair, which will be addressed below.

The texts also draw on the wisdom genre, building on its articulation in the \textit{Scroll of Esther} of what Talmon has called “applied wisdom,” making the case that while its language is not proverbial as such, the maxims set forth in \textit{Proverbs} and other books of the Hebrew Scriptures are enacted through the characters and plot of the narrative.\textsuperscript{58} And where wisdom is present in the biblical narrative, if only by suggestion, Israel advances this notion of wisdom in action, at times even explicitly, in his adaptations.

\textbf{Wisdom Literature}

Scholarship on the study of proverbs has given attention to their use as social metaphor,\textsuperscript{59} where their ethnographic nature relies not only on the base meaning, but also on how they are

\begin{footnotes}
\item[55] See transcription in Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” 67.
\item[56] Bar-Tikvah, \textit{Sugot ve-Sugyot}, 296.
\end{footnotes}
interpreted in a given socio-cultural context.⁶⁰ Even within the bounds of a particular community, they may be understood in more than one way, depending upon the situation in which they are delivered.⁶¹ In the case of Israel’s Esther texts and his extensive evocation, whether overtly or implicitly, of the wisdom imparted in the biblical book of Proverbs, we might also see a connection to the vogue among rationalists in southern France for reading Scripture allegorically,⁶² and by extension, to his bifurcated approach to the two language versions and their audience.⁶³

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in her article on proverb theory, has speculated, moreover, that proverbial sayings - particularly when they are presented in the form of a collection - come with an inherently authoritative tone, as though stating unconditional truths.⁶⁴ This assertion, I would argue, speaks directly to Israel’s compositional strategies and his underlying didacticism, using this material to teach by example, rather than direct instruction.

Beginning thus with his entrée to the Hebrew text, Israel immediately indicates to his audience the importance of wisdom, also hearkening back to the Maimonidean precept that the pursuit of human perfection and the rational intellect ultimately cannot exist separate from God; the acquisition of knowledge is a sacred obligation.⁶⁵ Israel credits God as the inspiration for his work and assumes a stance of agency, as though its production were being carried out in tandem with God, (as we can see revisiting the opening verses):

"מי כמוך
וצר שם רוח אדם להשכילוnbnr nsmth yd rchn chd ple
צאת שמו לעמו רועה ישלח יבנה ציון והיכלו
ישפיע פרס עלแก יattività אוזוז.⁶⁶"

⁶³ As we have seen, Israel makes clear that his Hebrew text is meant for the Jewish men, who would presumably have had greater access to his references and the ability to understand the allegorical layers of that text composed primarily of scriptural and rabbinic material.
⁶⁶ Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 48r, ll. 0-4.
(Who is like you who created man’s spirit to teach him that in the flame of his soul he might know and discern the secret of His [God’s] work. Let His name go forth to His people; let him send a shepherd, [re]build Zion and His Temple Let Him judge your people, this great nation:)

The final phrase of this stanza hails from Deuteronomy 4, and with it, Israel holds fast to God’s message that the Jewish people must not stray from the Torah’s instruction. This chapter of the last book in the Pentateuch starts off with admonishments to follow God’s ways, reminding its readers as well of the fate of those who did not; and its verse 6 stresses the importance of wisdom in this:

"ושמרתם ועשהתם כי הוא חכמתכם וביןכם לעיני העמים. אשר ישמעון את כל החקים האלה ואמר עמל עמל ואמר רך טעם חכמך."

(“Observe therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, that when they hear all these statutes, shall say: ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”)67

Here the relationship between the adherence to God’s laws and the inheritance of His wisdom is quite clear. The subsequent Deuteronymic verses come with specific warnings about the worship of graven images, which is echoed in Israel’s introduction to the narrative, where he recounts the story of Nebuchadnezzar. Taking his lead from the Mosaic voice of this biblical book, he establishes his auctoritas, creating a frame, an opening frame for the text, which is mirrored and closed off in his colophon.68 Israel’s preoccupation with God as the ultimate source of wisdom, as well as his own hand in its expression, plays out in several different ways in the texts, and in the Hebrew shibbuts especially, he introduces both the literal and also a “hidden” sense for the more sophisticated members of his audience.

A heavy-handed invocation of God’s name is one notable mode of advancing wisdom in its concern with absolute divine justice, an important embellishment given that God is completely absent from the Megillah itself. The original story, moreover, unfolds in a royal

court and depicts the paradigmatic success of the courtier due to his knowledge and virtue, even in inauspicious circumstances, another attribute of traditional wisdom literature.\(^{69}\) Israel, in his turn, elaborates this persona through his revisioning of the erudite Mordecai, even adopting aspects of it for himself. At the same time he enlivens Esther’s role as a courtier in her own right, rendering her an embodiment of “Woman Wisdom.” Influenced as well by Proverbs’ caution against consorting with foreign women, our author counterpoises his Esther figure as the ideal Jewish “woman of valor.” Thus, the didactic spirit of what Wills has categorized as “narrative wisdom”\(^{70}\) and the notion of teaching by example become even more prominent, as we shall see.

Israel persists in his reckoning of the biblical narrative’s lack of a divine source of providence and retribution,\(^{71}\) using God’s name persistently throughout his text. Indeed, where the interpreters of the Megillah have read God’s hand in Esther 4:14,\(^{72}\) in his adaptation, elegantly interweaving wisdom elements, he makes God patently present, intensifying Mordecai’s prophetic service and initiating Esther into her salvific duties:

\[
\text{אם מלכת בית המלך תחולי את ובית אביך תאבדי במעלי כי יודע אני בשלי הesser הגדול הזה:}
\]
\[
\text{והנפש החוטאת עונה תשא_with יי מלאך מליץ ימצא לאמר למלך מה עשה }
\]
\[
\text{לעם יי והצלה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר, ואת ובית אביך תאבדו...}
\]


\(^{70}\) Lawrence Wills, The Jew in the Court of a Foreign King (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 26.

\(^{71}\) Talmon, “‘Wisdom’ in the Book of Esther;” 446.

\(^{72}\) Esther 4:14. “...רוח והצלה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר, ואת ובית אביך תאבדו..."

“...then relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, and you and your father’s house will perish...”

\(^{73}\) Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 53r, ll. 449-60.
(If you as queen of the royal house should waver, 
you and your father’s house shall perish by my wrongdoing. 
For I know it is because of me, 
this great storm:

The transgressing soul will bear its sin; 
God’s people will find another advising angel 
to ask the king, ‘what has this nation 
done to you?’

Lovely hind, trust in your rock. 
Surely God will avenge your cause. 
Unto me, your curse, should 
some evil thing befall you in this matter:)

Thus the fate of the Jews rests undeniably with God. And Mordecai, as his wise ambassador knows what must be done. In fact, here Mordecai pointedly addresses Esther with an appellation cited directly from the Proverbs 5:19, "אָיֵלָה אֲהָבָים" ['ayelet 'ahavim] “lovely hind,” which also alludes to her laudatory moniker in Psalm 22,74 "אָיֵלָה הַשָּׁהָר" ['ayelet ha-shahar] “hind of the dawn.”

Mordecai’s biblical standing as wise courtier is inflated here and indeed throughout Israel’s romances. While in the Megillah, he certainly undergoes the prototypical rise to glory, in his Caslarian incarnation he has a more active role in the court, pitting his good judgment and rectitude against Haman, and giving him equal stature to his adversary. In the Hebrew and the Judéo-Provençal alike, the two men are advisors in the preparations of the banquet feast:

"כרצון איש ואיש היו היינות מרדכי והמן הכינו מנות." 75

(The wines were according to the taste of each and every man; Mordecai and Haman prepared the portions.)

“Cels que serviron foron mots, "Those who served were numerous, 
Mais los maestres sobre tots -- but the lords over all -- 
Segon que an dig los glozados -- as the commentators have said --

74 See Chapter Two of the present study, “Esther’s Issues [or The Blood of Others],” 108.
75 Ms. HUC 396, fol. 20a, ll. 73-4.
Mardecai e Haman foron andos. were both Mordecai and Haman.
Fon lhor conselh que.Is estrangies It was their idea that the foreigners
Venguesan manjar premies.”” come to eat first.”)76

Since they are both foreigners in the king’s court, physicians, and rivals, this amplification of
the two figures is significant.77 In fact, it serves as a means for Israel to superimpose himself
and his station onto Mordecai’s character, making the Purim story relevant to his own
community. It also reflects Einbinder’s proposition in “A Proper Diet,” that Israel might
have been offering an oblique critique of high-ranking physicians in his milieu,78 where anti-
Jewish polemics were deeply problematic and imposed restrictions upon him and his Jewish
peers, in turn setting up an implicit Haman/Arnau-Mordecai/Israel parallel.79

Israel offers stark portrayals of the difference between the arrogant and foolish Haman, who
is also a poor advisor, and the wise and courteous Mordecai, who speaks only when
necessary, is proficient in languages and has a skilled tongue.80 At a climactic moment in the
narrative, for instance, the king learns that his life had been spared because of Mordecai’s
judicious and discreet actions, and he wishes to reward him accordingly, commanding his
adversary, Haman, to go to the Jewish courtier.

"איה נבון חכם וחרוץ
מאתו משפטו נגזר וחרוץ
קח את הלבוש ואת הסוס אל מרדכי תרunteers
לך בכחך זה:"

76 Silberstein, “The Provençal Esther Poem,” 192, ll. 115-120. Of course, since we do not have the full text of
the Judéo-Provençal text, we do not know how the reversal of fortune - either that of Mordecai or of the Jews -
plays out in it.
77 An aggadic addition in the Babylonian Talmud as well as Midrash Aba Guryon and Midrash Panim ‘Aherim
point out that Haman came from a place called Corianus or Kfar Kazum, part of Edom, the Christian lands,
where he was a barber for 22 years. That Haman was a barber is also a motif that is repeated in the Targum
Sheni of Esther. See Bernard Grossfeld, ed. The Two Targums of Esther (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical
Press, 1991), 176, n. 39. Einbinder states further: “We can say that this "Haman" was a ‘foreigner’ (French?)
who began his career as a barber and exploited that position to rise to great prominence and power, which he
then abused.” “A Proper Diet,” 201, n. 49. The barber/surgeon was also considered to be lower in the ranks of
medieval physicians. Also cf. below 248, n. 239
79 A discussion of this parallel and the juxtaposition of Arnau of Villanova on Haman’s character, can be found
in Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” 71.
80 Haman, for instance, is described in the following ways: "...ידעין שיש איש חסר תכונות..., “Counsel given by a man
lacking character...”, Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50r, l. 177; "...ויאמר ממוכן הוא המן השטן...", “And Memukhan,
who is Haman the demon, said...”, Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 49v, l. 129.
81 Ms. Bodleian, heb. e. 10, fol. 54v, ll. 581-4.
(A discerning, wise and industrious man,  
His own decree was ordained diligently.  
Take the garments and the horse and run to Mordecai;  
go so empowered:)  

Israel’s prideful Haman, who had falsely believed that it was he who was to be honored, tries  
desperately to convince the king otherwise.  

(And Haman said, protect your honor  
and don’t allow a Jewish man to wear your garments  
even if he is from among the smallest of your servants  
heaven forbid that you do such a thing:)  

But Haman is duly foiled when Mordecai is dressed in the king’s garb; and he is humiliated,  
having to shave his rival, whom he found teaching the Mishnah several lines earlier, bearing  
out the distinction in their priorities.  

(And [a messenger] brought Haman a cup and scissors  
and tears fell from his eyes as he [Haman] shaved him [Mordecai].  
And Mordecai said, what a difference from two days ago,  
you are angry about this:)  

Israel’s embellishments of the Megillah with regard to the status of the courtiers reappear  
near the end of the text when Mordecai is again rewarded and elevated.  His addition of the  
purple garment, worn not only by royalty, but according to some sources, by medieval  

82 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 55r, ll. 601-4.  
83 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 55r, l. 625.  
84 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 55v, ll. 641-4.  
85 This motif of Haman bathing and dressing Mordecai is treated widely in the midrashic literature, for instance,  
in Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah 16a and Esther Rabbah X:4 as well as the Targum Sheni.  Also see  
above, page 210, n. 77 and below in the section on parody.  Einbinder also discusses this in “A Proper Diet,”  
201, n. 49.
physicians, again draws a parallel between the author and Mordecai through their shared occupation.  

Such refashioned versions of the original plot’s reversals as they are acted out by the Jewish and non-Jewish courtier are self-reflexive, allowing for a coy performance of Israel’s authorial and professional persona as well as his piety as a Jew. They further heighten and make more candid the contrast between good and evil, a mark of what Talmon, referring to the Hebrew Bible narrative, has called “pragmatic wisdom of a distinctive Israelite brand,” where “‘wicked’ is conceived as the opposite of ‘wise,’” and “‘wise [is] tacitly equated with righteousness.’”  

Israel assures us that despite Mordecai’s engagement at a foreign court and his consultative role for the banquet, his adherence to Judaism never wavers. At one point in the narrative, he is occupied with teaching the mishnaic laws of *kemitsah*, the priestly flour offering at the Temple:

(And Haman went to Mordecai and found
Him demonstrating the laws of *kemitsah* with his fingers…)

At another moment, Ahasuerus’ ministers, in response to the query as to the identity of the man responsible for saving his life, unknowingly describe Mordecai’s piety:

(The king’s agents replied to him truthfully:
He has never taken any offering from our hands,

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86 Ibid., 201, n. 51. Einbinder discusses several sources that attest to this phenomenon, including the *Even Bohan [Touchstone]* of Kalonymos ben Kalonymos’ *Even Bohan*. Mordecai’s garments of purple and blue silk are explicitly called physician’s robes by Kalonymos, a physician and belletrist, also a contemporary of Israel, to whom I refer in other chapters of the present work.

87 Talmon, “‘Wisdom’ in the *Book of Esther,“ 443. Talmon refers to this as one of two forms of wisdom in the Old Testament, the first being the eudemonistic, and this “pragmatic wisdom in biblical garb absorbs religio-moral ideas of a distinctive Israelite brand in which ‘wicked’ is conceived as opposite of ‘wise’ and ‘wise’ tacitly equated with righteousness.” As in *Proverbs* 20:26:  "A wise king sifteth the wicked and turneth the wheel over them." Mechon-mamre.org. Hebrew-English Bible. http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2820.htm.

88 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 55r, ll. 613-4.

89 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 54v, ll. 557-60.
and we have heard that until now he has never had a meal from this house:)

This is reminiscent of Daniel and his refusal to ingest even the smallest morsel of food at the court of Nebuchadnezzar, lest he breach the laws of kashrut. 90

When ultimately goodness and wisdom triumph in Mordecai the Jew, Israel, in the manner of wisdom literature, illustrates divine justice, not only in its relation to the courtiers in question, but perhaps even more importantly, in its more symbolic application to the Jewish people. As Coogan states of the genre, “God looks with favor on the righteous and punishes the wicked.” 91 The mashal (parable) figures markedly in these expansions, allowing Israel to juxtapose the narrative wisdom of the Megillah, with its aggadic sources, and the more explicit moral teachings of the Proverbs. In so doing, he proffers his own embellished brand of instruction, exemplifying propriety for his audience through the direct actions of the players. At the same time, moreover, the biblical story functions as a model for his own time and place, situating one allegory upon another, one might say.

Indeed, allegoresis was quite common among southern French rationalists and might offer some insight into Israel’s stipulation in his apologia for a differentiated audience. It also has a direct correlation to the moral instruction of the Proverbs as they are explicated in Menahem ben Solomon ha-Me’iri’s commentary on that tanakhic book. 92 In it, this prominent religious figure, sets out a two-tiered approach to biblical exegesis, the revealed or exoteric level, נגל (nigleh), and the hidden or esoteric level נסתר (nistar), 93 which might well be applied to Israel’s Esther texts. Me’iri states that while the literal meaning has benefit for the masses, “this benefit is meager in comparison to the allegorical meaning - the genuine benefit for the perceptive and understanding.” 94 He stipulates, however, that the allegorical

90 See Daniel 1.
92 We have already encountered Me’iri, a rationalist and an important player in the second wave of the Maimonidean controversy in southern France, in the previous chapter, “We Are What We Speak,” cf. 149.
93 Menahem ben Solomon ha-Me’iri, introduction to Perush ha-Me’iri ‘al Sefer Mishlei ( Förørs he-Me’iri til sør Per (The Me’iri's Commentary on Proverbs), eds. Menahem Zahav and Mendel Meshi (Jerusalem: Otsar ha-Poskim Publishers, 1968), 5-13. Gregg Stern discusses the tradition with its geonic-Andalusian and Maimonidean heritage, and specifically the Meiri commentary in Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture, 122-5.
94 Ha-Me’iri as quoted and translated in Stern, Philosophy and Rabbinic Culture, 123.
meaning is not accessible to everyone, but exclusively to those trained in philosophy. Wisdom is only to be conferred upon the fit so that it is properly grasped and not destroyed. Thus, when Israel delineates the audience for his two texts, ‘women, children and the rest’ for the vernacular, and the Hebrew for the Jewish men, he might also be suggesting a particular way of reading his texts. The Hebrew, in keeping with his shibbuts of biblical verses, comes with the two-tiered approach, and those with the appropriate tools, will have access to both the literal and the hidden meaning. In fact, there might even be some attempt here to create a pun: though the word נגלה (nigleh) comes from the root גלה (galah - reveal) and מגילה (megillah) from גילה (galal - roll), they are aurally and visually similar; נסתר (nistar) and אסתר (Esther) moreover derive from the same root, סתר (sater - secret). And these two levels are quite clear in his elaboration of Esther’s character.

Chapter 5 of Proverbs is one of several in which there are warnings against sexual relationships with an enticing “foreign” woman, positioning her against one of the Jewish community.

“Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house.”

“(Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee.”)

It is in this chapter of Proverbs, moreover, where Israel finds his source for Esther’s designation, “'ayelet 'ahavim,” as we saw above, which refers directly to the Jewish woman.

“A lovely hind and graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; with her love be thou ravished always.”

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95 Ibid.
97 Ibid., Proverbs 5:17.
98 Ibid. Further, Proverbs 5:3, “For the lips of a strange woman drop honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil,” or Proverbs 5:20, “Why then wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of an alien?”
The foreign woman, who is generally married to someone else, \(^99\) tries to lure the young man to her house, "בבית," [bayit], a term which entered heavily into rabbinical discourse about Esther as wife and into Israel’s treatment of her righteousness.\(^{100}\) Yet we have also seen the construct of the “foreign” woman as a recurrent theme throughout Israel’s romances, echoing the Proverbs - and likely hinting at contemporaneous social issues - where she is also expressed as ‘Folly,’ becoming “a metaphorical counterpart to ‘Wisdom.'”\(^{101}\) ‘Dame Wisdom’ or ‘Woman Wisdom,’ as she has been called, is a personified female trope who appears in the first nine chapters of the Proverbs and is alluded to in others.\(^{102}\) She is portrayed as a divine companion, at God’s side during the creation of the world,\(^{103}\) and in fact, in Proverbs 8:30, she calls herself a “nursling” "אמון" [‘amon], adopted like Esther.\(^{104}\)

(“Then I was by Him, a nursling, and I was daily all delight, playing always before him.”)\(^{105}\)

And where we can ascertain in the Megillah how Esther depicts “wisdom in action,” Israel’s Esther is endowed with the very qualities possessed by ‘Woman Wisdom’ of the Proverbs. When, for instance, Ahasuerus questions her about her heritage, she remains faithful to her duty, refusing to divulge any information, and he responds:

(If there is neither king nor prince in your family,

99 Proverbs 7:17-20, for instance, reads:

“נפתי משכבי -- מארס -- אהלים וקנמון.  לכה נרוה דדים, עד הבקר נתעלסה באהבים. כי אין איש בביתו, הלך בדרך רחוק,”

“I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until morning; let us solace ourselves with loves. For my husband is not at home; he is gone on a long journey.” Mechon-mamre.org, Hebrew English Bible. http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2807.htm.

100 I discuss this term and its treatment in the rabbinical literature in greater detail in Chapter Two of the present study, “Esther’s Issues (or The Blood of Others),” cf. pg. 139.


102 Female figures of Wisdom also appear in other parts of the Hebrew Bible. For a discussion of these figures see Talmon, “‘Wisdom’ in the Book of Esther,” 451.


104 This portrayal of ‘wisdom,’ it might also be noted, bears resemblance to the maiden who appears to al-Harizi as the Hebrew language in his Tahkemoni, also an orphan. See Chapter Three, “We Are What We Speak,” 143.


106 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50v, ll. 217-20.
behold, you are my beloved, my sister. The intellect is the daughter of instruction and no measure of honor has been lacking in you from the day of your arrival until today:)

The passage in the HUC manuscript has a noteworthy variant, wherein Esther herself, is directly related to and the bearer of wisdom.

"...ינכ"ר Реיפור אחות השכל והמופר...

(Behold, you are my beloved, sister of intellect and of instruction…)

As a woman and wife, Esther conforms to the model of what all Jewish women aspire to, the אשת חיל, “woman of valor” of Proverbs 31:108

"אשת חיל, מי ימצא? ו..."

(“A woman of valor, who can find her? For her price is above rubies.”)109

In fact, Israel draws on verses from this chapter of the Proverbs in many of his references to Esther. When Mordecai calls upon her to take up the matter of saving the Jews with the king, he says to her:

"אמרו לאחותי זכור תזכור
העת ידיה בכישור תשכור
סדין עשתה ותמכור
את תקות חוט השני הזה:"

(They said to my sister, you must remember
When her hands shall engage the distaff111 she has made linen garments to sell;
you are the hope of this scarlet thread:)

We might compare this to Proverbs 31:19 and Proverbs 31:21:

107 Ms. HUC 396, fol. 21a, l. 218.
108 Interestingly, this final chapter 31 of the Book of Proverbs ends with an alphabetic acrostic celebrating the ideal qualities of the Israelite woman, as Coogan notes, pg. 384. It begins in verse 19 with the “א” of "אשת חיל" “woman of valour,” and ends with the last verse of the entire book, verse 31, "נתן נדיבת רוחס, ויחללו משכירים..." "Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.
We also find a very similar locution in Proverbs 1:3, "לחקות מוסר השכל, זכר מוסר ומשכירים..." “To receive the discipline of wisdom, justice, and right, and equity…"
111 The word used for “distaff” or “spindle” [kishor] can also mean “ability” or “talent” and is probably used here as a double entendre describing Esther.
She layeth her hands to the distaff, and her palms hold the spindle.”)  

She girdeth her loins with strength, and maketh strong her arms.”

In Israel’s Hebrew, Esther is also the warrior who takes on the fight for her people, the house of Israel, as the “woman of valor” in Proverbs 31 safeguards her household.

Here she speaks to her “family” about how she will protect them with God’s help:

(And she said, pure of heart, innocent ones,
night and day for three days
let us fast and let us beseech the eternal rock
to do wonders for this nation:

So to come to the king I shall gird my loins
And let the good Lord make a miracle for him [the king]… )

Thus, Israel’s elaborations develop the idea of applied wisdom with his Esther, making them more evident in her fealty to Mordecai, in maintaining silence about her identity, and in her astute interactions with the king. Verse 2:15 of the biblical narrative,

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113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.

115 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 53r, ll. 461-6.
(“And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all them that looked upon her.”)  

again finds her taking on a traditionally male courtier role, “achieving proverbial success,” as in Proverbs 3:4,  

(“So shall you find grace and good favor in the sight of God and man.”)  

Israel’s Hebrew magnifies this, so that she is not only graceful to behold, but speaks with grace as well, a rhetorician in her own right, mastering the courtier’s speech and behavior, not unlike her wise uncle,  

(Shes poured grace from her lips  
There is no other like her in this:)  

Thus, there is clearly a potent relationship in Israel’s texts to the literal sense of the verses he employs from the Proverbs. Yet their allegorical interpretation bears some attention as well.  

In his commentary, ha-Me’iri explains that the allure of the “foreign” woman in Chapter 5 is to be equated with the temptation to stray from right or moral behavior. Similarly, he explains that the “woman of valor” of Proverbs 31 in nistar (hidden) signifies the Torah. In this way, Israel brings the possibility of multiple layers of understanding to the audience of his Hebrew text, with its interpolation of Scriptural verses that would have been recognized by most learned Jewish men in his community.  

Even for those without access to the more arcane references in the text, its plain sense fruitfully develops plot, dialogue and characters for didactic measures. Consistent with this strategy, we also find parable-like digressions from the narrative, meshalim (parables), a

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117 Talmon, “‘Wisdom’ in the Book of Esther,” 449.
118 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50r, ll. 203-4.
119 His explication of Proverbs 5 offers an elaborate breakdown of this kind of behavior, but starts with: “ותodelist Первый, “And in the way of allegory, it seems to me, that it comes to warn [him] to observe the ways of the Torah in all its parts”. [My translation]. Ha-Me’iri, Perush ha-Me’iri al Sefer Mishlei (The Me’iri’s Commentary on Proverbs), 41 (82).
120 “The woman of valor is the Torah.” Ibid., 292 (82).
common tool used for exegesis and instruction. When, for instance, the search begins for a new wife for Ahasuerus, Israel pauses to recount King David’s search for a young female companion, highlighting David’s perspicacity in contrast with that of the Persian king.

David nurtured great intellect, grace and honor. And so it was when he was very old
They asked who would stand in the face of his cold
On this side or that

At Israel’s every border, the king’s ministers sought her out
And should she not find favor in his eyes, let them not shame her
Still in her youth at her father’s house, they would ask her
‘Will you go with this man?’

The reference here is to an episode in 1 Kings 1 in which the aged King David is advised to find a young female companion to comfort him and keep him warm.122 Israel’s expansion of the passage illustrates how the sagacious King David did not wish to humiliate those girls who were not selected, and thus did not make the search known to the public. This mashal is clearly put forth to distinguish the actions of a wise king like David from those of a foolish king, such as Ahasuerus, whose quest for a queen was a grand spectacle and contest. The ill-considered king showed no concern for the subjects of his caprices.

121Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50r, ll. 185-92.
122 1 Kings 1:1-3: "Now Kind David was old and stricken in years, and they covered him with clothes but he could get no heat. Wherefore his servants aid unto him: 'Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin; and let her stand before the king, and be a companion unto him; and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat. So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the borders of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king.'

A bit further along in the narrative, Israel alludes back to King David’s situation, that is, his need for physical warmth, with another aphoristic verse,

כתר מלכות שם על ראשה ונזר
בחדש טבת אשר כפור באפר יפזר
טוב לגבר אבדתו תהי מחזר
החדש הזה:

(He placed a royal crown and diadem on her head in the month of Tevet when frost is scattered like ashes it is good for the man to return to what he has lost during this month:)

Israel revisits the need of the king, here Ahasuerus - though probably meant as a parallel to David above - for a young female companion to keep him warm after he has had Vashti put to death. This stanza is multilayered; for as we have seen, it also contains allusions of a medical nature, i.e. sexual relations in what would have been a cold winter month in his own setting, and of a religious nature in the quotation from the Psalms hinting at the destruction of the Temple. Yet its particular relevance here is its axiomatic tenor.

Until this juncture, my discussion has centered primarily on the Hebrew text, where the correspondences to both the Biblical Esther story and the Proverbs are more pronounced. The mashal does feature in the vernacular text as well. Yet even in its more overtly religious occurrences in the Judéo-Provençal, that is, when making reference to a biblical or midrashic parallel or inclining toward didacticism, Israel’s intonation is less serious, tinged with humor and more personal. There is, for instance, a correlative passage in the Judéo-Provençal, of the parable we saw above about the search for a young female companion for King David, which certainly has a similar objective to the Hebrew version, to teach by example, to reflect the wisdom of David against its absence in Ahasuerus. Yet, the vernacular comes with almost comical interjections, a certain irreverence, one might say, even for the great Jewish king.

“Mas ben fon melz aconselhat (But much better advised was David; con fon tant refrejat (David; when he was so chilled

123 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 50v, ll. 221-4. Line 222 "כפור כאפר יפזר is quoted from Psalm 147:16.
124 See my discussion of this verse in Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” 79. Einbinder discusses the medical connotations of this passage in “A Proper Diet,” 93.
Non trobet autra medicina he didn’t find any other remedy
Mes que lhi aguesan una enfantina, than that they get a young girl for him,
La plus bela que om trobesa. the most beautiful they could find.
Cant que de badas i estesa, However much in vain it may have been,
De belas donas s’azautava: he still enjoyed beautiful women:
Per que sas costumas gardava. So he kept his old habits.
Aquel o fes plus saviamenz: That one did things more prudently:
Per to trames privadamenz. he sent everywhere in secret.
En los ostals las regardavan, They looked at them in the houses,
E d’aco non senhor guinhavan; and they didn’t call the master’s attention to
Per que nengun non las celava their doings;
Qui avia donzela la mostrava.” therefore no one hid them;
Whoever had a daughter showed her.”)125

Whereas the focal point of the Hebrew “mashal” is on King David’s intelligence and honor, as well as his compassion in seeking out a companion, the vernacular anecdote is tongue in cheek, with sexual overtones not present in the Hebrew. Israel reminds us of David’s love of women and his “costumas,” rather than his wisdom here. Indeed, the passage also hints at other genres which will be discussed further along - parody and fabliau - and even the medical, with his mention of “medicina.”126 Yet the wisdom genre appears here, albeit with a satirical twist.

We have similarly encountered examples of Provençal adages brought into the vernacular text, either cited directly or by way of suggestion.127 Yet in this case, Israel draws not on biblical wisdom as he does in the Hebrew text, but rather folk wisdom, which would be more suited to a popular audience. Indeed, there are distinct parallels in the points at which Israel chose to insert proverbial references in the two texts. For instance, where we saw above how he specifically indicates the time of year and the need for warmth in the Hebrew, just following his parable about King David, in the vernacular, he interjects with the following passage:

“Lo tems non vuelh que vos denemre:128 (“I don’t want you to forget the season:
Ela fon preza en dezembre she was taken in December
Al tems que cas la neu el glas at the time when snow and ice fall

126 Interestingly, the term “medicina” commonly appears as a metaphor in love lyric as well.
127 Cf. Chapter Three, “We Are What We Speak,” 182.
128 See my note on the transcription of denemre in Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” 78, n. 104.
Here once again, Israel is attempting to make the same general point here as in the Hebrew, however, there are some striking differences in the Provençal passage. Firstly, this interruption to the narrative is quite a bit longer and is more openly erotic. And while the Hebrew comes with allusion to the destruction of the Temple, a somber event in itself, it carries with it a pious message for Jews. Although it does have an instructional quality, the Judéo-Provençal passage, appears to have no particular religious connotations. Meyer and Méjean-Thiolier have proposed that the Israel’s mention of a black wife might be an allusion to the beloved in the Song of Songs 1:5, “I am black, but I am beautiful.” I would add that it hints at another biblical figure associated with wisdom, the Queen of Sheba of 1 Kings 10-13, who comes to meet the renowned King Solomon. Silberstein has indicated that this might have a more contemporary implication, noting another reference several stanzas earlier to Ahasuerus’ search for a mate,

“Non gardon se es gentil
Son linatge o sotil;
Sia Juzieva o Saraina,131
La plus bela sia regina.”

(“They do not check if she is of noble
or base extraction;
whether she be Jewess or Saracen,
let the most beautiful be queen.”)132

questioning whether Israel’s “white or black” is a mere figure of speech, or a reference to “black-skinned women (and to Saracen women in 372) significant of an earlier era when

129 Silberstein, “The Provençal Esther Poem,” 202-3, ll. 420-33. Also see my discussion of this passage (as well as Einbinder’s treatment of it) in Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” 78-9.
131 This expression occurs in Troubadour lyric.
Moors were known in Spain and Southern France.” It is difficult to pinpoint the allusion here precisely, but interesting to consider this in terms of Israel’s other commentaries on marriage in the vernacular text, all of which indicate his immediate preoccupation with the matter.

One of the other points at which there is a parallel passage in the Judéo-Provençal text is where Ahasuerus probes our heroine about her heritage. In the Hebrew, as we saw, Israel used this exchange as an opportunity to remind the audience of Esther’s wisdom and the good judgment she used in her handling her precarious role at court. Given that we only have access to the beginning of the vernacular text, little can be garnered about Israel’s treatment of Esther in it versus its Hebrew counterpart. However, this passage offers at least a small clue. In the Hebrew dialogue, the king calls attention to Esther’s intelligence, and while here, he does not mention wisdom per se, he does indeed remark that her comportment is that of one who is well-bred.

“...Lo rei lhi dis: “Dona dalicada, De cal terra ses vos nada Qe tant gent es enthada?” (“...le roi lui dit: ‘Charmante dame où êtes-vous née pour être aussi bien apprise?’”)

Thus there is some indication that in the vernacular version as well, Esther is associated with nobility, and in what we can glimpse of her, she bears the traits of a true courtier, consistent with the wisdom tradition.

Silberstein has suggested that in the vernacular text “the use of proverbs and metaphorical expressions reinforcing the negative lend a popular or colloquial feeling to the narrative.” They are also, as she points out, influenced by rabbinic interpretation, and she cites one midrash in particular alluding to Haman, “an ignoramus always thrusts himself to the front.” Silberstein’s observations, without explicitly saying so, capture the generic fusion

133 Ibid., 255, n. 430.
134 Most notably, see my discussion on lines 322-340 in Chapter Three, “We are What we Speak,” 153-4.
137 Ibid., 61-2, ll. 283-5. Here she is referring to a proverb we have encountered in the previous chapter:
that is so prominent in Israel’s texts. The presence of religious motifs is, of course, undeniable in the vernacular narrative, as are the more secular elements in the Hebrew. Yet here, the hybridity that characterizes the texts as a unit, also distinguishes them as individual compositions. For while they are both an amalgamation of genres, each also tends to elaborate different genres, at times privileging certain models according to the conventions of the language in which they are written, at others, perhaps according to the intention of their author.

**Nova, Fabliau, Romance**

Suzanne Méjean-Thiolier and Marie-Françoise Notz-Grob have classed Israel’s *Roman de la Reine Esther* in the genre of *novas*, particular to the region and language in which they were written. They link *vidas* and *razos* as well as “recits, contes” and other forms of narrative poetry in their broad definition of the genre. And while Israel’s text is perhaps not entirely characteristic, that is, it stands as a singular example of a text with a sacred theme, it certainly conforms to many of the important features its anthologizers have attributed to the genre. Indeed, the *novas* or *nouvelles* are representative of generic interpenetration, which is undeniably true for our Esther text. Its formal structure of octosyllabic couplets is also a common trait, which is, in fact, shared with romances and narratives of the period as well. In their discussion of the text, Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob raise its courtly setting and its didactic tone as the primary qualifications for its inclusion in both the genre and their collection, centered on the contemporaneous condition of women as one of its principal interests. Some of my earlier discussions in the present study would indeed corroborate this understanding of the text. For, while the Judéo-Provençal version is certainly concerned with matters of a religious nature, its style is more populist, in keeping with its proposed audience. This focus would have a broad appeal and would necessarily include a female audience as

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138 For a full discussion of the genre and its evolution, see Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob, introduction to *Nouvelles courtoises occitanes et françaises* (Paris: Librairie Generale Francaise, 1997), 11-64. See my comments above about the classification of the text as “roman.”

139 All of the modern editors of the vernacular text have noted its metrical inconsistencies; however, they concede that these “flaws” can be ascribed to its composition in a foreign character set as well as general linguistic irregularities and perhaps scribal errors.
well as what the editors call “erudite laypersons.” And if, as Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob have suggested, the teachings in the Esther text are far from those of the troubadours and courtoisie, this “roman” still presents a point in common with the works specifically preoccupied with courtliness: “dans tous les cas, l’auteur se considère moins comme un artiste créateur que comme un maître du savoir, un artisan de l’âme et du beau.” Such a view brings us back to Israel’s own interest in being a proponent of wisdom in many guises. In this way, moreover, consistent with the didacticism of the novas, we might even venture to assert that he is something of a jongleur who sees his role as that of educating his listener-readers.

As their author, it is quite possible that Israel himself would have originally delivered the readings of his texts, but whether or not this is the case, there is no question about his narratorial role in them. He takes ownership of both texts, addressing his audience directly in the second person, with more than a few authorial interventions along the way, a standard in the novas and in romance, among other contemporary genres. All of the modern editors of the vernacular text have called attention to Israel’s elaborations, the most germane to the present discussion being those which are not specifically derived from rabbinical treatment of the Megillah, thus revealing influences of popular secular literary forms.

One of the didactic themes treated in the novas, according to Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob, is that of the jealous spouse. They discuss several works, such as Castia Gilos and Arnaut de Carcasse’s La Nouvelle du Perroquet, that deal specifically with this question, remarking, moreover, their commonality with the fabliaux. And while early scholars of the fabliau genre were inclined to view its bawdy comedy purely as entertainment, later scholars have acceded that it did have a teaching component as well. In “The Didacticism of the Fabliau,” Mary Jane Stearns Schenck offers compelling arguments for the fabliaux as dits moraux, following Zumthor’s stance that they even bear relation to Latin exempla, although

140 Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob, Nouvelles courtoises, 46.
141 Ibid.
142 This would have been possible at least during his lifetime, since in the case of liturgical poetry, the author might well have been the precentor of his congregation as well. However, any reader would naturally take on the narratorial voice. Michael Rand, “Fundamentals in the Study of Piyyut,” 2.
143 Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob, Nouvelles courtoises, 35-37. They cite the fabliau La bourgeoise d’Orléans in particular as an example of the “mari trompé, battu et content,” 35.
not preaching Christian morality per se. In the end, Stearns Schenck defines the fabliau as “a brief narrative poem with a tripartite macrostructure whose narrative is a humorous, even ribald, story arranged to teach a lesson.”

While Israel’s Esther texts cannot be called fabliaux as such, we can indeed identify influences of the genre on his work, most palpably in the Judéo-Provençal version. What is interesting to note here is that many of the fabliaux tales feature a change in fortune, which is particularly fitting for the Purim story, itself structured around the reversal of fortune for the Jews in Persia. Yet where the fabliaux motifs are most evident is in Israel’s heavily expanded treatment of the Vashti episode - and in its aftershock.

E. Jane Burns, in her treatment of women and women’s bodies in the Old French fabliaux, in her book, Body Talk, points out the centrality of “wifely disobedience” to the narratives. Indeed, as we have observed, this notion is already given some importance in the Megillah, but only superficially. While Vashti’s refusal to comply with her husband’s demand is frowned upon in the original story, giving rise to the decree that every man should be the ruler of his household, its primary function is to drive the plot toward the actual elimination of Vashti’s character, thereby making room for her replacement, Esther, the pivotal instrument of divine providence and Jewish salvation. Not only is Israel’s reconstruction of the incident significantly longer than in its source text, with the addition of dialogue, intrigue and authorial interjection, but Vashti’s previously elusive persona is animated, her mouth charged with caustic discourse and even her demise filled out with pungent detail.

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145 Ibid., pg. 36.
146 The fabliaux were produced in a circumscribed geographic region in northern France, which certainly raises the question of Israel’s familiarity with individual narratives from the genre. It is, nevertheless, possible that some of these did find their way to the south, at least orally, and if nothing else, they could be an indirect influence via other literary models.
147 Ibid.
Israel begins by drawing on a midrashic interpolation of the king’s command, which explains that when in the biblical verse, his chamberlains are told to bring the Queen Vashti before his guests in her royal crown, תכתי מלכות, it was meant that she come with nothing but the crown, that is, completely naked. While this expansion is derived from the traditional Jewish interpretation, I would argue that its references to the body and to sexuality, a motif which lies at the heart of so many fabliaux, are a natural prelude to Israel’s treatment of the scene. In fact, where the rabbis explained the king’s request in very no-nonsense terms,

"...shall she have upon her crown, and naked."

(“…that there be nothing on her except the crown and [that she be] naked.”)

Israel spices up the original narrative and has Ahasuerus articulate his wish quite plainly:

“Sonet sos set cambries majors,  
Comandet lor: 'Anas de cors
E menas me ses vestidura
Vasti la bela creatura.'”

("He rang for his seven high chamberlains, 
Ordering them: “Go quickly and bring me without clothing the beautiful creature Vashti.”")

The diction used, referring to Vashti as “la bela creatura,” so foreign to that of the Megillah, also echoes descriptions found in the romances. In fact the king’s language in speaking of Vashti bears striking resemblance to that used to introduce the heroine of Chrétien de Troyes’ Erec et Enide. We might compare Ahasuerus’ declaration to his guests to Chrétien’s depiction of Enide.

“Lo rei lor dis: ‘Per caritat,  
Al mont non a tant bela dona
Con la regina, ni tant bona.
E promet vos en bona fe
Que vostres uelhs en faran fe
Que anc Dieu non fest ant bela res,
E mantenat vos la veires[,]”

("The King said to them: ‘By Heaven, there’s no woman in the world so lovely or so good as the Queen. And I promise you in good faith that your eyes will bear witness that God never made so beautiful a [thing], And [now] you will see her[,]’")

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149 Esther 1:11.
150 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah, 12b,
151 Buber, Midrash Panim Aherim, Version B, Para. 1. (ספרים אחרים על אסתר, מדרש פנים אחורי, פרשה א( günlük אחרים)
153 Ibid., 195, ll. 177-83.
“Mout estoit la pucele gente
tote i ot mise s’antante
Nature qui fete l’avoir…
…De ceste tesmoigne Nature
C’onques si bele creature
Ne fu veue an tot le monde.”

La jeune fille etait tres noble et tres belle, Car
car Nature qui l’avait creee y avait mis tous
ses soins…
Nature elle-meme porte temoignage que
jamais si belle creature
ne s’etait vue dans le monde.”

Whether Israel was familiar with this Old French romance is uncertain, though surely not impossible; and he would likely have had some familiarity with Provençal romances that grew out of the northern tradition to which this belongs. The aim of this comparison is not to show the resemblance between Israel’s text and an individual romance, but rather to illustrate his use of a rhetorical convention adopted from secular literature, as well as indicate the eroticized tone that he establishes with these verses. This segue into the Vashti expansion is particularly interesting for its irony in light of what follows. For no sooner does Israel present the queen as a figure of courtly countenance, than she morphs into its near antithesis, something of a caricature akin to the burlesque portrayal of women in the fabliaux. Vashti is the unaccommodating, outspoken wife par excellence. She is unabashed in her response to her husband’s demand that she appear naked before his guests. Indeed, the king’s emissaries are reluctant, both recognizing the absurdity of their lord’s command and fearful of the queen’s reaction to it.

“Dis: ‘Ubres leu, que prezent port
Lo rei se dina aval en l’ort,
E tramet vos de s’escudela
De calque vianda novela.’
Entran e van mot consiros,
Am mal esgart e furios.
Vasti los vi mal encaras,
E pareisia que eran irats.”

(“One said: ‘Open up quickly, for I am bringing a gift. The king dines below in the garden, and sends you from his plate some kind of new food.’

They enter and are very concerned, with an unpleasant and crazy look. Vashti eyed their bad countenance, and it appeared they were upset.”)

155 Ruth Harvey and Simon Gaunt have treated the transmission of the “matière de Bretagne” into the Occitan narrative tradition in “The Arthurian Legend in the Occitan Tradition,” 528-45. While “the Arthurian tradition does not establish itself in Occitania as it does in Northern France, England and Germany,” it was certainly known in Occitania and Catalonia, making its way into - and responding to - that narrative tradition in such works as Jaufre. Huchet also deals with this subject extensively in “Romans d’oïl et d’oc” in Le roman occitan medieval.
156 As Burns describes them, “Women in these tales are featured typically as lascivious, demanding, verbose, irrational, and not very smart.” Body Talk, 27.
157 Silberstein translates this vianda as “dish.” This reference to a new dish relates to Israel’s medical additions as well - yet another genre in the mix.
And when she learns the reason of their visit, she makes no attempt to conceal her outrage,

“Dis: ‘Es lo rei tant descauzit? Ieu non cre que sia de menz Que el non sia isit de senz…”

plainly refusing and proceeding into a monologue of some twenty derisive lines of insult against the king. Here again, Israel falls back on rabbinic lore about her ancestry: daughter of Balshazzar and granddaughter of Nebuchadnezzar.

“Mal sembla mon senher avi, Que era tant e bon e tant savi Que begra de vin per un bueu, E el non o blandira un ueu.

I know well who his father was: he seemed of lowly origin; he would drink wine like an ox, Without considering it at all….”

Vashti might be classed among the domineering woman in the fabliaux, as described by Burns, since she is disobedient with her sexuality and her body, refusing to pleasure her husband. She is given a voice and she speaks back, though not necessarily looked upon favorably. As his chamberlains report to the king,

“…Paraulas dis folas e pegas: Vostre paire gardet las egas. Sapias, Senher, non vos blant plus Que una obriera fa son fus.

“She said crazy and foolish words: your father kept mares. Know, Sire, that she flatters you no more than a spinster does her spindle.”

Yet such a woman cannot be tolerated, lest she serve as a bad example to others, a concern that seems to have precipitated Israel’s further embellishment of the deliberations over her punishment. It was, as we have seen, Memucan, or Haman, who advised:

Ibid., ll. 207-9.
Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah, 10a, Yalkut Shimoni Esther 1050.
Ibid., 197, ll. 223-5.
Burns, Body Talk, 32-33.
“…’Senhors, prenam conselh
Que donas ne prengan espelh.
Se aquest fag non es punit
Totz los maritz seran aunitz.
Non trobres una de mil
Que a son marit mais sie humil.
Non ne aura femna de orre talh
que son marit preize an alh.
Se es batuda ni ferida,
Ve vos tantost la brega bastida.
Tornaran s’en a los marits;
Ben en poiran estar marritz.
Encars vos dic seran tant gaias
Que elas volran portar las braias.

(“…Sires, let’s take counsel
that women don’t follow this example.
If this deed is not punished
all husbands will be dishonored.
You won’t find one in a thousand
who would still be humble to her mate.
There would not be among them a woman
even of horrible appearance
who would respect her husband at all.
If she is beaten or flogged,
right away you’re set for a fight.
They will stand up to their husbands;
the men might well be afflicted by it.
Moreover I tell you they will be so unruly
that they will want to wear the pants.”)\(^\text{165}\)

Haman’s lengthy monologue reverberates with the fear of henpecked husbands, with apprehension of women “who wear the pants.” The latter, which we have met in an earlier discussion as a well-known Provençal dictum,\(^\text{166}\) is also a motif that appears in the fabliaux literature. In “Les Quatre Souhaits de Saint Martin,” for instance, a malcontented husband wishes for his wife’s body to be covered in vaginas to avenge her verbose, aggressive nature:

“Sa fame, qui chauce les braies/li a dit: ‘Vilain mal jor aies!.../A mal eür aiez vous beste…”\(^\text{167}\) She speaks to her spouse in a tone not unlike that of Vashti!

The deliberations of the king’s counselors follow this anxious trajectory, leading to the issuance of a decree that all women must speak the language of their husbands, which has been explored at length in Chapter Three.\(^\text{168}\) And the outcome of such mutinous behavior is, of course, the queen’s execution, bringing us back to the didactic element of the fabliaux, many of which conclude with an actual moral,\(^\text{169}\) while others offer implicit lessons. Israel,

\(^\text{165}\) Ibid., 199, ll. 298-311.
\(^\text{166}\) See also Meyer, “Le Roman Provençal d’Esther,” 222, Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob, “Roman de la Reine Esther,” 146, n. 1. Cf. also see my discussion on folk proverbs in Chapter Three, “We are What We Speak,” 182.
\(^\text{168}\) Cf. my discussion in Chapter Three, “We Are What We Speak.”
\(^\text{169}\) “Les Quatre Souhaiats de Saint Martin,” for instance, closes with: “This fabliau will illustrate, \textit{a man’s a fool to trust his mate/against his judgment; frequently/ he’ll come to shame and misery.” In Harrison, \textit{Gallic Salt}, 189.
in fact, closes the passage with an ironic authorial remark reminiscent of the satirical morals that close the fabliaux. When the king regains his sobriety and realizes what has happened to Vashti, he is deeply troubled. To dwell upon the events that have occurred, however, would delay the introduction of Esther and Mordecai and the telling of the central story of Jewish salvation. Thus Israel draws the matter to a close, using a rather sardonic narratorial interjection to make the transition:

“Pauzet son vin, tenc se per fol
E de Vasti lo cor lhi dol.
Non sabia con l’avia perduda;
Ni per om non fon defenduda.
Mes que aital es dol de molher
Cant cel copde qu’on se fer:
Que la dolor pasa tantost.
Pensem d’una outra -- cant que cost.
Per que lo rei ben so paset
E de regina a far penset.”

(“He [the king] laid aside his wine, realized his madness and his heart grieved for Vashti.
He didn’t know how he had lost her;
nor did anyone come to her defense.
But grief for one’s wife is like a bumped elbow:
the pain soon passes.
Let’s think about another -- cost what it may.
For the king got over that well
And thought about making a queen.”)

Here Israel is poking fun at Ahasuerus, who, in his wine-induced stupor, was completely unaware of what had transpired, and also at Vashti, the brazen wife, whose loss is ultimately insignificant. Using the moment to its fullest, he offers his audience an interlude both comical and moralistic, at the same time setting the stage for Esther’s arrival and establishing a contrast between the former ill-behaved queen and her praiseworthy replacement.

In its overall tone, Israel’s treatment of Vashti’s insubordination is fittingly parodic, in line with the customs of the Purim festival and its literary traditions, as we shall examine further. In this way, it creates a conversation with the fabliaux genre. The Hebrew version of the narrative, it should be remarked, also inflates the Vashti affair, injecting degrees of humor into it as well. In it, she again evolves from having a purely functional role in advancing the plot of the Megillah into a three-dimensional personality invested with a voice. In fact, she flouts his command with insults of a like nature, drawing again on the rabbinic construal of her ancestry.

(She dared, for she had a change of heart, and she said,'the son of my father’s steward, why has he come to shame me, this crazy man?

If at the wine feast his intellect fled, let him not give the women his power and his strength to envision sweetly and visit his palace. Who will listen to you about this?

Not even my father Belshazzar the awful who drank wine like an ox neither got drunk nor spoke rebellious words by doing such an evil thing.:)
Even though Vashti’s portrayal in the Hebrew is something of a caricature, this version, by virtue of its language and the intertextual devices it employs, casts the affair in a slightly different light. The Judéo-Provençal narrative certainly has its share of midrashic allusion, but it is oblique and used more for comical effect. Even when the vernacular and the Hebrew text show parallels in their midrashic sources, the former tends to be less explicit in its references to matters religious. In both versions, for instance, as we have seen, Vashti refers to her father’s ability to “drink like an ox.” Yet where she calls upon her ancestry in the vernacular text, she refers simply to her “noble father.” In the Hebrew, on the other hand, she actually names him, "אבי בלטשצר הנורא" (My father, Belshazzar the awful.) A seemingly minute detail, perhaps, but the name Belshazzar is so strongly identified as the son of Nebuchadnezzar, and by extension with the destruction of the Temple and the ensuing exile, that it conjures up a set of circumstances which are veiled in the vernacular narrative.

Although both texts possess didactic elements, Israel’s presumptions about the popular audience of the vernacular text would suggest that it was intended more specifically for entertainment purposes than its Hebrew sister. This would have afforded the author a greater degree of freedom in his manipulation of the religious material and in his concern with fidelity to a strictly Jewish tradition. Thus the vernacular Vashti episode reflects generic influences of a more secular brand than the Hebrew version, which is crafted according to a devotional model. It is filled with witticism and satire in its own right, and while we can find in it some inspiration from popular non-Jewish sources, as well as secular Hebrew texts, its reliance on biblical and rabbinic matter lends it a tone distinct from the vernacular text.

In the Hebrew, Vashti herself utters verses from the holy books of the Tanakh. In line 99, for instance, she utters words from Psalm 27: "לחזות בנועם ולבקר בהיכלו" [lahazot be-no'am u-
levaker bi-heikhal" in which David praises God, wishing “to behold the graciousness of the Lord and to visit early in his temple.” The use of the *shibbuts* has a twofold rhetorical effect in this case. On one hand, it is a reminder of God to the audience. Yet, taken out of context, placed in the mouth of none other than a defiant queen who is mocking her foolhardy husband, the same man who agrees to the extermination of the Jews and profanes the sacred vessels of the Temple destroyed by her grandfather, these words become quite ironic. Where the original is addressed to God, the creator, here the addressee is a lord of another sort altogether. Where the original verse is used for praise, here it is used for derision. Where the original "היכל" [heikhal] refers to the most sacred site of Jewish worship, here it refers to Ahasuerus’ decadent palace.

The Hebrew text is surely not without humor. On the contrary, it is rich with a stylized humor that belongs to an intellectual tradition of Purim parody, especially loved by southern French Jews, to be treated in more depth later in the present chapter. Yet this kind of satire is quite unlike that of the more colorful comedy of the Judéo-Provençal. It is hewn from canonical literary material that would have been appreciated particularly by Israel’s peers. And while it is reminiscent of certain brands of secular Hebrew texts, such as the *makamat*, in which the use of biblical *shibbuts* for comedic effect was not uncommon - and surely provided some inspiration for Israel in his composition - here it comes with a double edge since it is also a devotional work intended for ritual use.

If we look, for example, at the continuation of Vashti’s quote from Psalm 27, verse 5 of the Psalm uses language that establishes a covert wordplay:

"ככי יצפנני בסכה -- ביוו רשה, יסרני בסתר אהלו, בצור ירוממני."

("For He concealeth me in His pavilion in the day of evil; He hideth me in the covert of His tent; He lifteth me up upon a rock.")

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175 *Psalms* 27:4: "אתה שאלתי מהו -- אתה אבקש שבחי ביחס, י. פלמי無い: הלחם בנטש י. הלוך ביבנה י. הזקר הבהיך."

“One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the graciousness of the Lord, and to visit early in His temple.” Mechon-mamre.org, Hebrew-English Bible. [http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2627.htm](http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2627.htm).

The verse not only acknowledges God’s protection, but engages with the notion of secrecy. The speaker is hidden and articulates this using a word whose root is shared with that of Esther’s name, [s-t-r] "סתר," a derivation also used by the rabbis to explain why she was not called by her Hebrew name, Hadassah, at the king’s court. Of course, it is difficult to know whether Israel had such an association in mind when he composed the text and had Vashti voice the language of the Psalms, yet it is not unlikely that the subsequent verse would be evoked for anyone in the audience who recognized her words.

To a similar effect, Israel incorporates bits of Aramaic into Vashti’s diatribe against the king. In fact, it is not unusual to find Aramaic phrases interspersed through the Hebrew text since Israel’s shibbuts is not compiled from purely biblical Hebrew - as most of the early poems of this genre were. He also culls material from the rabbinic literature and the Targums, which were primarily written in Aramaic, whose use would have served as an indicator of Israel’s erudition and education in canonical Jewish texts. That he chooses to make Vashti a vessel for its expression lends an interesting twist to the episode. It is, first of all, a reminder of her ancestry and of her connection to the exile. Paradoxically, however, this almost hyperbolic figure of female willfulness and misdeed employs the language - as well as the expositions - of the Jewish sages.

Indeed the rabbis had much to say about Vashti in both the talmudic and midrashic literature as well as in the later commentaries on the Book of Esther. Israel shows no particular sympathy towards her in either of his adaptations; but to some extent both versions do reflect her mixed reviews in the two talmudic traditions. The Palestinian or Erets Yisra’el tradition, as discussed in Chapter Two177 takes a more favorable stance towards Vashti’s noncompliance, allowing that what Ahasuerus had demanded of her did not befit a woman of her stature. She is esteemed for her humility, and rather than chastise her, the Erets Yisra’el Talmud actually confers wisdom upon her. According to this tradition, Vashti makes three attempts to dissuade her husband, sending her arguments through his ministerial messengers. She uses reason to convince him of the consequences of his request and her actions are thus

seen as noble.178 She is blamed for only one deed: her refusal to allow Ahasuerus to rebuild the Temple destroyed by her forefathers.179 The Babylonian Talmud, on the other hand, finds no redeeming qualities in Vashti; she is viewed in a purely negative light. Israel tends to align himself with the more critical position toward the queen, especially in the Hebrew text, where he makes use of the most unflattering aspects of her portrayal by the rabbis, both in her physical description, as noted above, as well as in her base character. However, mixed in with its burlesque portrait, the vernacular text does communicate Vashti’s recourse to logic in her response to Ahasuerus’ ministers which the Erets Yisra’el Talmud attributes to her when she argues,

“…Es lo rei tant descauzit? Ieu non cre que sia de menz
Que el non sia isit de senz, Car aiso non es bel de dir
Que nuilha dona ses vestir Se deja mostrar en cort.
Per que li digas tot cort Que en aiso non meta ponha…”

(“…Is the king so vulgar?
I don’t believe it’s any less a thing
than that he’s gone out of his mind,
for it is not proper to say
that any woman without clothes
should have to show herself in court.
For that reason tell him simply
that he should waste no effort on it…”)

The two texts introduce a midrashic explanation for the mode of Vashti’s sentence: that she be killed and that she be naked, the latter substantiated as retribution for having forced the Jewish girls to work naked on the Sabbath.181 In the Hebrew:

(Defiled of name and full of tumult
For, she led the observant girls of the perfect faith into sin on the Sabbath day.

Her sentence was given and they burned her naked
On that day namely because of this:)

178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
181 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah, 12b.
182 Ezekiel 22:5. “הקרבות והרחקות ממק, יתקלסו
כנר דינה ושפרתו תימנה
בימים ההוא לאמר ובבכר זה.”

Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 49v, ll. 157-60.
The corresponding passage in the Judéo-Provençal, however, is longer and more detailed, with specific instruction on the materials to be used in her execution. What is more, the judgment is not recounted by the author-narrator, but spoken by the king himself, who insinuates but does not state outright that she is to be naked when she is burned.

“Mandet lo rei a un messier:   (“The King sent for a messenger:
‘Apelas me lo carnacier,    ‘Call the executioner for me,
E digas lhi ses nuhla falha  and tell him without fail
Pense de lenha e de palha;   that he take care of wood and straw;
Car disapte ben matin      for early Saturday morning
Vuelh que sia cremada Vasti I want Vashti to be burned
En las festa de las Juzievas, on the holiday of the Jewesses,
Car totas las obras seuas   for all of her work
En aquel jorn lor fazia faire, she made them do on that day,
Aisi car nasqueron de maire.” as they were born [from their mother].”)184

This distinction is not insignificant, for in the Hebrew it becomes a teaching opportunity, allowing the author himself to iterate a lesson about transgression and reckoning, in fact, using a verse of Ezekiel. In the vernacular, stated instead by the king, the verdict comes across with a different tone, one not as weighted with religious implications. Indicating only that Vashti’s victims were Jewish, it is otherwise without overt reference to sin. Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob have traced the end of the quote to the Castia Gilos, one of the novas that chastises jealous spouses,185 bringing us back in turn to that genre with its own didactic style, not specific to Judaism.

In keeping with the less formal mood of the vernacular text, less constrained by ceremony or religious precepts, Israel expresses some leniency toward Vashti with narratorial interjections. The first occurs during the deliberations about the nature of her punishment.

184 Silberstein, “The Provençal Esther Poem,” 200, ll. 342-51. Silberstein translates line 351 as “naked as they were born.” This is the implication of the line, however Israel does not state this explicitly. Minor modifications to translation.
185 Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob in “Roman de la Reine Esther,” 149, n. 3, cite this as a saying “de meme qu’elles sont nées de leur mere,” a way of affirming the truth of a fact, and they suggest that this is related to a frequently used saying in the Middle Ages: “tous ceux qui sont nés de mere,” which comes from the Evangiles, inter natos mulierum, and is found in the Castia Gilos, v. 347.
“Se dison dreg non fon aucida;”\(^{186}\) ("Justly speaking, she shouldn’t be killed; Si avia fag com descauzida.” she had indeed behaved as an insolent one.")\(^{187}\)

And the second, once she has already been judged and executed:

“Vasti vi mal aquel jostar:”\(^{188}\) ("Vashti was unlucky in that joust; Cremada fon -- laisem l’estar.” she was burned -- let’s let her be.")\(^{189}\)

Although they do not pardon Vashti, these remarks offer her a modicum of compassion, taking into account that she was not entirely at fault. They also reflect the reasoned views of some of the medieval commentators on Vashti’s sentence.\(^{190}\) The Hebrew text is more accusatory and infers that Vashti had her own evil intentions. Again quoting the Babylonian Talmud in its Aramaic:

(Even she had transgressive intentions; where there is a faithless husband, there is a faithless wife.

\(^{186}\) On her translation of “fon aucida,” Silberstein notes that we would expect the auxiliary verb to be in the conditional, for a, in order to justify her reading of it and questions whether it was a scribal error or whether Israel [Crescas] was using the perfect with a conditional connotation, “The Provençal Esther Poem,”. 235. Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob translate this line as “s’ils conseillent d’être juste, elle n’est pas tuée,” explaining that this refers to the counsel of the sages to exercise clemency in order to avoid death, though the king’s majesty prevented them from this, and they therefore sent him to seek advice from the sages of Moab. This is based on the commentary from the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah, 12b. “Roman de la Reine Esther,” 142-3, n. 3. This advice does indeed follow in both of Israel’s texts. Admittedly, I prefer Silberstein’s translation of this line, although it is not literal, for it does render the advice of the king’s counselors more accurately. This occurs at a point in the narrative when Vashti’s sentence has not yet been decreed, so it should logically be treated as a conditional. In both texts, the king’s advisors are wary about recommending a death sentence, lest the king blame them later, when he was no longer in a state of inebriation.


\(^{188}\) Ibid., 200, ll. 352-3.

\(^{189}\) I’ve altered Silberstein’s translation of line 352 from “Vashti took a dim view of that game.”

\(^{190}\) Barry Walfish, in Esther in Medieval Garb, 113-20, discusses the opinions of medieval commentators on the trial of Vashti. While many of these were later than Israel, well known exegetes, such as Ibn Ezra, Gersonides, and Joseph Ibn Kaspi were concerned in particular with the interpretation of the identity of the yode’ei ha-ittim, “the wise men who knew the times,” from whom Ahasuerus sought counsel. The questions focused on the notion of justice and the difference between law and custom, conventional law and absolute law. Those who came later often grounded their arguments in Aristotle’s Ethics. Israel probably would have been familiar with some of these issues, and again here, his rationalist leanings come to the fore in his vernacular Esther adaptation.

\(^{191}\) Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 49r, ll. 85-8. The Aramaic expression in line 86 "אמיו בקרית יתתיה יבריא" comes from Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah 12a.
And from the heavens [God] her sin was revealed, so one did not approach the other.)

In these lines, according to Silberstein, Israel [Crescas] “makes very clear Vashti’s unchaste conduct,” which she proposes is “a subject too indelicate to have included in the version for women and children.” Given his overall treatment of the episode in the Judéo-Provençal text, I would argue that he was probably less concerned with propriety than she supposes, and that his exclusion of the talmudic reference is not a question of delicacy per se. For, as we have seen, the narrative is not lacking in material, whether allusive or direct, that can be construed as inappropriate for such an audience. And while this omission might well be related to the audience issue, as Silberstein suggests, it is rather the inclusion of the rabbinic interpolation about Vashti in the Hebrew that seems indicative of Israel’s concerns here. That is, the erudite audience of this text would likely have recognized the talmudic reference in Israel’s commentary and appreciated its religious inferences.

Of course, the intention of these arguments is not to demonstrate a clear-cut generic distinction between the two texts, nor would it be fair to claim that one is explicitly religious and the other secular. The question of the genre of these texts, much like that of their audience, presents us with ambiguities about which the modern reader can only speculate. What I am pointing to are tendencies in the two texts (and we must remember that the vernacular is only a fragment, so no comparison can be precise), and more specifically, the dialogue between them. Their intertextuality, the influence of their sources, affects the style of each individual text in unique ways. At the same time, there is overlap which brings them into their own intertextual conversation, one with the other, which I hope has become evident at this point.

Indeed, this conversation is evident in Vashti’s burning, about which Israel is explicit in both versions of the text. The Megillah itself is very vague about the kind of punishment Vashti received, offering no specifics. She is commanded never to appear before the king again and

\[193\] Taking into consideration the earlier discussion of the variegated audience, that is, that the Judéo-Provençal text could have had an appeal for learned Jewish men as well - particularly physicians because of the medical additions, as Einbinder has suggested - Silberstein’s suggestion is not entirely convincing.
simply disappears, though the assumption is that she has been banished. The rabbinitic literature, on the other hand, is more specific about her fate, interpreting the biblical verse to be a sentence of death. There are variations in the midrashic accounts, some leaving the method of execution open, others offering very precise explications, such as beheading. None of the aggadic accounts, however, suggests death by fire, as Israel repeats in both of his adaptations. Here, he is quite clearly making reference to a localized, contemporary phenomenon. Burning was a common form of execution in the Middle Ages, and likely not foreign to Israel. In her treatment of the texts, Einbinder cites a number of inquisitorial events that occurred in Israel’s own region very close to the time of their composition, such as the burning of twenty-one beguines in Narbonne in 1322. She also explores this motif through poetic and epistolary documentation of martyrdom among Northern French Jews in her Beautiful Death: Jewish Poetry and Martyrdom in Medieval France, as does Kristen Fudemann in “These Things I Will Remember: The Troyes Martyrdom and Collective Memory,” about the 1288 Troyes Elegies of Jacob bar Judah of Lorraine, dedicated to thirteen Jews who were burned at the stake.

Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob’s introduction to their edition of the Judéo-Provençal version offer a different connection, highlighting Vashti’s refusal to submit to marital authority. They consider the incident in light of the material in the novas and compare Vashti’s burning to that of Saint Christine, led naked with her head shaved across the city of Tyro in Italy to be burnt alive at the Temple of Apollo, later gaining martyrdom and

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194 As Esther 1:19 tells us: "אם-על-המלך טוב, יצא דבר-מלכות מלפניו, ויכתב ב siti per-מלכים, ולא יעבור: אשר לא-תבוא ושתי, לפני המלך אחשורוש, ומלכותה יתן המלך, לרעותה הטובה ממנה.”


196 According to Esther Rabbah 4:9, 12, Memucan’s suggestion was to bring Vashti’s head to the king on a platter. The midrash reads: "אמר לו אדו המלך דבר א nhờת מפרץ יאן כנפיו אשורות. This also appears in the First Targum to Esther, 1:20. Grossfeld, The Two Targums of Esther, 38.


sainthood status. Yet a third possible influence is offered by Silberstein, who proposes a connection to a “European tradition of death by fire as punishment for adulterous women, described by Armistead and Silverman in their study of the [Judeo-Spanish] ballad chapbooks of Yacob Abraham Yona.” In fact, in several variant versions of the early Sephardic folktale, “La Adultera,” to which Silberstein is referring, the motif of firewood and dry straw to prepare for the burning of a faithless wife appears: “kon siete chikeles de leña i uno de la paža seka.” These are the very same preparations that Ahasuerus orders in the Judéo-Provençal text.

The diversity of correlated sources do indeed reflect Israel’s impressionistic portrait of Vashti as both a blameworthy instigator of sin and a victim whose lot was not entirely just. Yet while his stimulus remains uncertain, it is quite apparent that he was drawing on very immediate circumstances rather than something garnered from canonical material. Confirmation of this comes to us, moreover, in the Purim epistle composed by Israel’s contemporary, Abraham ha-Bedersi to David Caslari, who writes:

"הכותב על בגתנא ותרש. השורף ושתי וזרש..."

(“He who writes about Bigtan and Teresh. He who burns Vashti and Zeresh.”)

And yet, despite the relevance of the burning motif to his local audience, Israel never strays too far from his Jewish sources. For, in Vashti’s execution the Midrash Panim ’Aherim sees

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199 Méjean-Thiolier and Notz Grob, *Nouvelles courtoises*, 45. This derives, according to the authors, from *The Golden Legend*.


201 As quoted in Armistead and Silverman, *Judeo-Spanish Ballad Chapbooks of Yacob Abraham Yoná*, 207. The authors state: “the bundles of firewood and dry straw which here seem to be destined for the adulteress are obviously a remnant of the public execution by burning with which the enraged husband threatens his faithful wife.” And, for instance, “Mulher que tal fala dá merece ser queimada/em trinta carros de palha e outros tantos de ramalha.” “They continue,” The *romance* evokes a traditional punishment for adulterous or unchaste women: death by fire, a fate suffered by many a wayward ballad heroine.” 208.

202 As we saw above, “Mandet lo rei a un messier:/Apelas me lo carnacier,/E digas lhi ses nhuha falha/Pense de lenha e de palha;/Car dispte ben matin/Vuelh que sia cremada Vasti.” Silberstein, “The Provençal Esther Poem,” 200, ll. 343-7.


204 My translation.
the fulfillment of God’s prophecy in Isaiah 14:22, bringing us back to the very verse that Israel cites in his apologetic distinction "nin ve-nekhed u-she’ar,

וחבק"ה אמא תמרית לבלבל שם ושאר נין ו נכד (يشעיה י'ד:כ'ג), לפקות נפשו הל כל, כי להלך ואמרי דבוריה שֶל

(“And the holy one, blessed be he, said: ‘And I will wipe out from Babylon name and remnant, kith and kin.’ And therefore this was done unto her, in order to fulfill the words of the holy one, blessed be he. And he told her to enter, she said, I will not enter, and the queen, Vashti, refused…”)

Local topoi, such as the burning motif, are present in the pair of Israel’s texts, but perhaps more palpably so in the vernacular. The Esther story itself is often called a biblical romance, therefore, lending itself quite readily to adaptation into an updated medieval romance-style narrative. And of course, the use of the local vernacular language would facilitate this. In addition to many of the instances already indicated which evidence Israel’s familiarity with the romance genre and its probable influence on his composition, we find another geographical reference in the Judéo-Provençal text that is absent from the Hebrew. On the heels of Vashti’s execution, during the search for a new queen, Israel interjects his less than flattering comparison of Ahasuerus to king David, which he concludes with:

“Mes cel que moc lo parlament
El fes faire l’ordenament,
Car el volia que empereiritz
Fosa dal luex vont es noiritz;
Per so non vengron en gran preisa
D’Englaterra ni de Breisa.”

("But he who started the conversation had the order announced, because he wanted the empress to be from the place where he grew up; for that reason they didn’t come in droves from England or from Lombardy.

206 See supra my discussion of wisdom literature.
207 Here I amended Silberstein’s translation from “He who started talking.”
208 Silberstein, “The Provençal Esther Poem,” 217, n. 111 and 250, n. 399, explains why she did not change the transcription of “vont,” which does appear in the manuscript as "וונט" (JTS Ms. 3740, fol. 29r). Meyer, "Le roman provençal d’Esther," also transcribed it a “vont” and Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob maintain that in their edition, “Roman de la Reine Esther.”
209 In his transcription, Meyer, suggested that there might have been a scribal error and that this word should actually be “Gressa,” a reading which Méjean-Thiolier and Notz-Grob have adopted in their edition. However, the word in the manuscript is clearly written with the Hebrew character ק and not ש. It is far more likely that the original text would have referred to “Bressa” or Lombardy, a region geographically more accessible and more aligned culturally to southern France. Silberstein, “The Provençal Esther Poem,” 186, explains her translation to Lombardy, referring to Frank Chambers’ book, Proper Names in the Lyrics of the Troubadours (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 83, in which “Breissa” is equated with Brescia.
Like Israel’s earlier reference to specific localities, this passage is elusive and comes with no explanation. Whether he intended to assign a particular significance to these places, other than situating his narrative in the European Mediterranean, is difficult to ascertain. Yet it is significant that they appear in the vernacular text and not in the Hebrew, where the names could have been transliterated for inclusion.

The regional referents, therefore, do seem to bear a relation to genre. In the vernacular version of the text, their precision not only positions the narrative in its proper physical setting, but also contextualizes them generically. For, although there are overlapping influences on the texts as a pair, there are also distinct sets of source material at play in the individual compositions. As the scholarship has indicated, Israel infuses the Judéo-Provençal text with “details of his own medieval realism.” To add to the examples of this we have already observed, the sumptuous description of the palace decoration for Ahasuerus’ feast is strikingly similar to that of the wedding of Flamenca and Archimbaut, and the foods served at the meal have been compared to those served at a papal banquet in Avignon. Silberstein has pointed to parallels in the techniques used to “update” medieval adaptations of the Libro de Alexandre as well. All of these elements ground the vernacular text both in a very specific historical and literary context which is quite separate from its religio-cultural heritage.

**Parody**

A case can be made for the relevance of locality to the Hebrew text as well. Here, contrarily, the relevance to genre is born directly from its religio-cultural heritage, falling in with a local tradition of parodic Purim compositions. Indeed, the vernacular text might equally fit into this category, yet it is in his stylistic approach to the Hebrew text that Israel finds his place.
among his contemporaries. Moreover, until this time, most such texts were composed in Hebrew, not in the vernacular.  

The Purim festival, when jest and raucous behavior are sanctioned, lends itself naturally to parody, and the abundance of satirical texts related to it, attests to their popularity, both for their consumers and their composers. The production of Purim parodies was rather a vogue in southern France during the Middle Ages, with works that exploit the occasion to poke fun at tradition. The range of texts is quite varied, with hymns transformed into wine songs, works satirizing talmudic tractates and the style of rabbinical discourse, and playful renderings of prophetic writings from the Bible, written by some of the most important intellectuals of the day, including Levi ben Gershon, Kalonymos ben Kalonymos, the author of the 'Even Bohan, “Touchstone,” and Abraham ha-Bedersi. Many of these were actually read in the synagogue as part of the Purim liturgy, particularly the *piyyutim* that were written specifically for that purpose, such as Israel’s Hebrew text. Indeed, there were humorous *piyyutim* composed in Provence for Purim (and other occasions) by well-known poets such as Yitshak ha-Shniri and Yehosef Ezovi, as

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214 There are certainly connections that can be made between the vernacular text and other romance texts which are mimetic or parodic, such as *Jaufré*. In fact, some fruitful comparisons might be made between the portrayal of the bumbling King Arthur in that text with Israel’s depiction of Ahasuerus in his texts. However, I am limiting my treatment here to the genre of Purim parody since the genre is so specific to Jewish tradition, especially in southern France.  

215 For a comprehensive bibliographical study of Purim parodies, see Moritz Steinschneider’s “Purim und Parodie,” in *Israëlitische Letterbode*, 7 and 9 (1888): 1-13 and 45-58. Also Israel Davidson’s *Parody in Jewish Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1907), dedicates 2 chapters to the works produced in Provence and Italy. Silberstein has also included a brief history of parody in Jewish writing, with a special focus on the tradition on Provence and Spain, “The Provençal Esther Poem,” 31-42.  

216 Such texts live side-by-side with Israel’s in the manuscripts, and though these were copied later, they are from the same general period.  

217 Such as the anonymous 13th-century *Azharot le-Purim*, Silberstein, “The Provençal Esther Poem,” 34.  


219 Gersonides is believed to be the author of the *Megillat Setarim (The Scroll of Secrecy)*, punning on the root of Esther’s name, “*sēter*” סֶטֶר, as well as the *Sefer ha-bakbuk ha-navi*, where the name of the biblical prophet “Habakuk” is playfully revised to “Ha-bakbuk,” “the bottle.”  

220 Kalonymos authored the *Masekhet Purim*, a parody on the Talmud, which satirizes in particular the Talmudic tractate *Megillah*, which deals with the laws and lore of the Purim holiday.  

221 We have already encountered Abraham Bedersi Purim epistle to David Caslari. The epistle was accompanied by a Purim text, which, according to Doniach, has been lost. While we do not know the exact nature of the text, therefore, it quite likely belonged to this fashionable parody genre.  


223 Bar-Tikvah, “*Piyyutim le-Purim - bein siyah mefukhah le-zemer mevusam,*” (“Sacred Poems for Purim-Between a Sober Conversation and an Intoxicated Melody”), in *Sugot ve-Sugyot* 296-8.
well as piyyutim that tell the story of the Megillah.\textsuperscript{224} However, less common, Israel’s Esther text, the Hebrew Mi Kamokha, does both.

While it is certainly fair to call Israel’s text a parody, as Pansier does, “une franche et curieuse parodie,”\textsuperscript{225} and while it unquestionably belongs to this 14\textsuperscript{th}-century trend in southern France, we might first consider the parameters of the genre. Davidson discusses two early epistles, written by Abraham Bedersi in honour of a Spanish statesman, brimming with hyperbolic praises that “turn religious hymns into compliments.”\textsuperscript{226} While their content is not meant to be humorous, or satiric, according to Davidson, they do “belong to the literature of parodies, because of their playfulness in imitating the ritual.”\textsuperscript{227} The definition of parody, as such, is rather broad.

The notion of parody in terms of Israel’s Esther texts is more complicated than meets the eye. Both texts are, of course, rich with comedy. And the humor of the Hebrew text in particular is often derived from its linguistic and rhetorical ingenuity, its skillful use of allusion to re-visioning of its source. Yet, if we understand a textual parody to be a “take-off,” implying some degree of ridicule of the original work, we cannot justly apply this generic code to Israel’s Esther texts. His intention was surely not to lampoon the Megillah. In this way, it might come under Davidson’s definition in that it “imitates the ritual.” It is perhaps, more accurately a parody in the alternate sense that Linda Hutcheon describes as an “ironic trans-contextualization,” or “repetition with difference,” drawing on the Greek etymological root of “para” not only as “counter” or “against,” but also “beside,” suggesting “accord or intimacy instead of contrast.”\textsuperscript{228} Silberstein signals another term to refer to the Judéo-Provençal text, calling it “a travesty, which keeps the subject but changes the form of the original.”\textsuperscript{229}

\textsuperscript{224} For a discussion of the Provencal piyyutim composed for Purim, Cf. “Piyyutim le-Purim - bein siyah mefukhah le-zemer mevusam,” (“Sacred Poems for Purim- Between a Sober Conversation and an Intoxicated Melody”), in Sugot ve-Sugyot, 296-393, especially the introduction to this section, 296-300 and his reference to Israel’s Esther text on 323.

\textsuperscript{225} Pansier, “Le roman d’Esther,” 5.

\textsuperscript{226} Davidson, Parody in Jewish Literature, 17.

\textsuperscript{227} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{228} Linda Hutcheon, Theory of Parody : the Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 32.

\textsuperscript{229} Silberstein, “The Provençal Eshter Poem,” 42.
Indeed, modern scholarship is inclined to view the *Megillah* as burlesque, certainly comedic, and have studied it in light of its historical accuracy. Its rhetorical strategies, the inversions, the repetition, the absurdity of the laws enacted, have also led to readings of the biblical text as “carnivalesque,” as “anti-law” and subversive. It might be also be called “serio-comical,” the authors of which “distance themselves from the language of their work through humorous, ironic, and satiric accents as they undermine the serious unmediated discourse of power and authority.” Whether it is historically accurate or simply an etiological explanation for the Purim festival the original story offers a farcical account of the Persian court, and from its first incarnation, was perhaps a means of assuaging national stress as a result of persecutions. This, of course, was an important element of its appeal to later writers, who did their own adaptations, like Israel.

According to Bar-Tikvah’s study of the piyyut tradition in Provence and Catalonia, the popularity of humorous texts in that region was in part a result of the freedom of expression allowed to Jews in it. He also explains that the humor expressed some of the tension between the Jews and Christians in the region - the humor strengthened the Jews’ ability to deal with their enemies. Israel’s texts might therefore be seen as an extension of their source, a medievalized response to a contemporary situation.

The Hebrew text shows its currency in some of the shared references with the vernacular discussed above, juxtaposing medieval tropes and literary conventions with the ancient narrative. Yet we also find in it overlapping motifs with other locally written humorous texts. For instance, the *Drunkard’s Chain of Tradition* in Levi Ben Gershon’s *Megillat Setarim*, a parody of the chain of Jewish tradition from the Mishnah ’*Avot*, includes in the line biblical characters whose misfortunes were related to excess with wine, is echoed in a passage we have encountered already in Israel’s text,

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231 See Craig, *Reading Esther: A Case for the Literary Carnivalesque*. Craig considers the *Book of Esther* through the lens of Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque in literature.


Heroes drunk on wine found solace from God. And he chose Lot and he remembered Noah, nor was Samson, son of Manoah, praiseworthy in this matter:)

Likewise we find the trope of a prohibition on drinking water on Purim, parodied in the Masekhet Purim of Kalonymos echoed in

(In honor of Purim because the one beauteous to behold made the king’s feast to commemorate it with wine. For all women the obligation of the day undoubtedly: ‘I will not drink water in this place.’:)

And he further emphasizes this in his invitations to imbibe wine and feast, as is warranted on the festival:

(The man who exalted his vineyard on high Go, beloveds, imbibe and get drunk with him. And should he eat fattened turkey with his bread Great shall be the honor of this house:)

(The latecomers to the wine eating delicacies Are prepared to save their souls from death

234 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 58v, ll. 897-900.
235 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 58r, ll. 885-8.
236 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol 58r, ll. 889-92.
237 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 58r, ll. 893-6.
And let me attest for myself faithful witnesses  
Thus was their mindset:)  
Indeed, Israel’s casual use of Aramaic is akin to similar usage in contemporaneous texts,  
particularly those that parody the Talmud. Here he draws on passages directly from  
the midrashim. When, for instance, Haman is commanded to bathe and robe Mordecai for an  
honor he thought would be his own, Mordecai mocks him using a passage from the aggadah:  

הלא זה בו היו חיי אבותיך  
ובקוריינוס עשרים ושתיים משנותיך  
ותודר מפרשות כי נכריה עבדה  
טוב אשר תאחוז בזה:  

(Was it not this, your fathers’ life  
And in Corianus twenty-two of your years?  
Stop your excuses because your work is alien  
It is good that you grasp that:)  

And this is followed by another midrashic embellishment, which he uses to heighten the  
burlesque effect of the reversal:  

ותאמר בת המן הקים אבי את דבריו  
היום נקם ישיב לצריו  
ונשתך סיר אשר חלאתה אתה  
על ראשי אבי כי מחולפת השעה  

238 Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 55v, ll. 645-8.  
239 Einbinder translates this line as “Cease your hypocrisy, for you are [merely] a laborer,” which she explains  
is based upon Rashi’s commentary of the original verse in Isaiah 28:11,  
"לעשות מעשהו,.זר מעשהו, ולעבד עבודתו  
נכריה עבדתו.”  
"(…that He may do his deed, strange is his deed, and do his work, strange is his work.”). Rashi  
explains: i.e., "to do his work: to do his job, as in working the land, laborer in the vernacular." “A Proper Diet,”  
94 and 201, n. 49.  
240 The midrash appears in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah 16a and is revisited in the Midrash Aba  
Guryon and the Yalkut Shimoni. Mordecai rebukes Haman for his arrogance in thinking that he is more  
deserving of honor than his Jewish nemesis. See also, Segal, The Babylonian Esther Midrash, Vol. 3, 81.  
Mordecai invokes Haman’s kin and indeed, Haman himself, who were barbers in a foreign land. This is  
particularly interesting in the context of Israel’s narrative since the two are not only rivals in the court, but  
physicians and advisors on the foods served at the feast. Barber surgeons were the lowest in the hierarchy  
among medieval medical practitioners. Here, he humiliates Haman not only in pointing out his lesser rank, but  
perhaps even more significantly, the fact that he, too, is a foreigner in the court. Einbinder also addresses this  
and provides an informative discussion of the origins of this passage “in “A Proper Diet,”94 and 201, n. 49.  
We might alternately read the word "frishim" on l. 647 as “knighthood” (from "frish" meaning “horseman” or  
“knight”) and thus translate the line as “Stop your knighthood because your work is alien,” which would make  
an even stronger case for the question of hierarchy here.
(And Haman’s daughter said, ‘My father has kept his word
Today he will exact vengeance on his enemies
He will ride on a horse while Mordecai shall be behind
A day of good tidings is this very day:

But she did not know for her gaze was clouded
And she threw a scum-filled pot
On her father’s head for the hour had turned.\(^{242}\)
‘Straighten up and behold this great thing’:)

The use of such lively additions to the text certainly extend the comedic tenor of the original tale in *Megillat Esther*, and in using rabbinic sources, there would likely not have been any backlash from the religious authorities, as there was occasionally for satiric writings.\(^{243}\) And while the *shibbuts* style, the de-contextualized use of biblical verses of the use of Aramaic articulations from the Talmud are meant to contribute to the humor of the text, I would argue that they are not purely tongue-in-cheek. For while parody inherently comes with a degree of self-reflexivity, the Purim story, both in its biblical form and in the present incarnation of it, the humor is directed outward, at those in power. It is, in fact, here that we witness its serio-comical aspect. For while Haman, Ahasuerus and Vashti, the non-Jewish players are farcical, the objects of derision, the Jewish hero and heroine are at all times dignified and God-fearing. This contrast is potent in such verses as this, again at the moment when the fate of the Jews had changed and the underdog became the victor:

(Mordecai in his ascent shamed Haman
and trod on him with his shoes
saying, ‘He humbles the proud and exalts the wretched.
Today you shall be a slave to this nation’:\(^{244}\)

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\(^{241}\) Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 55v, ll. 677-80.

\(^{242}\) *Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate *Megillah*, 16a. It also has iterations in *Esther Rabbah* X:5, *Midrash Lekah Tov* VI 11, *Yalkut Shimoni* 1058.

\(^{243}\) Davidson, *History of Parody in Jewish Literature*, 20, points out that “the more conservative element were indignant and looked upon these parodies [referring particularly to those of Kalonymos] as vile profanations.”

\(^{244}\) Ms. Bodleian heb. e. 10, fol. 55v, ll. 665-8.
Indeed, in this stanza, Mordecai cites a common line of prayer, a benediction from the liturgical cycle of the Shemonah 'Esrei "משפיל גאים ומגביה שפלים" , “He humbles the proud and exalts the wretched.” There is a great poignancy to such humor, a reaction to the reality of a people under the constant threat of persecution. This is particularly palpable in the Hebrew text, where the verbiage and the intertextual devices have a double edge.

Where parody and imitation meet is difficult to ascertain, therefore. In the vernacular text there is a similar lack of distinction. We might, in fact, ask of that text, whether Israel is expressing an admiration of secular romance literature or copying other romances that are themselves parodies of earlier models. A similar question could even be posed about his treatment of the medical material discussed earlier, yet another of the genres woven into his Esther texts. Indeed, it this very pastiche of genres, this interweaving of languages, the hybridity within and across the Esther texts that reflect something larger, a more profound personal and communal phenomenon: from one angle, perhaps, it appears as a fragmentation of identity; from another, a marriage of the two worlds in which it was produced.
Conclusion

This thesis explores notions of hybridity in Israel Caslari’s adaptations of the story of Esther. That he composed two different language versions is in itself a compelling argument for their bicultural nature. Yet the Hebrew version of his text is by no means a mere translation of its vernacular predecessor. Rather than adaptations, we might justly even call these texts re-visions not only of the original Hebrew Bible narrative, but of one another. In this way Israel was an exception, much like the festival of Purim itself, the only Jewish holiday commemorating an event that occurred in the diaspora. He took an unusual approach to his compositions. For while the production of literary works related to the Purim holiday was not a rarity, and while intertextuality was quite common in such works, his texts tell a story of their own. Each version comes to us with its own embellishments that evince an intersection of cultural concerns and generate an internal dialogue. As a textual unity, this develops into a full-blown conversation, where tropes of exile meet local tradition, where medicine and religious ritual converge with irony and history and, indeed, murmurs of anxiety.

Naturally, hybridity of this hue leads to critical questions about acculturation and identity, which my analysis certainly takes into consideration. The point of inquiry here is not one of assimilation, which would have been all but impossible in 14th-century Occitania without conversion, nor would it have been desirable to a pious Jew. At issue, rather, is the adoption of elements from a secular ethos as well as from the larger Christian society, and how those are integrated into Jewish thought and ultimately, Jewish identity. There can be little doubt of Israel’s allegiance to his community or to his faith. Yet, his Esther compositions attest to influences from the world outside his carrière. Funnelled into a quintessentially Jewish narrative, these beget a fascinating discourse - and at times, a tension - between cultural mores.

While Israel was certainly a man of his day and of his intellectual milieu, the singularity and creative spirit of this pair of texts, the richness of their sources, their commonalities and differences, and what they can teach us about their author and his community, is what
inspired my work. This is the first study of these texts in an in-depth and comparative way that looks at their hybridity in many of its incarnations. My hope is that it can open the way for further scholarship. The texts are a potent witness and contribution to Jewish literary history in southern France and their biculturalism speaks to matters that still preoccupy Jews, even in today’s world.

Each chapter of this thesis examined a different aspect of hybridity in the texts. Chapter One, “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles,” opened onto the seminal work of Susan Einbinder, to whom I am indebted for her learned exposition of Israel’s medical expansions to the texts. The discovery of her research was an impetus to my own investigation and the spark for a deeper analysis of the texts. Building on her insights, I reconsidered not only the medical/dietary additions and their implications, but the juxtaposition of these with Israel’s pious preoccupations, his affinities with rationalist medicine and philosophy as well as his erudition in the Jewish canon. The chapter also reflected on his didactic motivations and his self-reflexive stance as author.

Chapter Two, “Esther’s Issues (or The Blood of Others)” moved into questions concerning gender that stem from Israel’s professional and religious ideals, especially in relation to purity. His treatment of such matters in the two texts expresses values shared with Christian physicians and thinkers, but also draws on Jewish exegetical attitudes toward menstrual purity. It also touches on ideas of “otherness” and “heterogeneity” as they play out across religio-cultural bounds as well as those of gender. These are articulated in his portrayals of the two queens in the narrative, the non-Jewish Vashti and the Jewish Esther, who is held up as a model for Jewish women.

In Chapter Three, “We Are What We Speak,” I carried forward the problem of purity to explore its connection to language and cultural identity. Language in these texts is a significant marker of their hybridity, not only because of the duality between the two versions in the vernacular and in the “holy tongue,” but also because of Israel’s stipulations for their respective audience. The consequences of linguistic purity here are not only cross-cultural, but social as well, delimiting access according to gender, age and class.
The final chapter, “A Poem by Many Other Names,” looked at the mixing and meeting of genres in the two texts, and argued for the inclusion of specific generic influences in and across the individual compositions based upon their language, their intended audience and their primary form. While the vernacular version does draw on midrashic motifs, it privileges secular literary conventions. The Hebrew, on the other hand, shows a preference for Jewish canonical sources and literary modes.

This thesis takes into account the most prominent aspects of hybridity in Israel’s texts and is structured accordingly. Due to its focus and scope, I was not able to undertake an exhaustive study, and invariably, there are possibilities that arise out of the work for other ways of examining the texts that could offer additional insights into them. One such consideration would be to introduce contemporary theories on Jewish diaspora. Daniel Boyarin theorizes diaspora “not [as] a condition foisted on the Jews, but a cultural practice….” He speaks of its particular relevance to the story of Purim, which he calls “the holiday of Diaspora.” To explore such a concept in the context of Israel’s texts and his environs could produce fruitful readings of them.

There is also more work to be done on the study of gender, with a focus on education and literacy in southern France in the Middle Ages. The existing scholarship on this area or research is somewhat limited and new information would certainly offer a fuller understanding of the community. It could, moreover, shed light on Israel’s apologia and the audience divisions he prescribes, allowing for a more conclusive evaluation of his comments.

Another potential avenue for exploration would be the legacy of the Hebrew text, which, as indicated in my introduction, exists in two 18th-century mahzorim from the Comtat Venaissin region, as well as in a 19th-century print edition from Salonika. The two local mahzor copies maintain the integrity of the liturgical poem in its form and appearance. The

1 “Purim and the Cultural Poetics of Judaism - Theorizing Diaspora.” Poetics Today 15:1 (Spring 1994), The Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics. This is Boyarin’s introduction to a special issue of the journal dedicated specifically to the Purim holiday.
2 Columbia University, Ms. X893 C-J55 Vol. 31 and British Library, Ms. BL Add 19663.
Salonika print edition, on the other hand, bound on its own, is presented as a prose text and the layout of Israel’s colophon is lost, with the acrostic absorbed into the body of the work. In all of these versions there are minor variations to the content of the text which hold promise for comparative study.3

As to my own vision for continued work on this project, I plan, first of all, to consult the two original manuscripts on which I was unable to do hand-on work over the course of this dissertation. One is the later medieval copy of the Hebrew text at Hebrew Union College. While I have relied on a microfilmed copy of the manuscript, which is clear and an excellent guide, I hope to do a full codicological inspection of the manuscript and incorporate that into my introduction. It would also be beneficial to look at the other works in the codex, which might inform our impressions of Israel’s composition and its inclusion among these other texts.

It is also my intention to visit the Biblioteca Casanatense to work with the Judéo-Provençal fragment that is housed there. The digital copies I acquired from the Biblioteca indicate that the fragment is in very poor condition and heavily corrupted. Given, however, that we have only the one Jewish Theological Seminary fragment, it is an essential investigation. If it contains portions of the text that are not extant in the JTS manuscript, it would provide valuable additional material for comparison with the Hebrew text.

My analysis of Israel’s Hebrew text is, with the exception of a few passages that have been transcribed and translated in Silberstein and Einbinder, based solely on manuscript copies, namely the Oxford Bodleian and the Hebrew Union College codices. While these are not the fourteenth-century originals, they are the earliest extant copies, and both are probably within a century of Israel’s life. Perhaps one of the most important projects that I foresee growing out of this dissertation, and hope to undertake as a post-doctoral fellow, is a critical edition of the Hebrew version. While the text is little known outside of a small scholarly circle, its richness and its significance as an artifact of Jewish literary, cultural and intellectual history

3 In “A Proper Diet,” Einbinder offers some comparative analysis and considers the trajectory of the Salonika text. In fact, one of the changes she discusses in relation to Israel’s medical embellishments, which I also treat in my “Medicine, Midrash and Miracles” Chapter has a third variant in the mahzorim.
is immeasurable. Since I have already produced a full transcription of the Bodleian manuscript with variants from the Hebrew Union College copy (see Appendix) and have translated considerable portions of the text, as well as worked with so many of Israel’s sources, this seems like a natural extension of my current research.
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מי כמוך

1

יזר שמراه אומד להשקילה
ובבר נשמת ידע ורבי של פעלת
יזא שמול להנוע רוחה ישלה יבנה צוות והכל
וישפטו שמי הגרדיו זה :

2

צור הנותן רוח חדשה בקרבי
לחברתי מרגעי ונעבזר
סבתיה אמי את לב
כאמור עשית הזה :

3

האנחת הודת מארת הוצללים באד
ל çalışmalar водת ותשמית וזכLake שאר
ואאת שית עבריה לעבריהם וממשה יד לחהפרא
וכשת והמשה ישראל והוזי הזה :

Lineated transcription of Israel ben Joseph Caslari’s Hebrew Mi Kamokha poem from the 1402 Manuscript Oxford, Bodleian heb. e. 10 with variants from the 1447-1455 Manuscript Cincinnati, HUC (Hebrew Union College) 396
לפנינו ברותאלו על גאולה
ירחגר לי שיר חנל
כל הדברות אשר וו על המגלה
למסוד היה:

(15)

5
אוכרי חכמי יִנֵּמי
נדינל ילמר כְּמעטוּרי
שמוש וִינָגֵל לֶלָל חֵטָא
(20)

6
בּוֹרֶיִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַישׁ חֵמֵר
כַּיִּם גוֹנֹאלוֹת פְּנֵיוֹת
גְּלֵה לָךְ בֵּמְרָאוֹת בְּחִדֻּוֹת
(25)

7
עֲלֵה על לַב בְּבוֹכָהוֹת
פָּסָל נֵכֶּשׁ בֹּחוֹרִים אֵנָשׁ צָר
ולָאֵמָרָם לַיְּדֵם כְּלִלָּם
(25)
היהודים ופחדו כרעו לפניו כל היהודים ואות יי וראו בבלתום מchodząc.
�
ולא הוא נשים במעל הזה: לא הקדישו לسور מצותיו החישו ואות קדש ישראל ולא הקדישו.

שית מכם וראה נפש נקיה בוחן לבבות רואה נפש נקיה פקד עלiami ויוסף היה.

[folio 48v]

וורוי והובשו פמה טריד: שמעו נא את המדרש הזה:

[folio 20a]

טפורה מספר אל הקדישים.

מלאת אסתר מבוכה מטישה: בקומם שלל תור עדת קדישים:

בום ההוא יושר ישר הזה:

פטור מהתשובה וראו נפש נקיה פקד עלiami ויוסף היה.

[folio 48v]

וורוי והובשו פמה טריד: שמעו נא את המדרש הזה:

[folio 20a]

טפורה מספר אל הקדישים.

מלאת אסתר מבוכה מטישה: בקומם שלל תור עדת קדישים:

בום ההוא יושר ישר הזה:
אחשוורוש מלך גדול וنشأ
בשנת שיש למלכים משותה גודל עשה
בכל הקודש להשתכוב בם רצה:
האריך הבלייל הזה:

השנה שלוש למלכו עשה גדול עשב
בכלי הקודש להתייבא
רצה

האיש הזה
חשבון גלותם ממנו נסתר ונעלם
вшиеון גלותם מהם שבעים נשלם
ואני אהיה לעד לעולם
למלך על העם הזה:

בחצר גינת ביתן נשאו
שם קרמין ומצעים נאים
כי שם יאכלו הקרואים
ואני אהיה לעד לעולם
למלך על העם הזה:

הزهرת ביתו לשון הגיא
שם קרמיים מצעים נאים
כי שם יאכלו הקרואים
ואני אהיה לעד העולם הזה:

שופט אותו נשוא דיאה
שם קרמיים מצעים נאים
כי שם יאכלו הקרואים
ואני אהיה לעד העולם הזה:

מותה זו הבכי שיש ודאה
לא נראו כל יהודים מלכים קדומים
مريית והם על הארץ הזה:
עד היום הזה:
16
芬ם בדסייה צוה המלזר
ראוה ירותיך קר אל חקר
סביה טביה הבח קר בשר
לשת לכל העם הזה:

17
המר חוד ונתיך לבן אדמם
על כל רב בחיה מצות קדם
כיאForObject וודעד אדם
אוהי נשער הזה אד

18
אריחותים לוכלארם ראשונה
הכין כי אין בפיהו נכון
לשבת לבני שושן אחרי
הם לבני שושן פנו

19
כרצה וייאו וייו יייגות
מרדכי והמן הכינו
המלכה עשתה לבנות
הם ושתי המלכה עשתה לשמה בבנות
העיר כמשפט הזה
20
איל ורבן והמרור שלום שלוש כבשים
עגל מרבק אבוסים__________
לכל מנין במובסם___________
אל חותם:
(80)
21
בומ השבטים על קבע של של חורורה
למה וניב וניב וריה
לhabi וניב וניב וניב וניבה________
[Folio 49r]
למראה והמימ והשרים את פי
את זה אמרו זה:
[Note that in Ms. Bodleian this looks like 5 lines- laid out differently]
22
היא גס היה לברך עברה נחפונת
אוחר בקרי יתחי כי בזינה
ונשים ונשים את ענה
ולא קרבי זה ואל זה:
(85)
23
דברת אלָדיה בשומן פרחות
[צומחת]
רוֹשׁ אמִירין קרִים את בברחת פרחות
ותחי ולא לָפוך הָלַס לָפָחָה
ולבשת הָפַסָה בָּיָם הזה:
(90)
24
העזה פניה כי נפתח לב
האמר בר אורייריה דאבאו
לabolic של מקור בר:

(95)

25
אם במשתה היין סר שלך
אל ירנ לניסเศ חור וחלול
לɾחובות במעמך ושלך בהלכלך:
מי ישמע אלהיכם דבר הבר:

(100)

26
לא כל אפי בלמשר המרגא
המרא והמר שתי חותרא
ואני לשךра כי לא דבר סרה:
לנושא דבר וו דוד:

27
וישבר המרימם אל המלך
ויברי דבריו עצמו פלך
ותאמר דבריו על המלך פלך
בדברם דבריו:

[Folio 20b]
חמת המלך בערה בקרבו
ותתープ רוחו ויתעצב אל לבו
והוא עוד במשכן:

ואז רועי העתים שופר ותишא
קרא יואים높ה אל תגע ואת דינה:
ן למדתן ולשריש שפותי נא
את המלאך הזה:

והי מנו כי היה מלך טפש
ובשור יוניו מעלי ובפש
דומע מ.dispose יהשך להטוותל בכם ולהפש
בא הדאש הזה:

גוזה מ镂ו גלינו מאראagnar:
 amps הפחתנו בינה נבון
על אומת כנער לא מרצה דיינו
לעשו את דברי הזה:
לך אל חכמי מואב כלם נסמכו
рошונם בצרlehem נמשך
בנולדה אל הלב
ולא ודcao על יום הזה:
ולא דכאו עד היום הזה

וראמר להם זה מהן yaşן
הדיוט קופץ בראש והרשות נתן
בקלקלת מתחלףו מבט Автор: נוהם צוי
כנ Anatvoirsch יומד הזה:

וראמר להם זה מהן yaşן
לא המלך לבדו כי כל שריו נכלמים
נשמם נשלא בכר ל ULONG
אם יכופר העון הזה

באמרם ושתי המלכה עזה פניה
ווג אתי אבא אהרן
והי אתי רעה בעני אדני
ונשאת אל המשל הזה

 backs the megaluh

 back: the megaluh
פקדו את האורורה הזאת באש תשריפה ונטשה כל הנשים وزעירה או תקישנה והלבת אחורי הב늘ים ולא תرفعו ולא יסיימו לעשות כן הוא:

יצא דבר מלכות ואמר תצוה קרה באביוו פרושה להו והייתה שונים ויהיה כנל רוח ונאם애 ולא דבר זה:

ולדבר בלשון עמו יצו להיות ההושיבו נשים נכריות ולא ינהגו בנות הארץ כשביות אל ארץ אחרת עד היום זה:

תעמו ומולדתו תהי מכרתה ונקה האיש מעון אם עמו תהי נקשרת כי בלעגי שפה ולא בלשון אחר זה:

abolית עמו ומולדתו היא מכרתה ונקה האיש מעון אם עמו תהי נקשרת כי בלעגי שפה ולא בלשון אחר זה: ידבר אל העם הזה.
טמאת השם רבת המהומה
כי החטיאה ביום שבת
שאמרות דת תמימה
עמו ושרפנוגר דינה
ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה:
(160)

40

וייטב הדבר בעיני המלך והשרים אשר עמו
לימים כל אשר שופר ביבמה ופדס בלאו עמו
בשם המלך נכתב נחתם בחתמו
וירש ואוהה לך עד יום ההוא:
וכל catchword

[Folio 50r]

42

והלא
מאז
גברה
הוקם על
האתם תריבון לבעל
יען אמרכם את הדבר הזה:
(165)

43

אגרות ראשונות אין בהם חדש ויתרון
אגרות ראשונות אין בהם ממש ויתרון
(170)

44

נייע אפרים אוד הדבר הזה

45

אגרות ראשונות אין בהם חדש ויתרון
(170)

46

内科 אוד הדבר הזה
אחר כל זה זכר את ושתי מר ממות מצא

רימר ולא מימר את אהת אהת גוונה תשה

התתنشرה עשה את הדבר הזה

(175)

(175)

וייען עשת את השם הקדוש

ביקרבים עשתה בהלולים ויתר פרעה עדות

אלא כי הרי כלhmaו התיהינה בנות

לפני הבית הזה

לפיים ביכר הזה

(180)

(180)

והנערה אשר בר תיטע בעיניו באחת מהנה

והנערה אשר תיטב בעיניו לאח镛ה

וראério לא נוכל لنשוח את הדבר הזה

(185)

(185)

דוד הגדיל כל מה שבון עשה:

רופי כיuko אוינו

ורבשו ונפי לקרות כי יומי

מהו מביא
בכל גבול ישראל שרי המלך בקשוה
ואם לא מצאה:req את בצעני אל כלילו
בנזוריה בית אביהショップה:
הפלט את העניין זה:

איש ידוע חדש ולשש הלילה
וה בושי עינייה כשני מדריך משיב הלילה
אשת הלילה עם עיניה אשדות הלילה
מלך בללי אלו המוקים זה:

רוח אוון אט הרכה
וה אסתר ב דודו יפה חצרה
וכמהו מלך ארוסה
לא היה זה:

עיניים אדומים פסידות ברכה
ואם הרכה מעין ירקחת
בשפתותיה והמרצת
אין אחורות沃尔לח בור:

שניהו נשואות פרק测绘
שוחה וחיות יפה פרק测绘

יד אוון אט הרכה
והבשורה.setFocus פרק测绘
אין אחרות沃尔לח בור:
מאמר מרדכי אסתר עשתה עשה
ועמה וולדתה לא רצתה
לִהְיוּ כָּל מְמַלֶּכֶת
לָא תַגְּדוּ אֲשֶׁר דְּבַרְתֶּם הָהוֹ:

[Folio 50v]

הכינה המלך גָּם חַכָּה
לֶאָם הַדָּתֶךְ מַתְנָכֶרֶת
משפחתי נְבוֹהֵיהֶנָּה הָיָה דְּקָרֶה
הַמַּאֲרֶץ וֶאֱוִֽאֶרֶץ:

אֶדְוִּין המלך וַהֲבַבְּקַר
הַמִּלְכָּה מְלַבְּכֶנָּה וַתְּלַכָּה
עָמְדוּ וּרְבֶנֶיךָ אַלְּחָרֵב שִׁׁמְךָ
לֶדְעַת אֵין צוֹרֶךְ:

השַׁבֵּה אָסְכָּמָשְׁפָחְתָּךְ אוֹ מְלֶכֶת אוֹ נַדְּרֵך
נַגְּךָ עָתוֹת יָהָדֵית תֵּשֶׁלֶל בַּת הַמְּפֹֽסְרָה
וְכַל מַדָּת בְּעוֹדוֹ בַּלָּהֲאָתָה
מוֹזֶמֶבֶּן אוֹלִּיֲאֵל יִתְוָיו צוֹרֶךְ:

(52)
(205)
(53)
(210)
(54)
(215)
(55)
(220)
כתר מלכות שֶם עָלָה רָאָשה וּנְרָה
בָּחָדְשֵׁה נֶבֶת אָשָר כֵּפֵר כָּפֵר יֵפְרוּ
וּמוּ לַגְּבֵר עַל אֱבָדְתֵּךְ 휴 הַמְחָר:
הֶזֶדֶש הָוהֵי:

טֶבֶר לִגוּרָה לַהַנֵּעִימָה
עֲדוּ מֵלָאת לָלְעָבָה הַמְרָבָה
כֶּבֶדֶה בַּת מְלָך פְּנִימָה
מָאת מְלָך נִדְרֵי נְדָר הָוהֵי:

גַּהַר יְשֵׁעָשוֹנָא סְרִיסֵם פְּרוּשִׁים
נְשָׁה בְּגוֹרָה פָּעְמִיס וּכְחָשִׁיס
הַמָּה הֵי שׁומֵרֵי הָנְשִׁים
אָהָד מַהְוָא וָאָהָד מַהְוָא:

וִירוּשְׁמַל הַמְלָך כָּתַר בִּלוֹכָתָה
וַיֵּעֶשׂ מְשָׁה בְּיוֹם חַתְנָתוֹ
וַיְהַנֵּה לִפְדוּתָה עָשֶׂה מַאֹסְבָתוֹ
עָשֶׂה אַתָּה חָסֵד מְנְדָל הָוהֵי:

[folio 21b]
לשמור חגה חדשה ושבתו הכינה נתיבות ושביעת נערות למצא חשבון נצבות

(240)

הנהיה כדבר הגדול הזה:

מרדכי לדעת את שלום אסתר נכסף

(245)

אם חתמה ואת ותעה הבולה שלום אסתר נכסף

(245)

עשה תשקוף של讀ה נכסף

בנין בולע לאמיו את ותעה:

להמית الملك היתה עצם:

(250)

בלעגי שפה ובלשון ארץ

(245)

והם לא ידע כי الملك הזה ינתם:

[Folio 51r]

שמות אשת הדבד והוזי

written over in a different hand
וישלח מרדכי מלאכים אל אסתר
(255)
חרש לא
חרש לאמר בגתנא עם תרש מסתתר
(255)
ודם המלך זה לזה יתר
(255)
היום הזה:
(255)

65

יובקש בדבר ונהנה האמת והptoms
רתלה שגיות להיוות לה גימו
ורכתב בשם מרדכי לאמר באחרית הימים
את הימים הזה:
(260)

66

אחר כל הדורות הצל
יוקם יי שם לוגלת אריאל
המן בן המדתא בעון אבתיו מתגאל
כן המרץ הזה:
(260)

67

על כל שרי המלך נשא וגדל
וכל עבדי המלך מתחתיו ול
ועל תשכחו תפך חרש פסל
הסמל המקנה הזה:
(265)
הנה בידך נתתי אציל
ставить חותמי ופתילי
ועל כל אשר יש لي
ראות הפקודתך והנה:

בראות מרדכי אלילו על שכמו
לescort ولا אזップ ממקומנו
וימלא המן חמה ויאמר לאשר עמו
 SHALLAH חיה ב מ י זה:

בדי ישב לזר כלב הארי
עבורה נא אסירה את ראשה מידי עברי
וראמר כי עבדיו נ棐
milidi העברים זה:

אמר יזב זה העם משה אבותי את אבות
עתה אcoma להורג אבות وكلHeaderText
שומת על פניו מים עלתם
מאמי מזרם על וים הזה:
אנקום נקמתי ואפק זمري
משאל אסר חרט הראה זה מעלי
כי קורב המלך אל
יתן לahrain העם הזה:

מעבדי המלך מרדכי נקרא
מדוע להמן כתף סוררה
ทาน ופש המלך חשורה
בנפש האריא הזה:

השיבם הדובילו החקים

מלוחמה לני בטומלךם
משה די על כל היה חקם
ורשע על על הדבר הזה:

יראמר עם כל לכלכלן ועד
ישן עם אהוד שרש פרה לעננה והרשה
לכמים ולאדם זהה אדורות
עבד אדוני זה:
76

ודתו ד חדשים המלך וא摈
בנשרורי כספם רוחם
דבר שכר למד וPago
לכל אשר יאמר המלך זה:

77

יינו משתחים וובר סוחט לא יבאישנה
ואם אשר ימלול גוזנו
על הארץ כימי ישפוך
וראהר חדש ינני וה:

78

והיה כר תקראמה מלוחמה
אל ישאר מקום אדם בינימה
שב ישים סוחט כי לא נוכל דבר מאומה
בצצם דבר זה:

79

ויצוה אדני המלך לגבורות
ועיניך אל תחוסים מאדום
וערתם אל חוסמך MADE
ערת אלפים ככם אשקל בניים
אם תעשה לך הדבר הזה:

315

310

305

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305

315
דבר המלך אתו קשות ועזות
אל בתכשך כל גדולות וקרעות
חלילה לך מעשות זה: כי לא מתבכות שאלת על זה.

וכו את אשר נשא אלוהים לפרסה
ברזר"ך:"א"ו"ש באוה"ב גthroat
כי לא מתר לשלחה בברשות
והער לעם הזה:

ויאמר להם כרבי תורתם
וכן חטאו לו כי לא יוכלוشتם
ועהן כי מאס העם הזה:

ואשרו שלשת על זה אתבתון
משי דמשי ואילך בני
ונשר צדקיהו יאליל בני
את שארית העם הזה:

LINES 320-323 ARE MISSING FROM MS. HUC
THIS STANZA END WITH LINE 324 BELOW:

80

320

81

325

82

325

83

330
יןحا יברך דбри ודאות
למשי ראשונים ודמם גלגלת ויהודים
פרסה כל הינפ וזרע רוח קרים
ירודר הער הזוה:

הشاب המלך ושבה 근זה
אם אשים岑ן לצבה
באלותכי ירב והיה אעשא קרוה
הבחרתי את המקום הזוה:

ۋۇۋەن متوۋەك بەرۇۋەن يอารม أۋەىن الملک
ەنە مەپورە بەقەل مەپورە فەپەل
قەر بەرەئ دۇژئ لەئەپەل
ئەن تەپە مەدۆ:

[folio 52r]

84

85

86

87
ויאמר המלך אל שרי פרס ומדי
העוזרים על התמן כי לא יד
ויאמר המלך אל שרי פרס ומדי
העומדים עליו אתם עדי
יחלשו על ראש המן כי לא יד
הפכו את הדם הזה:UNCTION
המן הנה כל ארצי לפניך
והעם לעשות בו כטוב בעיניך
הפיק רצונך להכסף נתון לך
ושי אל העם הזה:אין נפ
הוברי שמים טגננין אצ
הפילו פור הוא הגורל לפניו
דבחדש לעב
ייאמר אח אל
הוד והדר
והם ממושך
ש אדרנלחמו כי בחד
סר צלם מעליהם ומאור מדר
ויאמר המלך אל שרי פרס ומדי
משמך נחהו כ 전체 אחר
се עלים מעילים ומאורים קדר
ויאמר המלך אל שרי פרס ומדי
לSpinBox את הדמ הזוח:
ולרשע אמר אלהים אם נשמתו
נפקהד ואו וויה đaות
ביום הזה ועבתה בב זךקף
ינע כי שאלת את הדבר הזה:

סופרים המלך וכשיר רעשות וודים
גם לאמר את בسفر וודע
לארשים להרחש את כל היהודים
גולה ויה להו:

ודת נתנה בשושן הבירה
ותריר ש刁ש נבומך כי תשב תורה
לך רימריו יז צרה
ותוותה ונטשה ודימ ויה:

וותריך יד איה את כל אחר כהר
יופ_period זעקה זרולה ומר
אנה נסנה לעורה
והמ אנשיה לעם ויה
משה בור רשה חנינא
יאמר נצחו תחתונים עליונים
והשקפה צור שוכן מעונים
וראה כי עמך הגוי הזה:
ולא עמק עין זה:
(380)

ובילוש שק דע רוחב העיר יזא
שפר ואפר ראשו כሳ
יאמר מי נתן יעקב למשסה
אבל בבל זה:
(385)

נגרות אסתר הגיזה מחדרים
שמעון קול נדיד המורדים
והאמר לא בᓑה העברים
קול דודי הנה זה:
(390)

והالتهולו המלך כנכפר רחמה
אורה שלם בומנה בא ממוקד דמי
ויש אפורים פילה צרם מלאת ימה
בגאל תברrouch:
(395)
ותקאר אסתר לחתך בניורש לכל שואל
בקרת חתך וואז הו נ createContext
כי יש מבクリック ישראל
אשר אמר כי הוא זה:

ותאמר לחתך איש סודי
מעי המו עליל לודידי
מְרָדָּכָי לְאָם אָבֵי וָידֵי
לדברת ומזה Raleigh זה.

ותשלום הגדרים להסירת שקון ולהלבישו
מהלצות ולכי הקבל המחגרות
ותאמר זויר ישראל ושדותו
מהו ויהי האבה דוזיגוי הוה.

ורסף למדיך את כל אשר קרובה
הפרשת המכסף אשר המלך בדיבור תחתה
ואת פעוטה המכסת להראות אל אסתר ציווה
לאמר קארא בני זה.
ויאמר לה מספד כיענים וכסיסים
והודיהו האמלווי ועשין
ים וקדמה עברים נסם
משניע עברה יהוהหมอ:

ויתן בידה את ספר המקנה
פתשגן כתב הדת אשר בשושן נתנה
ויאמר לה נשיעה א ua
את מערכות ישראל היום הזה

ויתן אסתר חותן אסתר
יקר סגי ליה יתיהב
ואת אשר המלך יאהב
יוכיח אם יושיט לו שרביט הזהב
אין משפט מות לאיש הזה:

[folio 23a]
איש על דונה

[folio 53r]
ורצות נפש כל דובר היה:

בר מנ דרי יקר סגי ליה יהוה
ואת אשאר המלך יאהב
ויכח אח ואשיש ולא שרבינו יהוה
אין משפט מות כל איש היה:
ואני הז שלושים ימים לא בקוראת

ועם לא חחקתי כיإجراء

לאידעתי [้ม]למה נחבאתי

והרוויה ישתי מחכתי את הדבר הזה:

והמה בציע בدني כי אלה

והריוותם את ראשון למר

למה יהב עלי ישלכ

ואנכי הרתי את כל העם הזה:

כשמעה התוכ דרביה רになりました

אין משביכיتل הקהל כלמה פירוש

לרמזור למרדכי ולא לא פורש

המגיד לו אי זה

אל גבירתךויאמר לו מרדכי שוב

ויאמר לו מרדכי שוב

לאמר קומי אורי כי בא עתך

ответ תלבשי בממלכתךולמה ג

ולמה גאות תלבשי במלכותך

ומדהו הזה:

וראמרโลמרדכי שהא לא רביה

לאמר קומי אוררי כי בא עתך

ולמה גאות תלבשי במלכותך

והמה הציע ותפחה:

(420)

(430)

(435)

(440)
אמרו לאחתיך כ.setYך תזכור
היה לי יד בכיור תשכור
סדין עשתה והמכור.
את hakkית והניוהו.

אם מלכת בית המלך תחקי
את בוית אביך ואבדיך במעל.
כי ודעם אני כי בשלי.
המער כדנולו.

והנפש החוטאת עונה תשא
ועם יי מלאך מליץ ימצא
לאמר למלך מה עשה
לך העם הזה.

אילת אאביות כימי בזורך
אך ייסר יא המדך.
עלי כלתך אם ייקר.
 UINT בברך.

111  (445)
112  (445) (450)
113  (450) (455)
114  (455) (460)
ותאמר ברי לבב וتسمים
לילה והם שלשה ימים
cזמנו ונקבשה פנים צור עולמים
ולחרף את העם הזה:

ולחפילה את המדרז הזה

116

ובכן לבא אל המלך מתני
אשנס ובכן לבא אל המלך מתני
ויי הטוב יעשה לו נס
אשר לא כדת כי אין אונס
ויי טוב יעשה לנו
ולדבר את אדני זה
ולדבר את אדני זה

117

ויעבר מרדכי חר ורועדו
ביו ייו ביו ייו
בימי ראשון של פסח העביר המועד
ובצום ובכי להודע
כפסח זה לא נעשה

118

ונערותיה צותה מדי הודי
הביאו לכהו אחרי ותפללו בעדי
ותאמר בלכתה יהיה אלהים עמדי
ושמרני בדרך הזה

119

ונטורית צוחה מוריה
הביאו לה אל אחריו ותנפללו בدعاء
ותאמר בלבו היה אלהים עמדי
ונפנפו מרפי הזה
היום השלישי קמה מתעניתה
ומלאך אחד הגביה קומתה
ומשנהו כפלח הרמון שם רקתה
ופקצת ממעה:
כרוב אחד קמקצה ממעה וכרוב אחר

והעמד פתח החצר החיצונה
ותעמד פתח החצר התיכונה
ויאמר המלך אם תר ענוגה ועדינה
ובימי וקח נא את המטה הזה:

מלאך אחד העריך את מטהו
ושלח את אמתה ויקחהו
ויאמר כי לא ידעו מה הוא

יאמר רעיתי כלם נכונות
ואנך יש לי הפקוד revisions
[Page 23b]

משואלונים כל בּנָה
בליעפי רבה אשת בירורשים לבנה
כי לא מאתניא תּוּ כּה לְעִנְתָּ
אַךְ לְעִנְתָּ הַהָ:
ותנו סוחר אם לברכשתי תפנה
לבא המלך והמן המשנה
ואל המשתה לעשורת אוות הנה
שלחתם גודי הוה:
(490)
(495)

ידק המלך מוכאו

וירמר אל המן ור' צבאו

ולבלית והן רצות אסרה הביאו

וזהו אוהי על דדבר הוה:
(495)
(500)

יראלו יהשרו עמה

ויאמר לו המלך אمرك ולהמה

קרן ונוגלה א集團ה

ומיה דדבר הוה:
(500)

והאמר אל אמא טקב בעיניך הדבר נאות

משתה שtraîn על ושחרה לעב עני נשות

ורכמ מערים יאנה פלאות

ומיה之争ה לי אמא דדבר הוה:
(505)
ויצא המן שמח וטוב לבב ובר אותו את מרדכי וילך שובב ויבא זרש אשתו وكل אלהי בנים ובנות במקום הזה גם לא הביאה אסתר המלכה פייו הכשילו ولשונו לו לחכה ושמעה יהושע את דברי יהושע ולא קם ולא זע ממני בלכתי ובשובי מעודי עד היום הזה:

מלך אשר לפני הגדתי והוספתיכם עושר וכבוד מושב אלהים ישבתי ורייתי והсосתיו גדלי ורומתי בנים רוחתי בניו.blur.com

אף לא הביאה אסתר המלכה פייה הכשילו ו逫ו ו逫ה והי אם הכותש ואמרתי תפארתי עם ולשון רוחה

גם זה הבל ומלבי אעביר כל טובי ועבר כאבי ואמרתי לא קם ולא זע ממני בלכתי ובשובי מעודי עד היום הזה:

נאם המלך מלכתי ואמר כלدور
ולמהרפי יהודית נפער כנפיו
לא כל ולא גז מים בלכתי ובשובי מעודי עד היום הזה:

[folio 54r]
לאמר דברי היום:

 MPL 128

MPL 129

MPL 130

MPL 131
וירש אשתה וpaque מותה
והסל מתנו ואל תњר בר מלשה
ועשו עץ גוב והמשים אמא
על ראש המותי היה:

ובקר העכובו לملك לעלות
ו המרדכי תשים דברי הלילות
ואומר למלך לעלות
הכלב מת הוה:

ורעש המן את כזה יוכננה
ויי אמר כי לך אנהנה
ול הכהן והרווי יрисנה
למלך יזה אנהנה הוה:

בليلת הזה נדהشت מקוין פרדemi
נפתת לנו שערי רחמים
לכל בן ישראל מים קדומים
ליל שופטים והא בלילת הוה:

לil שלושים בليلת הוה
הקיץ המלך בפחד ומורא
ויאמר לו כל דבר קומ קרוא
ספר הזכרונות ואת כל אחר קריה
ממי מלך אשר עד יהוה:

שמיש בְּנֵי טומר לבמלל היה קרוא
ולתחת את אֵל ודרכ ויה מופה
מלוא יְהוָהgue שָׁם הוא ויה
לאמר כי בהד את אזיווה:

וימו לא כתוב עון תרש ובנגת
אשר בנד מדרכ מועה
ויאמר המלך בָּה שָׁם את וַתִּמָּוח
לְלֵישוֹת הוא:

הזע ועי עונה על
כי לכל קָן ראתי תכלת

ויאמר המגועש יקר גזל
למרדכי על:

[folio 24a]

[folio 54v]
סוכני המלך השיבו נוכחות
לא לקח מידינו מנחה
ולא שמענו עד כה היתה לו ארוחה

(555)

מן הבית הזה:

(560)

ירשהל משותרו
המן בא לאמר על הלשורי
לתלות את מרדכי והכרו שמעני שלחר
ויאמר לו ולא נמיום מוהו:

(560)

ויאיש אשיר המלך חפץ ביקרו
מה לעושה של יא ובבר
בויום מחר כל יא על שכרו

(565)

במבחרת דה:

(570)

ויאמר המן בלב ימי חפץ וירצה
המלך לעושה יקר ומי עד מיתשת
אוני יא לא אורה אלא זה מнесен
ויאמר אליהם דה:
ילבש לבוש מלכות זבוב התכלת ומרוקם
ועל סוס רכב אלה בר המלך והוקם
ירשה ול איש מושרי המלך בן ושתום
את וכל האנשים הזה:

גמל בשחיתותיו ותנוור בר כיידי
נפל ושם שמם לא מגעתי
רמאי המלך אל עבדיו
دراجנו זה:

איש נבון חכם וחכם
מאנה מעשה גבירו והרין
קח את הלבוש ואת הסוס אל מרדכי תרב
לך בכחך זה:

המן נדהם ונאלם והם
ואמר הם רבים עתה שם אחד לכלם
עלם את ארצו נסתר ונתע עמו
מי זה אוסף:

ירurved חפמ נדמח ונטלーム
יראמר הוא ריבים תעדה שמים את לבלים
את עשוב ואת ארצי נПетербур עשוב
מי האיש הזה:
ענהו מרדכי היהודי מלכותי עצתו תכן
ואל תהי קלה בעיניך חכמת המםכן
הציל ממות נעשי על כל אנשי מצרך لتحقيق דבר הזה:

149

והמן טובון משנתה
יראמר כמלד מרדכי איכא כקודם
אלא מי מכלב אוחותיך והראה
מלך הנכד מי הוא זה:

[folio 55r]

150

וירוח איה המלך והמן ינער
בל לאמר מחרת והשה חסן ינער
ועשה לפורדך יהודית וירושו בשעת
כמשטת הזה:

151

ויאמר המן חוס על כן
ואל ילבש איש עבר את בגדי
וגם יאמר מוקنمو עבדך
חילל לך מעשהיך דבר הזה:

(585)
(590)
(595)
(600)
(600)
תשימנו כרמך שומר לעבד ולזמור
מנא בן וזלך יקח מהור עה חמור
וא על הפתת יפורד חומד לעמור
את המגדל הוה:

ויאמר כרמך שומר לעבד ולזמור
מנא בן וזלך יקח מהור עה חמור
וא על הפתת יפורד חומד לעמור
את המגדל הוה:

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ויאמר כרמך שומר לעבד ולזמור
מנא בן וזלך יקח מהור עה חמור
וא על הפתת יפורד חומד לעמור
את המגדל הוה:

יווהד מרדכי חרדה גודלה
פי המן של בוחר עה
ויאמר כר מף פה איש או ונעלה
אף כי הבית הוה:
השיב ראה אלוהים את דמעתך
ונגידה לו מה משכורתך
אל תירא כי קרובה ישועתך
גדלה נפשך עד היום הזה:

גדלה נפשך על הים הזה

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ויאמר המן מלא הקומץ קמח העביר הקצף
יותר מעשרת אלפים ככר כסף
טעם מרבד והברר את המקף
לך רד מוה:

ויעלו מרבדות ישוועת יולי
תחה מחגרת שק פנינה
ערן והברר המסת עעים
משחת קדש יהיה זה

ואפגה חלת הים

והואיל מרבדי באר את המשנה
נפש כי התחש וההת请选择 על גונה
מלא הקומץ קמח שלט הקרבה
ואפגה הקוליא הים:

וירקר המקן מלא הקומץ קמח העביר הקצף
ויורר מעשרות אלהים ככר עג
זגור והברר והברר את המקף
לך רד מוה:

ועלו מרבדות ישוועת יולי
תחה מחגרת שק פנינה
ערן והברר המסת עעים
משחת קדש יהיה זה

משדת קדש יתם הים:

(620)
(625)
(630)
(635)
ויאמר מרדכי הנה אני שולח מלאך אל איש את הוקי גלח
ויאמרו לו יבשו ביתם ואין פותח נסעו מזה
ולאṃ את הוכキ גלח
ויאמר מרדכי ול מגה ברוח אוין פותח
נסעו מוה:[Folio 55v]

160
לדֶּהְמַנְבֶּיא סֵפֶל מַסְפֶּרִים
וַלְּגְלָה וְעָנְתֶּה נִרְדֶּה מִמּוֹ
וַרְאֵמֶר מַרְדָּכַי מַת הָוֹ בְּלֹּא מִמּוֹ
ותֶּהָ לְעָלָה הָדָבָר מוה:

161
הָלָּא זָה בֵּי וַיַּי אֲבָטִיךְ
בֹּקְרֵיִינוּו סִעְרִים וְשֵׁתָם מְשָׁמָּתִיךְ
וֹדֶל לָא מְפֶרֶשׁ וְכֵי נְכֶרֶה עֵבֶדָתְךָ
נְסֵב אָשֶׂר הָאָחָוָה בֹּדָה:

162
עוּשֶׁה שְׁפַמָּה וַאֲהָא כָּל שֶפֶרְו גָּלַה
וַיִּאֶמֶר וְכֵי אָדָנְיֵי רבִּכָּה
עַתְּ הָאָגְלָל הָוִי הַמָּלָך בָּעָדָי יֵשֶׁלָה
עַד מִתְלָיְיָה וָהוָה:
163

השיבו לא אוכל כי זקנתי ושבתי
ורשלשת ימים לא אכלתי
מדאנה מדבר צאắp שכרתי
את עצמותי מוה:

164

וירא manos כי חואנה
והוא מבקש והוים רפה פונה
ויאמר שלחתי המלכה תרחק שלחתה
שמע נא את הדבר ווה:

165

וישם אדני על שמכי ראהל
אני אשא והאני אסבול מותו עליה
אכלי עטול ב עלה
לך עלה מוה:

166

מרדרך ביטחתי המן המלך
ואוותי הדריך בהעילים
ויאמר נשיהם גואם מביתショップ
יום חוה עבד לעם הזה:

167

ס chuyện המק מחולם
ואוותי הדריך בהעילים
ויאמר נשיהם גואם מביתショップ
יום חוה עבד לעם הזה:
וירכב על סוס ומרכבת מריחודו (665)
בלבוש מלכות ועדי זהב והעדת (670)
לראות על שור בנח צעדה
את המינא והמינא הגדול הזה:
לראות את המינא הגדול הזה (675)

ו pstmtיםبينים בין יאнятו לבבכם (670)
ליהוות الملك חיזייך בקירבכם (675)
ככה יעשו לו ולראש תראנה עיניכם (675)
ואיזאו והעולה על זה:

doントそうクト

ותאמר בקה תקוף ואיבת בהי (670)
והום נקט ישיב לזרחי (675)
על סוס ירכב ומרכבת גם חוא אתרי (675)
יום בשורה חוא הזה:

וזיהו לא ישעיה כ göreית מאנה (680)
והשלך בט אושר הלאת האתה (680)
על ראש אביך הוזולה שלחו (680)
המצויה וראיה אתếp המינא הגדול הזה:
אל שער המלך שב בן קשיא
והמן נדחק אל ביתו חסרפ ומכבאיש
ות𬘓ינ איש ויוער ולא איש
בושרש אתיה חרב חודה.

אם מותר שאול מרדם אשר שלט
בארןしたり נגוס ומשלט
כי אם לברוח ואתה ובניך בלאת
כוזו זאר מז המוקד חודה.

וייח איפורים כה ווי דבר ורשה
אם מוברעיה ווריקה אשר שח הדורש
אסתר המלכה למלך המלך גרש
גירש אשתם חודה.

ועד ממריבים ופרסים המלך וגיעה
וללך לא המשתה אלא וודא
וללך כי למדתה אתן תסיר
אמר שבת נא חודה.
 génér חנו ואני אלי רעי אלי שמעוני

ונח ויהיו ברות ראות קארמר

כי את רוח Asheville וואני

והנה שב אנה בוח:  נתן לי

ויבי הילוה לאמר הותו תחת לשבת

המלך לאכל לחם נצבת

ולככם אתנו כי חותלה נבודת

לא Hãי להשב בדרכים:  נתן לי

ויבא המן אל המשתה והוא לא נשמר

כי בא יומו וחייו נגמר

ויהי השער לסגור ויאמר

מה נורא המקום הזה:  נתן לי

וישאל המלך אל אסתר גם היום גם תמול

ך עודמה שאלת

על ימין או על שמאל

דרוח נכון נקם להשיב או חסד

לגמול

הממלכה או אפר שלום:  נתן לי

וירא המלך את אסתר מגה יומו טמולה

מה שאולות תודי על ימי אול על שמי

רוח בוכת למשיב ואשר להמול

נתח לאלים בוח:  נתן לי
180
כדני המלך אבי חזון שלמה
והוא אבי חזון שלמה
הוא אבי החזון שלמה
אבאתיו הוא מרדכי והוא גדול
מענורי עד היום הזה
Ms. Bodleian corrupted

181
עבידים והשפתות נתנו
זו ישתה כ튼ה
ולמשמי לחרות לא ביאב מכירתן
אשר לא כתוב בספר התורה הזה:

182
בשמוע המלך מולדתה ועמה
ויקרא לה אסתר בשמה
ויקרא לה בשמה

[Folio 25b]
ולברנינ גם מכירתן

183
yorah la קשת בשמה

[Folio 56v]
פעמים הזמן דבר כי לא עשה עמה
שלום על חומת הזה

182
yorah la קשת בשמה

[Folio 725]
לא תחמול עליו ולא תכסהו
מות יומת האיש ההוא
נפשו דבר היום הזה: בכי
השיבת אסתר הרגה היא אלי עמיות ווזר
ב䶮אות עמיות התיינו ידבר
על ריב לא ולעובי ומתרבר
איש צד ואויב תומך והוזר הוד:  

ואת כל רכוש אשר רכשת עמק
אינו שיש בניק מלקותך
כל תפים לא ישוי בים להתך
כשם מותר:  

ריца המלך ולא נת היבחךقوة וודנה באב
וירא והנהלך לכל אלים ול Tbישה ב
ריامر לא כי דברת הוזר:  

השיבר المقدس את הנה מרפו וארצי
והנה צוות בחירה יוער
ולעשוש צרוף נפש
משתרים את הנהר点缀:  

(730) 
(735) 
(740) 
(745)
ויפול המן על המטה אשר אסתר עליה
כרע נפל בין רגליה
اورל תשחרר למלך בנסך אפריה:
ורש מעיליך רק את הנפהynthesis:

ותנן לו יהי אל המצריים הענה
אביך הראשית חטא עלינו
עובר ישראל מה שריינו
עוכר יהוה יבומר הזה:

ћדמל שיש מגון海滨 אל הגישה
המן לפני אסתר מתנפז ומתרה
לאמר להו מכלל מעיל באשה המתה
האשה ינצלת

וירם המנה
עובר יום החמש מעון באה
ואסתר עם תמונת בירית באה
הנערה חברתוך הוא הזה:
חרבונא
אחד מן הסריסים
עמד וידבר על העצים
נפשו בגן עדן חי العالم ישים

[Folio 57r]
וכנעם אלהיםعاش הזה:

192
ריואמר עד גדון המלך פשט
לתלות את מרדרך אשר בר המלך נשע
וביתו ענוהו והרשים(ם) אמר שא
העשב ענוהו נפחים זה:

193
ריואמר המלך תלוהו עליה
ריואל תנך פראי מעלה
והניא שפורנובעל
כאמר דבר זה:

194
ודבר צא אותם המלך ופיי המקה פינים
ועשתה בנו ענוה תאשפז
כמעט באה ודיבר לאדיקפר
כמוהו זה כל מהו זה:
אורונר רשעים
כבודם נדעכה
ולביני ישראל לברכה נפכשה.
כלהו של הוה הוה.
(780)

ולפדריט אמר המלך הנה צורי
ולך ביה מה אוותך עשית
גזרת העצוה כי אוותך ראית
עדיך לופני בוחר הוה.
(785)

האמר אסרה בית והון לבל ימעט חפצי וחשקי
כ יאס לחשיב רעת המשך הנמליך
את המפרים אשר שלח ום נקר
אל השפוך במקום הוה.
(790)

ורפה בטשמה נאה וודר מבקש
ך הוה והעד גלונד ימעטש
ועל אשר היה לכם למחיש
שר הודי גפל הוה הוה.
(795)
וְכִּ֥ה וַמְשַׁמֵּשׁ אֲלֵֽהָם
כַּחַ֣ב אָצֵּר בָּשָׁם הָֽנֵכָּ֣ת נֶכֶּ֔ת נֶכֶּת
אֵ֣ין לַהֲשֹׁב אָפָ֣ס כָּלוּ לַיְיוֹדֵ֣ה תְפַּאֵ֑רָה:
אָמְעַ֖שֶּׁה אַתָּה הָדְבֵר־הָוָֽה׃

וַאֲתָ תַּבְעֵֽתי אֶשֶּֽׁר הָמַֽן הָעֵבְרָֽי
לֵפְרַדְכֵי הָיוֹדֵר הַנֶּתֶֽה
סַקִּל יָסָֽקֵל וַאֲרַי יִרְדֵּה אֱפַרְתָּי
כָּל הַנַּעֲגַע בָּאִישׁ הָוָֽה׃

וַחַֽרְיָה אֲזַי נַחֲמַֽתְכֶם
כְּתַבָּה עַל הָיוֹדְרִים כָּסְבָּב בְּעַנְּכֶם
לִצְמָֽה עַל נַפְשֶׁם לָיְתָנְכֶם מַאֲוָבָכֶם
רִאְמַרְוּ שָׁבֵֽו וְדָבֵר הָוָֽה׃

[folio 57v]

וּכְלַֽהֲבָבָּה מַעֲסָם הָמַֽלֵּךְ וְהָשָׁרִים
לֶח֣כְרָה אֵת כָּל יוֹשֵׁב הָעֵרִים
אֵֽשֶּׁר אֵ֣ל יַשְׁמֻ֑עָה לָכֵֽל הָדּֽבָרִים
הָכְתֹּבֵים בְּסֵפֶֽר הָוָֽה׃
ודע כי אלהים עשה המלך סכל
ורעש עם בן המדתא אפורכל
והוא אسكر לא דבר ובריה לא היה הכל (815)
ורעש את הדבר ההוה:

ותמה الملך ואותותיו שקר
ורע לווה נפש קדרה דכר
מפיר צריב ובודהות נתחק
אם אמת היה הדבר ההוה:

ורעש המלך ברואש את גמולו
ותהל אוחו את בני סבר ול
תמש מימיון ו👩‍👦‍👦 משמואל
נבר המזון גזר מוה:

הודאות הרואשים אשר שמעתם
ibal המה או אשת רשותה
את בני בני יהודים מאז מעולם
מהנה אליהם והוה:
וביום אשר הפיל פור והו נגזרל עליים
נתקח והו אושר ישלווה המה בשנואים
רא וזיותי אתכם כי עבדי והשמימים
את זהב הוה:

וכל והו מלך ושיפל ותכניעו
וכלodem ל UIPר genie
וכל המדינה ומינו המלך וישוע
את מצורפת ישאל והוה:

הרצים יצאו בדבר המלך
annelברכבלאלהבסופים
ציר שושן צהלה ושמחים וששים
בכא הספר הזה:

וזהרי יצאו בלובוש מלך喁הלוהואנגן
ותשמ אשת אספו על בית טמן
משנה למלך ועמו נאמן
وغם בחר היהוה:
ותאמר אסתר לאמר למלך עוד נשאלה
ודע טマー בשושן מחר יעשה
למחות זכר עמלק זינו אל עצר
ולא הטהרנו מזה עד היום הזה:

[845]

211
ותאמר למלך עוד נשאלה
212
וראמר מדריג פניכם רעים
213
וראמר המלך מדור פניכם רעים
והקול נשמע והדברים ידועים
בשואת הבירת הרגו החרדים והמשי והשבוע
אלה שברח בר מחו:

[850]

214
בשואת המלך מวรשה מעלי לא וכר
כי לא מלך ופוח שאר
וראמר כי ראשת גור עמלק אתכם عشر
וכנNotFoundException הווה:

[855]

215
נקהל החרדים מעבשך
כבר צורה עליה אלהים פניה שונך
ווהרור כל הזברע אנרגותיו בשון
בארבעה עשר יומ территорיה:

[860]
זרע מרענים נמקו בעונם
ושללם לבוז ומקניהם וקנינם
כי לא היה לקחת מאומת ממותם
לפם חדש:

(860)

rorim movibir ollile
הנ_SID לקושי ושלים
מיתודים יי ביטין והרולים
ותן את הם חדש:

(865)

והכתב עלת החשר ובסי עפר
לאות עולם כי מצאו כファー
עם יי砷וכל היפה
את ספר חדש זה:

(870)

ואחר כל חון ונבואה שבימים
מגלת אשר ואתה בלבלילים
במשתה ובשמחה קבעו חכמים
זכור את היום הזה
את היום הזה

(875)

(870)
לעשות כל היום מנהגים ידועים
לזכר מאכל אסתר ושלשת השועים
ואל נבי ישראל מנורא
בليلת הווה:

בלילה הווה:

בומ שלשה עשר באדר קבעו להחגון
ולקרות אט המגלה בוב ובילה לשון
ומנת לאמורות ומשלות מנחת
והوء הווה:

לזכר פורים כרשעה יהת הען
משתה המלך ליזהו על הני
ולכל שיש נחת הום לאפס לאין
לא נשחת מים 베מה הווה:

ואריש אשר בפורים והים כROWSER
לבר דדמא שותו ושכרו עמנ
ואם incontr תרגלות שמה להוה
גאול יתי כבוד עמה הווה:
למאחרים על היין האוכלים למעדנים
ולŃי ממוות נפשם נכונים

[folio 58v]

ואacente לי עדים נאמנים
והי לעבום זה:

נבורים לשתות בזז וימי מ злоו מנות
ירוחר לו לזל ויזכור אליהם את נון
ולא ישתבחו שموس בר מון

בדבר הזה:

לשלוח מנות אם לא השיגה ידכם
שלך שלך שלך שלך אטום לאחוכם
سورתם והרי נפשכם
ואם תעשים את דבר הזה:

לתכלת עיניים מיי יבכים יהלל
המשתכר עד אשר אוהלים יקהל
בואת יההלל יההלל
לשמור מצותי עד יהושע הזה
לеш נשים לאכזל וחומת הטבר
ונשמר פ ואל גונך הנחת
שמח נשים עליה ואל נאתה
מפעת食べות והזון:

ורשים המלך את החורשות על ארסי משל
شاهدים כלכליים כי מלאכה בהם
ולאשר להם כלב לאוריה הפסים
 japenen התزهر והזון:

וזה
לזרום הורות גיום עשה
ולאורי להורות בשיר ובשבחה
ולברך בשמי עד היום הזה:

הרופא לכל בשר והܡא לאשפה
בەە לעגן אדם מרחוק biçה עשה
והמקרא
בשמי א יותר לعجبו נחת
כל התוות והזון:

ה르מא
כל בשר וה INA ורעשה
בוקעי לעניי אדם מרחוק עשה
והמקרא
בשמי א יותר לعجبו נחת
כל התוות והזון:
ישראל עמק אשר בבל צרתם
עמדת להם נקמת נקמתם
בן בכרך תפתה ו洢ור גלולם
העל את העם הזה:

233

יוסף שינת ידי ל氪ן זאנו והבאתה
אל ברבורת חוד לא חתוינו
קוש לאיר מות פרה חוד תריעה
לשלום העם הזה:

234

לבני יצאר בגדיד קרש חנת תשבי
הלביש מופצת יהודת תבין
תשביר שחקים יחם משפחת יבין
רודין מארירי העם הזה:

235

בצייר הקשים תשכן צור שוכן בר
ואוריך اليمن ליידי לכלהל יהודין

[folio 59r]
[Missing from Ms. Bodleian]
ישמרנו
genot 드ר בים משלחת
שבני ישראל עם גלולת

[folio 27b]

הנהור
 necessità
אנס מי הפך הלימש ברכתו והעלתו
האלים הקדושים והו: (940)

אנס
cn צאשא יאש bella סלחת
בברשה עברו יהודא ובמעועド ענין הנחת
תקוה נ,,,,,,,,,מאותה בואים בו
かないיה חסרי ואלה והו: (945)

האל
המשיגי אווש שמת נפשות בגוות
באור תורה ילכו ונר המצות
סוד מדע לאשר לא יידעו החוויה
יאיר עד היום והו: (950)

המושיע
אתרי משיח צדק וחיות לולאות
פור שיפטני מקום בחמות עלות
כימי מועד אבלנו הפכת למחולות
ותעש לך שם היום הזה: (955)
ישראל זרע קדושך
מלכותך אליהם רואי בנך
בוקע ים לפני משה זה:
מי כמוך ואין כמוך ומי דומה לך ואין דומה לך:
עליך מקרא מגלל