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BRANDEIS JUADIC STUDIES JOURNAL

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Dear Reader,

The second half of Moses Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* examines the concept of prophecy. Viewing prophecy as the "greatest perfection man can attain," Maimonides insists that this "highest degree" can be achieved only through "the medium of the Active Intellect." Yet not all study yields prophecy. Prophecy, for instance, cannot be "remedied by training" or rote memorization. Instead, prophets emerge through a "most perfect development of the imaginative faculty." Only creativity, in the Maimonidean universe, gives rise to innovation.

The *Brandeis Judaic Studies Journal* embraces this vision. Our journal offers original scholarship that aims to advance Jewish thought through a commitment to what Shelley called the "expression of the imagination." In this issue, our authors grapple with inconsistencies in Jewish Law, injustices that occurred in nineteenth century American Jewry, Jewish Life during the Renaissance, and sexual horrors during the Holocaust.¹ Exploring diverse Jewish thought, this Journal acts as a vehicle by which student scholars share unique, modern forms of prophecy with readers. I am thrilled to present the *Brandeis Judaic Studies Journal's* third issue.

Josh Hopen
Editor in Chief

¹ The final piece of this issue contains disturbing and descriptive accounts of sexual abuse suffered during the Holocaust. Reader discretion is advised.

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While this journal is not officially affiliated with the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department, it is honored to have the continued support of its faculty, including Professor Jon Levisohn, Professor Eugene Sheppard, and, of course, Administrator Joanne Arnish.

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The journal reserves its deepest appreciation to its readers. Your desire to explore these difficult yet enriching pieces is motivating and serves as a model for us all on our individual journeys for truth.

Joshua Hopen, *Editor in Chief*

Abigail Good

TRYPHO'S COMPANIONS:

**JEWISH PRIDE AND PRACTICE IN DIALOGUE
WITH TRYPHO AND ON TUMBLR**

The link between Justin Martyr's fourth-century *Dialogue with Trypho* and posts made on the microblogging site Tumblr circa 2015 may not be immediately obvious, but both comment on the Jewish law tradition from a specific angle: emphasizing the finicky, sometimes estranged nature of halacha in daily life. Justin presents a negative view of Jewish law, while Jewish communities on Tumblr have created a microculture around having their own halakhic-inspired discussions and being proud of this intellectual tradition. I propose to show in this paper that by reading *Trypho* with a focus on the characters of Trypho's companions, who laugh at Justin and therefore at Christianity, it is possible to sketch the outlines of a sustained Jewish resistance, and pride in that resistance. This resistance is sometimes expressed in engagement with halakha.

Before reading against the grain to focus on internal views of Jewish practice, it is necessary to lay out the surface level of *Dialogue with Trypho*: Justin's intentional arguments. For this, I turn to Maren Niehoff's "A Jew for Roman Tastes," which I believe illuminates a key way Justin uses the characters of Trypho and his companions. Niehoff argues that Justin writes for a Roman audience, and uses Trypho to represent Jews as the "other" to this audience, in contrast to Christianity, which is represented as quintessentially Roman in nature. For the purposes of this paper, we can simplify Niehoff's characterization of Justin's strategy as having two main aspects: that the values and arguments that Justin places in Trypho's mouth serve first to emphasize aspects of Judaism that the Romans disliked or were disturbed by, and secondly to associate Jews with the Eastern, Greek part of the empire.

The first aspect takes the form of Justin emphasizing issues like circumcision and exclusivism, which were aspects of Judaism already much discussed by the Romans. In Roman culture, circumcision was seen as mutilation. Roman law forbade circumcision, only making exceptions for Jews by birth. Jews could not circumcise converts. Justin's Jewish character expounds on the importance of circumcision, invites Justin to get circumcised, and emphasizes the divide between Jews and Gentiles. These actions play on the attitudes toward Jews already present in Roman society. It characterizes Jews as un-Roman. According to Niehoff, Justin also moves to character Jews as

positively aligned to the Greeks, to take advantage not only of Roman attitudes toward Jews but also their attitudes toward Greeks. Roman culture had a complex relationship with Greek culture; Romans respected and used many Greek concepts, but Greece was also the colonial other, the east elsewhere. Associating Jews with Greeks was to mark them as outsiders and, by contrast, Christians as insiders.¹

Justin uses Trypho's entourage of rowdy friends as his first method of othering Jews and proving they are non-Roman. The group of unnamed Jews introduced with Trypho laugh twice at Justin and are eventually sent away for not taking the conversation seriously. Niehoff identifies their behavior as "violating accepted [Roman] decorum," and writes that "making excessive noise and behaving in an undisciplined manner are key motifs in colonial constructions of the Other."² This group of men are supposed to be seen as ill-mannered by a Roman audience. They contrast with Justin—the perfect and polite philosopher—and reflect poorly on Jews as a group. Trypho's character, in contrast, is set apart from the others by his not tolerating their behavior. Yet, despite being the best of them, he is defeated by Justin. "The claim is clear—" The best Jew is still no match for a Christian.

To represent Jews as similar to Greeks, Justin associates Jewish Biblical exegesis with Greek sophistry. According to Niehoff, Roman tastes on philosophy at this time, especially Platonic philosophy, favored personal observations on striving to live in tranquility with the rules of nature, and rejected philosophy based on meticulous commentary on canonical texts. Sophistry was associated with the kind of philosophical work done particularly in Alexandria.³ Rather than focusing on "sophistic quibbling over negligible details,"⁴ various Roman thinkers of the time encouraged readers to "engage the author's message and respond to its transformative appeal by shaping one's own self."⁵ The written words are less important than the message hidden between them.

This is the kind of biblical reading Justin presents as his own practice. He explains, "For sometimes the Holy Spirit caused something that was to be a type of the future to be done openly, and on other occasions he spoke of things of the future as though they were actually taking place, or had already taken place. Unless readers are familiar with this manner of speaking, they will not be able to

¹ Maren R. Niehoff, "A Jew for Roman Tastes: The Parting of the Ways in Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho from a Post-Colonial Perspective," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 27, 552.

² Ibid, 556.

³ Ibid. 570-571

⁴ Ibid. 572

⁵ Ibid. 571

grasp the full meaning of the prophet's words."⁶ According to Justin, one must understand that the Bible often speaks figuratively rather than openly, and read it with an eye to these subtle metaphors. Christians understand this, and learn from the Bible's subtext rather than focusing on its surface level. In contrast, he casts Jews as the ultimate quibblers of negligible details: "your teachers, as many as you have, only explain to you why female camels are specified in a certain passage [...] or why so many measures of fine flour and so many of oil are used in the offerings [...] you conduct a theological debate of the question why one *a* was added to Abraham's original name, and you seriously dispute why one *r* was added to Sara's name."⁷ Why the Bible uses certain language, the miniscule details of temple rituals, theological debates on subjects Christians would deem unimportant; all of these Justin presents as things Jews are interested in, but should not be. The nature of God, the pursuit of which must be the purpose of analyzing the Bible, is not to be found in them. Jewish exegesis is therefore backward according to Roman tastes and useless according to Christian beliefs (or at least Justin's beliefs).

Justin's rhetoric about exegesis is especially interesting to me because of how it prefigures modern Christian and Jewish attitudes toward religion. Justin argues that the Jewish method is overly literal, obsessed with unimportant details, and ascribes contradictions to the holy text, while the Christian method reveals the underlying, transformative meaning of the text because it is above petty details and supposed contradictions, which cannot possibly exist in the Bible. Niehoff identifies Justin's characterization of Jewish method as essentially Greek (in the Roman view), and the Christian method as Roman. Justin's understanding of how Jews and Christians read the text may describe more how he perceives or wants others to perceive the difference, rather than what the difference actually is. Nevertheless, there is a tantalizing amount of similarity between his description and contemporary Jewish and Christian approaches to religion that suggest either an accurate depiction, or a depiction so powerful that his and others' work created this reality over centuries.

It is interesting that Justin's characterization of Judaism, which is meant to be unfavorable, is generally in line with how many Jews today proudly depict Judaism. For example, many contemporary Jews would agree that Jews analyze small details of the Bible and law more intensely than Christians (whether or not this is true being immaterial to their self-conception of what it means to be Jewish) and engage in finding meaning in contradictions and reasons for seemingly random details. Many Jews present being finicky with the text as a fundamental, beautiful, and endearing aspect of Judaism. This extends outside of

⁶ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Selections from the Fathers of the Church, Volume 3 Catholic University of America Press, 2003, 114.1.

⁷ *Ibid.* 112.4-113.2

the Bible to halakha. The Talmud had not yet been compiled when Justin wrote *Dialogue with Trypho*, but his comment on Jewish teachers hyper focusing on details such as a female camel, and his attitude toward ritual law, imply that Justin would have similar feelings on the Talmud. In his view, Jews were already obsessed with their too-specific, irrelevant laws in his time.

This aspect of Judaism has survived to the present. Jews online today proudly engage in arguments of halakha, not only on aspects of contemporary Jewish life or historical Jewish life, but also on aspects of the fantastical and ridiculous. One Tumblr post from 2015 says, “One thing I love about Judaism is that long involved conversations about things like ‘can a zombie attend shul?’ or ‘can i use my pet dragon to light candles on shabbat?’ or ‘is meat from a replicator kosher?’ are seen as completely normal.”⁸ These kinds of discussions are not quite as ubiquitous as the author claims, at least offline. But in the space bounded (in a permeable manner, as I will discuss) by Jewish blogs on Tumblr at the time they were posted, such discussions were quite common. This statement reflects an understanding of Judaism—as argumentative and detail-oriented—that these discussions were both inspired by and themselves reinforced.

The responses to the post prove this, with other bloggers chiming in to discuss the questions raised in the original post. “A pet dragon can light your shabbat candles if it’s a gentile dragon,” one user claims.⁹ Another respondent objects: “if a jew owned the dragon as a pet wouldn’t using the beast’s labor to light candles be pretty explicitly prohibited?”¹⁰ Yet another user steps in to clarify: “I think it was ruled that one may allow a dragon to ignite a fire if (a) the dragon is non-sapient, and preventing them from lighting the fire would be animal cruelty, or (b) the dragon is sapient, non-Jewish and not in indentured service.”¹¹ This response alludes to a solution already discussed in an earlier post, meaning that the original post, which claims these discussions are “completely normal” was indeed based on reality. In fact, the previous discussion has created a “ruling” which can be referenced and cited. In their discussions, these users are creating a record of past questions and answers—in other words, their own contemporary, online Talmud.

As is so common on the internet, full of endless copies and promulgations across sites, this Tumblr post was also screenshotted and posted to Reddit, where yet more users commented on dragons as candle-lighters and pork from a replicator.¹² One commenter added, “judaism is basically rules lawyering:

⁸ Anonymous (@the-independent-jew) "One thing I love about Judaism..." Tumblr post, posted 2015.

⁹ Westsemiteblues "Yes, but it should avoid..." Tumblr post, posted August 18 2015.

¹⁰ Adrivenleaf "Wait wait... if a jew..." Tumblr post, posted August 18 2015.

¹¹ Hagar-972 "I think it was ruled..." Tumblr post, posted August 19, 2015, 6:09 PM.

¹² OurEngiFriend "Can I use my pet dragon to light candles on Shabbat?" Reddit post, posted 2015.

the religion. it's pretty great like that.” Rules lawyering is a term that originated in role playing games, referring to following (and twisting to your advantage) the letter of the law, rather than the spirit. In other words, it is exactly what Justin accuses Jews of practicing, and what contemporary Jews enjoy doing. This Reddit user even makes it explicit: rules lawyering is cool, and Judaism is the highest form of rules lawyering.

These mock-Talmudic discussions almost never address real world issues, as our example including zombies, dragons, and Star Trek replicators shows (vampires are also a popular topic of discussion). This makes it even more clear that the Tumblr users engaging in discussion are not concerned with the answers, which are irrelevant to actual Jewish practice, but rather the process. Debating what would be the correct answer under Jewish law is the practice they are concerned with, enjoy, and engage in. This calls to mind Justin's accusation that Jews fixate on things like how much flour and oil are to be offered in the Temple they no longer possess¹³—that they are concerned with irrelevant things. In the Rabbinic tradition, such questions are not irrelevant. The Talmud concerns itself with Temple sacrifices, despite being written after the Second Temple's destruction, in anticipation of its rebuilding. But the answers may well seem irrelevant to one who does not ever expect the rebuilding of the Temple. It may seem that the Rabbis, and post-Temple pre-Rabbinic period Jews who still discussed offerings, cared more about discussion than answers. Whether this view of Talmudic discussion has influenced contemporary understandings of what Jewish law is about, or whether it is an unrelated phenomenon grown from the stereotype that Jews love a good argument—or, as I suspect, both—it is clear that some Jews take pride in exactly what Justin criticizes.

In another post from 2015, one Tumblr user sent a message, which the recipient answered publicly, asking, “If Pac-man was an Orthodox Jew do you think he'd have to stop eating ghosts or are they kosher?”¹⁴ The blogger who received the question did not exactly answer the question on the kosher status of ghosts, but did respond with a humorous and elaborate answer positing “that Pac-man is a metaphor for the turmoil inside the Jewish soul”—ironically, a reading which rejects the surface of the text in favor of drawing out its metaphorical theological implications,. This shows that despite contemporary Jews seeming to fit into Justin's dichotomy, the reality of how Jews and Christians interpret texts is always more complex than one generalization. One user reblogged the post to add, “I love Judaism- what other religion encourages and demands debate like this?”¹⁵ The idea that this attitude and way of engaging

¹³ Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 112.4.

¹⁴ Witch-of-habonim-dror-blog “If Pac-man was an Orthodox Jew...” Tumblr post, posted June 15, 2015, 1:16 PM.

¹⁵ Blooms-day “I love Judaism...” Tumblr post, posted May 13, 2016.

in religion is unique to Judaism is a recurring theme among Jewish discussions on Tumblr. In a reblog of another post, for example, a user writes:

“I’ve noticed a trend where if you ask Christians something like “can your god microwave a hot pocket so hot that even he can’t eat it?”, most of the time they immediately close ranks and start trying to come up with a coherent answer that sounds good to outsiders, treating the question as an attack. If you ask a bunch of Jewish people the same thing they call in their friends to get their opinions and have the most absurd discussion ever right in front of you.”¹⁶

This user’s characterization of the Christian answer may or may not be accurate; what is important to analyzing Jewish attitudes toward finicky discussions is that this post, implying that Christians are a stuffy kind of people who don’t know how to have a good time, was made at all. In contrast, Jews understand that an “absurd discussion” is a good thing, a chance to stretch one’s mind and come up with an answer to a tricky question—even if that answer does not matter, the process is enjoyable and valuable. The implicit message is that Christians do not understand this, and their culture must be poorer for it. The mindset behind this post undoubtedly evolved from the history of which Justin represents an early stage—Christians looking down on Judaism—and is made possible by the context of the current day, in which it is safe, at least in the anonymity of the internet, to publicly say or imply that Jews might look down on Christians in turn. In a spiritual response to Justin, this Tumblr user asserts that this *is* Judaism, it *is* different from Christianity, and Jews *enjoy* being different.

Each of these posts engages with Justin’s ghost by purposefully and joyously embodying what he most disapproved of. Justin is the imagined Christian audience which might at any moment encounter these posts on their Tumblr dashboard or on the blog of someone they follow. For each post, no matter how embedded in the Jewish Tumblr community, is on some level a performance for anyone outside the community to see. That is the nature of posting on Tumblr. Posts are often circulated widely beyond the original blogger’s followers, to those users’ followers, to theirs; even to other websites like Reddit, as we saw before. That Christian audience, the Jewish bloggers imagine, does not know their way of “doing religion/Judaism”—they might not understand, or even disapprove. But that only makes these discussions more fun. Offending others’ sensibilities is a time-honored human pastime, after all.

Both Justin and Jewish Tumblr users essentially put forth two arguments. The first argument is about how Jews and Christians engage with the Bible and law. Justin provides examples of Jewish discussions of his day as evidence for the Jewish side, and his own Christian readings of the Bible for the Christian side. On Tumblr, bloggers’ evidence for the Jewish way of reading is the Talmud and the practice of engaging in their own public mock-Talmudic discussions.

¹⁶ derinthescarletpescatarian “I’ve noticed a trend...” Tumblr post, posted July 26, 2016, 10:56 AM.

Their evidence for how Christians engage with religion is defined in contrast. Both Justin and the Tumblr posts discussed here align in arguing that Jews focus on details and debate, while Christians focus on the holistic picture and spiritual answers. The second argument considers which mode of interpretation is more accurate/meaningful. In Justin's representation, everything Jewish is the inferior other. For Jewish Tumblr users, everything Jewish is the superior other. It is the direct opposite of the Christian mainstream, and better because of it.

I have called the possible audience of these posts, the theoretical disapproving Christian, Justin's ghost. If the audience is Justin, it is clear that the Jewish bloggers rowdily discussing zombies and dragons and replicators are not well-behaved Trypho. They are not the most acceptable of the Jews, who still cannot beat a Christian, but his group of laughing, mocking friends, exiled for not taking things seriously. Because the opposite of Justin is not Trypho. Trypho is willing to politely engage with Justin, styles himself as a fellow philosopher, and agrees to send his laughing friends away. The opposite of Justin is the group of companions who refuse to politely engage with him, who voice their disdain in laughter and readily leave the conversation. Most contemporary Jews are likely unaware of the exact critiques Justin articulates about Jewish modes of reading. But their attitude, taking pride in their legal traditions, aligns them with Justin's characters, who break into "loud, rude, and raucous laughter," causing a "commotion," acting "insultingly;"¹⁷ even "joking and making fun of [Justin and Trypho's] earnestness."¹⁸

¹⁷ Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 9.2

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 9.3

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Orly Krupp

AMERICAN JEWISH GIRLS' EDUCATION IN THE MID-19TH CENTURY

During the second half of the 19th century, Jews played a unique role and disproportionately influenced the United States; they retained impressive reputations in areas such as military leadership, business fields including the textile industry, and even the White House. To achieve success and status in these spheres, many American Jews chose to abandon the cultural practices of their native countries and embrace the more liberal, democratic values of the United States. While the adjustment to the American lifestyle afforded many Jews social and economic mobility, it often conflicted with traditional Jewish values and practices. This phenomenon of compromising religious observance for "The American Dream," whether intentional or not, was frequently criticized by European Jews, as they viewed American culture to be detrimental to Jewish life, to possess "little Jewishness".¹ In his book *Three Years in America*,

Romanian traveler Israel Joseph (I.J.) Benjamin observed and recorded his findings on many areas of Jewish life, one of them being the education of Jewish girls. While analyzing Jewish families, Benjamin discovered the lack of Jewish studies present for girls, the ways this education impacts the girl once she leaves formal schooling, and how parents' values led to daughter's disillusioned perspective on life as an "American Jewess."² Benjamin further asserted that the inadequate Jewish education resulted in American Jewish communities failing to produce strongly educated and religiously passionate women who could raise the next generation of American Jewish children. Through an in-depth analysis on this text supported by various secondary works, one can further understand the deeply nuanced dynamic between American Jews and their relationships to each respective identity.

Jewish women's involvement in education in America dates to the Second Great Awakening in the early 1800s, when a new wave of religious fervor took hold of various religious groups. Jewish women were especially inspired by Protestant women, who "feminized" both religious practices and community leadership roles, thereby integrating "republican values" into their

¹ Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 45.

² I. J. Benjamin, *Three Years in America: 1859-1862*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America), 1956. In the Zola and Dollinger volume, this excerpt is found on pages 253-255.

lives.³ Rebecca Gratz, the American-born daughter of a wealthy Jewish merchant in Philadelphia, observed these social shifts and desired to integrate them into her own community.⁴ One primary way in which Gratz accomplished this goal was through initiating the Jewish Sunday school movement, which not only increased access to Jewish education but also created a vocational space within women's prescribed religious environment.⁵ This model was successful and promoted a dedication to Jewish education, but by the time I.J. Benjamin arrived in America in 1859, social structures within the Jewish community largely evolved. With communities centered around synagogues long forgotten and avenues such as the Reform movement greatly influencing Jewish life, families adapted to American society, practicing a less fervent and more palatable version of Judaism. In their minds, this approach was two-fold: it allows for a smoother integration process, and helped promote a palatable Jewish image among their non-Jewish neighbors and friends. Eastern European girls who immigrated from to America, or whose parents were immigrants, were encouraged by "teachers, parents, and even religious institutions to adopt a more American form of Judaism," and leave behind their native Yiddish traditions.⁶ Such sentiments, which promoted a degree of cultural assimilation, were reflected in the education Jewish girls received in America. According to Benjamin, herein lies a primary cause and threat to both young women's ability to be an informed Jew and to overall Jewish continuity.

Before analyzing the excerpt from Benjamin's book, it is crucial to acknowledge the lens through which he viewed the world. Originally a lumber trader from modern-day Romania, Benjamin, at age 25, embarked on trips across the globe, observing and recording the economic and social conditions as well as the traditions and local legends of each Jewish community he encountered.

These trips often spanned multiple years and took him to multiple continents.⁷ According to Zolla and Dollinger's introduction to this passage, "Benjamin was frequently critical of the freewheeling behavior he observed among American Jews."⁸

In the opening lines of this passage, Benjamin mentions the "inflexible demands"⁹ that Judaism calls for, of which the "first and foremost is to give his

³ I.J. Benjamin, *Three Years in America: 1859-1862*, 48.

⁴ *Ibid.* 49

⁵ *Ibid.* 50.

⁶ Melissa R. Klapper, *Jewish Girls Coming of Age in America, 1860-1920*, (New York University Press, 2005). Page 34.

⁷ I.J. Benjamin, and David Gordon. *The Book of the Journeyings of Israel*. (WDL RSS, Zevi Hirsch Fetzal, 1 Jan. 1970),

⁸ *American Jewish History: A Primary Source Reader*, ed. Gary Phillip Zola and Marc Dollinger. (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2014), 253.

⁹ Here, Benjamin refers to the commandments which G-d gave to the Jewish nation. While it may sound as though Benjamin is adding his own opinions into what these demands are, there are various biblical and rabbinic sources which command parents to teach their children Torah.

child a good education."¹⁰ Here, Benjamin stresses the key role Jewish education plays in a child's upbringing, as it is only through studying, understanding, and building a relationship with Jewish texts that a child will gain the necessary skills to practice Judaism when they leave the home. Giving some credit to the American school system, Benjamin writes that they in part prepare students for the journey of life, but overall fail as they exclude all religious studies, "not with an unwise purpose."¹¹ Benjamin seems to understand that while girls receive a poor religious education by attending secular schools, it is preferable to include religious studies, as they would undoubtedly be Christian-sourced courses. As a result, "the study of Holy Scriptures" remained "much neglected" among Jewish American girls. They did not learn scripture in school or at home, so their focus remained solely on school subjects. Even for girls who attended religious Sunday school, the time was so limited that Jewish educators couldn't impart adequate information on religious traditions, moral behavior, and the study of scripture.¹²

In the next portion of this excerpt, Benjamin reflects on the advantage boys had regarding Jewish education and the unfortunate contrast to girls' lackluster schooling. Writing that it is "the established way"¹³ for boys to be instructed in both Hebrew schools and the home, Benjamin notes "the great difference," and therefore the great benefit, to receiving the education given to the boys.¹⁴ The stark education inequality between genders is a result of how Jewish communities functioned in Europe, where boys often went to school to learn about Judaism, and girls stayed home to learn the traditions mimetically from their mothers. Due to this assumption, "almost no one was concerned about girls adolescent religious instruction" in Europe.¹⁵ Despite girls in America being given more learning opportunities, writers for *The American Jewish Press* advocated for girl's schooling "but with the caveat that too much education might lead girls to press for religious leadership".¹⁶ Benjamin certainly was not advocating for liberal or feminist advancements, but rather lamented the poor state of "religious instruction of these Jewish housewives and mothers of the future".¹⁷ The end of this paragraph expresses Benjamin's "regret and

¹⁰ I.J Benjamin, *Three Years in America: 1859-1862*.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Klapper, *Jewish Girls Coming of Age in America, 1860-1920*, 163.

¹³ It was deeply established that men would learn Torah and gain skills needed for work in order to accrue an income while the women were the homemakers and provided the primary childcare. Therefore, societally men were predisposed to more schooling, resulting in more knowledge on Jewish texts and laws. Women knew Jewish law and texts pertaining only to her daily life, such as prayers, and to running the home, such as laws of Kashrut.

¹⁴ Benjamin, *Three Years in America: 1859-1862*.

¹⁵ Klapper, *Jewish Girls Coming of Age in America, 1860-1920*, 171.

¹⁶ Klapper, *Jewish Girls Coming of Age in America, 1860-1920*, 178.

¹⁷ Benjamin, *Three Years in America: 1859-1862*.

This phrase shows how Benjamin prescribes women to the role of housewife even in their adolescence and is disappointed that they are not being properly prepared for the tasks that accompany this role. It is possible

astonishment" in knowing that "half of the American Jewesses are at present unable to undertake and fulfill worthily the place in life for which they are intended".¹⁸ Clearly, Benjamin expects young girls to be learning commandments relevant to women and to being a housewife, and because they were deprived of such schooling, he discerns a fundamental aspect missing from Jewish females during adolescence.

Throughout the remainder of this excerpt, Benjamin describes the upbringing of American Jewish girls as they transition into adulthood, ultimately offering a remedy for the lack of education being "evil."¹⁹ He begins by explaining that up until the age of five, the mother instructs her daughter of the basic overview and laws of Judaism. Their fifth birthday is celebrated by enrolling in public school, where they are introduced to girls of other religions and may end up kneeling "during morning prayers which are arranged for those of other faiths".²⁰ ²¹ While at home they may recite some "Hebrew or English prayers,"²² "The child experiences nothing and knows nothing" of Judaism in a meaningful and practical way.²³ This subtle apathy will linger until she reaches the age of fifteen, when she will likely attend high school or higher education .

Even if the daughter desired to undergo increased Jewish studies once she transitioned into adolescence and early adulthood, parents often refused to allow their daughters to learn more, either due to "lack of resources or a traditional reluctance to teach girls".²⁴ Over these ten years, the parents focused on increasing their wealth and promoting their daughter's secular education.²⁵

Because of this, she received no lessons in home economics, but instead engaged in lessons such as French, music, and drawing. Perhaps the most pressing sentences in this section occur when Benjamin describes that even if the parents hire a Hebrew teacher for their daughter, she will find the lesson boring. After a short while, she will complain to her parents, and they will fire the Hebrew teacher- "he whom they should have engaged first and dismissed last".²⁶ Soon

that he is either unaware of or in denial of the fact that in the future, more women will begin working outside the home and move away from the limited opportunities women were afforded in Europe.

¹⁸ Benjamin, *Three Years in America: 1859-1862*.

¹⁹ Ibid. "Evil" refers to the girl's education and upbringing.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Benjamin does note that this action may occur unintentionally or without realizing its significance, but nonetheless it plants seeds that are not rooted in Jewish tradition, and furthermore shows the parent's failure to teach their daughter basic Jewish functions such as prayer. Even if they do teach their daughters a few prayers, the young child's elementary understanding of religious rituals leaves them vulnerable and impressionable to misguided actions, such as kneeling during prayer.

²² The fact that prayers may be recited in Hebrew or English shows the "Americanization" of Jewish families.

²³ Benjamin, *Three Years in America: 1859-1862*.

²⁴ Klapper, *Jewish Girls Coming of Age in America, 1860-1920*, 178.

²⁵ Benjamin, *Three Years in America: 1859-1862*.

²⁶ Ibid. Here, Benjamin hints that if only the parents had instilled a love and value for Judaic lessons from a young age, role modeled such behaviors, and did not prioritize secular skills, perhaps the daughter would have had a different reaction to learning Hebrew as a teenager. This is still a prevalent issue in American Jewish communities today.

after, the daughter prioritizes "parties, balls, and soirees," leaving what is left of her Judaic studies and religious affairs in the shadows. Indeed, many Jewish social critics feared that "religious education was forced to take a back seat to spiritually insignificant endeavors," and that the focus on accomplishing materialistic goals further drew away from making Judaism compatible with American life.²⁷ The young lady, having learned almost nothing to prepare her for living an educated and enriched Jewish life, now falsely believes she is ready to become a Jewish mother and teach her children what had been taught to her.

Ultimately, Benjamin attributes a girl's education to the commitment and thoughtfulness of her parents, and it is out of "their own lack of true religious feeling" that her disillusioned outlook on life as an American Jewess manifests.²⁸ His emotional and detailed recount of his time in America revealed the many intricacies of a Jewish girl growing up in America. He displayed how implicit beliefs, traditions, and familial behaviors often result in women who, while highly educated in secular studies and equipped with impressive skills, failed to garner the necessary information, relationships, and internal connections to pass on a thorough Jewish tradition to her children.

The implications of Benjamin's book, and specifically this passage, are many: in the modern Torah-learning world, women continue to be institutionally disadvantaged. Only in the past few decades has serious women's Torah learning (on par with men's learning institutions) taken hold of more religious circles.

Additionally, one learns how vital Jewish education was and still is in a Jewish childhood, and that the habits established, and the lessons learned in our earliest years are often the most formative. Most important, however, is the relationship between parents and their children, and how a parent's means of providing education truly shapes their children's future. Because many Jewish parents in the mid to late 1800s focused their attention more on their American identity and less on the practices that accompany their Jewish identity, their children internalized these messages; this intergenerational theme clearly shows how European Jewish immigrants who were once devout slowly watered down their religious involvement and instead aimed to create a sort of "balance." However, the social and economic success these parents strived for came at great costs, turning their children away from Jewish observance, and eventually producing non-affiliated or non-Jewish grandchildren in the decades to follow.

²⁷ Klapper, *Jewish Girls Coming of Age in America, 1860-1920*, 176.

²⁸ Benjamin, *Three Years in America: 1859-1862*.

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Samuel Millner

HEREWITH HIDDEN AND CONCEALED:

***LEON OF MODENA AND THE BOUNDARIES OF
JEWISH LIFE IN THE RENAISSANCE***

ABSTRACT

In conventional historical periodization, the Renaissance is often thought of as a low point for European Jewish life, overshadowed by the relative peaks of medieval Convivencia Spain and Enlightenment Europe. This paper seeks to complicate this narrative by reviewing *Hayyei Yehuda*, the autobiography of the 17th-century Venetian Rabbi, Leon (Judah) of Modena, one of the most intimate records of Jewish life during the Renaissance. In addition to revisiting Leon's meticulous quotidian accounts, this paper integrates recent archival work to successfully confound the image of a wholly Christocentric Renaissance and recenter the important role (as well as the veritable limits) of European Jewry in the cultural processes of the age. Specifically, this review substantiates the crucial relationship of Jews relative to Christian communities during the Renaissance in terms of their socioeconomic proximity, their shared linguistic practices, and their common technological processes. Most importantly, this piece highlights — through Leon's brilliance — the important role played by Jews in developing new forms of cultural and scientific knowledge, such as alchemy and poetry.

In modern historiography, the conception of a European Renaissance (literally a rebirth of the Classical world) starting in the 14th century is a cornerstone of western periodization. However, this convenient narrative oversimplifies complex historical forces in a manner that elides certain nuances of the time period in Europe — nuances that are actually inconsistent with popular depiction of European civilization as the direct and sole successor of Greco-Roman Classical civilization. Even the nomenclature implies a direct continuity between antiquity and Europe, all the while overlooking the significant involvement of non-European sources in this transformative cultural phenomenon. Prominent among the aspects overloaded in the conventional Renaissance mythos is the involvement of the Jewish community, both as internal actors in Europe and as external contributors who translated and revived classical works that came to constitute the theoretical backbone of the

Renaissance.¹ The former is especially exemplified in the autobiography of Leon of Modena (*Hayyei Yehudah*), a 16th century Venetian rabbi whose prolific life was shaped by the forces disrupting the whole of Europe at the time. His life is a testament to the physical and cultural proximity of Jews to Christians during the Renaissance, the limitations of those relationships, as well as the reactionary institutional pushback that complicated Europe's emergence into the Age of Reason.

The most glaring inconsistency in the normative, Christocentric Renaissance mythos is a now-accepted, significant physical presence of Jewish communal life in and/or around Christian spaces — even in the face of far-reaching legal exclusion and persecution. Indeed, such nominal exclusions have given rise over the years to a body of biased historical scholarship that takes the nominal exclusion of Jews at face value while neglecting to give due consideration to Jews as subjects in the process of Europe's putative rebirth — viz., Leon of Modena's role as a prolific figure in the Republic of Venice. However, the emergence of new archival evidence in recent years has allowed scholars to decenter the role of Christendom in the Renaissance and reestablish the role of Jewry in Renaissance Europe. One such scholar is Debra Kaplan, whose book *Beyond Expulsion: Jews, Christians, and Reformation Strasbourg* reexamines Judeo-Christian relations in the Alsatian city that had banned Jews for four centuries. Kaplan's review of new archival records looks beyond the nominal exclusion of Jews and demonstrates unequivocally that Jews participated regularly in various aspects of public life in Strasbourg, despite their formal legal expulsion.^{2,3} Kaplan et Alia have established the scholarly foundation for the high degree of interfaith interaction detailed in *Life of Judah*, which had also been overlooked (or perhaps intentionally excluded) by older scholarship.

Indeed, the reality of Judeo-Christian physical coexistence is a central and unquestioned fact of Leon of Modena's autobiography. There are certainly limits for Jews living in this social environment (discussed later in this paper), but the titular Judah primarily concerns himself with other issues, such as health, family, and his gambling addiction. First and foremost, the high degree of intercommunal interaction in Judah's life — despite his being confined to the Venetian Ghetto — expressly disrupts the normative Renaissance mythos.⁴ On

¹ Another such overlooked factor is the significant waves of Byzantine scholars and emigres following the 1204 Sack of Constantinople and the 1543 Fall of Constantinople.

² Debra Kaplan, *Beyond Expulsion: Jews, Christians, and Reformation Strasbourg* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 6.

³ Kaplan explains that expelled Jews, due to a mutual economic necessity, ended up simply moving out of the city limits while still entering the city walls to trade during the day.

⁴ The popular imagination often envisions Jewish ghettoization as being a uniform and comprehensive social bifurcation between Jews and Christians, which is oftentimes not actually the case.

one hand, Judah coexisted in the public sphere with Christians, noting at one point how during a journey, "On the way [to Florence] I was accompanied by several Christians and by two young Jewish men."⁵ But intercommunity interactions go far beyond casual acquaintance. A rabbi and preacher by trade, Judah details at length his many public orations (sometimes done to pay off gambling debts), usually attributing to himself much glory and ovation. Interestingly, he on several occasions mentions preaching to mixed Judeo-Christian audiences, even going so far as to claim that Christian noblemen were amongst those applauding his sermons:

In attendance were the brother of the king of France, who was accompanied by some French noblemen and by five of the most important Christian preachers who gave sermons that Pentecost. God put such learned words into my mouth that all were very pleased, including many other Christians who were present. Both before and afterward, noblemen and other great men came to hear my sermons, most notably Duke Candale and Duke Rohan, among others.⁶

As this is an autobiographical work, it is important to take into consideration the possibility that some details are embellished by Judah for the sake of self-aggrandizement. However, further reading evidences that the interest in the "other" in medieval Venice was rather reciprocal, with Judah actively engaging with Christians on several occasions. It is especially noteworthy that Judah's religious services are apparently conducted in Italian or some other lingua franca, allowing the gentile nobles to understand and appreciate him. Later on, after receiving a grave omen via a dream, Judah solicits a horoscope from ". four astrologers, two Jews and two Christians." and after, when his son Mordecai falls ill, has "eleven doctors, Jewish and Christian, consulting about [Mordecai's] malady."⁷ In the former case, Christian astrological predictions are deemed admissible, while in the latter, we see that their medical expertise transcends community barriers. At the very least, it is clear that the Jewish and Christian communities in Renaissance Europe enjoyed a high degree of social interaction and even, at times, operated using shared bases of knowledge (i.e. medicine, astrology, etc.). Even further, it is clear that these groups at times enjoyed high degrees of mutual empathy, as is seen when Judah's son Zebulun is murdered (by Jews nonetheless) and he is grieved by Venetians across the religious spectrum:

Even Christians and Turks grieved. At the cemetery there was an eighteen-year-old Christian citizen from the Dolfin family who had known him, and he grieved so much that immediately after returning home he took to his bed and died within four days. There was no one who had ever spoken with

⁵ Leone Modena, *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth Century Venetian Rabbi*, ed. Marc R. Cohen (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 105.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

him (my son] — including many Christian commoners who were acquaintances of his - who did not weep over his death.⁸

At least in some cases, Jews in Venice enjoyed highly intimate relationships with their gentile compatriots.

Beyond mere social proximity, Judah's life gives further specific evidence that the Jewish community not only shared certain cultural knowledge with Christendom, but that Jews at times actively participated in the development of said knowledge within Renaissance society. This can be perhaps best exemplified in the case of Judah's extensive (and costly) involvement with alchemy, the proto-scientific medieval forerunner of chemistry.⁹ Judah writes about how his son, Mordecai, becomes an apprentice for a "wicked and sinful" man, the alchemist priest, Joseph Grillo:

He worked at it assiduously and became so adept that all the venerable practitioners marveled at what such a lad knew. Finally, in the month of Iyyar, he arranged a place in the Ghetto Vecchio and with his own hands made all the preparations needed for the craft. There he repeated an experiment that he had learned to do in the house of the priest, which was to make ten ounces of pure silver from nine ounces of lead and one of silver.¹⁰

In this instance, Mordecai absolutely shatters aspects of the Christocentric narrative by passing under the tutelage of a gentile priest and engaging in hermetic transmutations. By further mastering the material and becoming a known proponent of this arcane, pagan protoscience — especially one that is ripe with co-opted Jewish symbolism that Mordecai would have been quite aware of. Moreover, Judah himself admits to having been involved in such affairs, saying, "And this is not vanity, for I also wasted my life trying to understand things such as these, and I would not have deluded myself had not sin caused me."¹¹ Judah's aside gives an important clarification that alchemy is an un-Jewish, sinful pursuit that is forbidden, although in reality this religious ban does not stop Jews from frequently being swept up in the alchemic zeitgeist of the time.

Mordecai ultimately dies due to lead poisoning, a tragedy likely portended by the many ominous dreams that Judah receives. As alluded to previously, Judah frequently engages in divination and astrological conjecture, things not endemic to the Christian world, but certainly common in Christian European culture at the time.¹² It is important to note that this aspect, among

⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁹ This body of natural philosophy and applied practices drew heavily from the traditions of Hermeticism, occultism, and Kabbalah. The influence of Jewish tradition on such practices will be discussed later in this paper.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 108.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹² There is a long history of divination, astrology, and the like in Judaism, from Joseph's saga to the medieval musings of Maimonides and beyond.

many others, of medieval mystical ideology was steeped in Jewish influence, and moreover, was actively developed by Christians as well as Jews, viz. Judah. And in the humanities, for instance, Judah lists himself as the author of numerous Italian poems and other works.¹³ Lastly, it is well documented that Jews were at the forefront of European medicine during the Renaissance, with Jews constituting many renowned dynasties of physicians, often receiving license from the pope himself to practice; one such Italian Renaissance physician was, ironically, also named Judah Messer Leon (of Mantua), as noted by historian Cecil Roth.¹⁴

When looking at shared cultural development during the Renaissance, it is ahistorical to withhold consideration of the actual source of much of the ideological material that was in circulation at the time.¹⁵ Indeed, significant portions of the knowledge that set the stage for the "Age of Enlightenment" originated externally in Europe, especially in the Islamic world and in the ruins of the late Byzantine Empire. This history of knowledge would perhaps be more apparent to Jews, a Semitic people constantly upholding non-European cultural knowledge while enduring in a frigid European exile. And while Judah himself does not make explicit arguments about the origins of revived "Classical" knowledge, the extensive wanderings of his son Isaac evidence the real ties that connected Europe and its periphery — at least in the sense that travel between Europe and, for instance, Egypt, was regular enough that the two places would influence each other.¹⁶

Judah casually mentions that ". . . because my son Isaac, may God his Rock protect him and grant him long life, was behaving improperly with childish escapades, I sent him to Patras in Morea. For about thirteen years he wandered the Levant."¹⁷ Other than the nonchalant treatment of exiling someone to wander the Levant, it is most noteworthy that Zante (now in Greece) is considered to be the Levant — as opposed to Europe. In this sense, it seems that even Greece, the original Classical society, as it were, falls outside of the European cultural sphere.¹⁸ The Levant — Eretz Israel in particular — certainly falls within the Judeo sphere, which was nominally segregated from Europe. Sometime later, Judah's son Isaac "arrived naked and bare from Egypt, after more than twelve years during which he had been all over the Levant . . . But just as he had done

¹³ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁴ Cecil Roth, *Jews in the Renaissance* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1978), 312.

¹⁵ This is one of the primary modus operandi of those promoting a distilled version of the Renaissance as a wholly Christian, European process.

¹⁶ It was around this time that a growing number of European Jews migrated to the Land of Israel, invited by the Ottomans to revive the economy of that area, notably Yosef Caro.

¹⁷ Leone Modena, *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth Century Venetian Rabbi*, 105.

¹⁸ No doubt due to the Ottoman rule over Greece at the time. This is also consistent with the otherization of Byzantium by Catholic Europe. In any case, this crucial locus of classical source material is not automatically classified as being European.

before he left, he once again began going around and playing games of chance and associating with drunkards. Finally, at the beginning of Iyyar 5381, I directed him to return to the Levant and also spent about twenty ducats to send him off on his own."¹⁹ It is interesting that Judah views the Levant as an ameliorative location in addition to just being a spiritual destination. But the proximity of Europe to the Middle East is indisputable — especially in the Jewish community, which was uniquely tied to its coreligionists in Asia and Africa. In fact, such travels are commonly documented in European history, e.g. Judah Messer Leon, who in the early 17th century "crossed the seas to the Levant and traveled from place to place, spending much time away from his home."²⁰ This transcontinental dynamic was a crucial factor in the eventual Latinization of ancient Greek works, which were often first translated from Greek into Hebrew or Arabic in Islamic lands. For the Jews who regularly went between the Christian and Islamic worlds, classical authors such as Galen and Hippocrates were actually not new when they entered the European consciousness during the Renaissance.

Despite the essentialness of Jewish people in Europe's nominal rebirth, there remained real limits to their involvement in Renaissance culture. Even as individual states began to overtake the Catholic Church as the main seat of power in Europe, Catholic antisemitism continued to inform acts of senseless persecution that terrorized Jews and simply made it harder for them to contribute to European society as a whole. Judah was no exception to this scourge of antisemitism; as during his life, he experiences the whole spectrum of antisemitism, from petty violence, to civil legal restrictions, to Inquisitorial persecution. He recounts various tales of Jews being attacked, robbed, and killed by gentiles, and he himself was kidnapped by a gentile as a child.²¹ Later on, Judah's father is unfairly "thrown into prison because of a debt of fifteen hundred scudi that had already been repaid" by a corrupt cardinal.²² During the plague of 1631, he writes that "for approximately a year Jews have been forbidden to buy and sell or engage in business negotiations; hence there has been no earning. The government also took more than 120,000 ducats from the Jews."²³ The Republic of Venice here clearly sees its Jewish subjects through a medieval lens: expendable foreign residents that can be liquidated for money at any point. He later writes that:

For when one [Jewish] individual committed a crime, they would grow angry at the entire community, calling us a band of thieves and (saying] that every kind of crime is concealed in the ghetto. Ever since then, they [the Jews] have

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁰ Cecil Roth, *Jews in the Renaissance*, 314.

²¹ Leone Modena, *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth Century Venetian Rabbi*, 79, 82, 105.

²² *Ibid.*, 84.

²³ *Ibid.*, 135.

been the object of scorn and hatred - .²⁴

This draconian treatment is comedically dovetailed by Judah's paranoid breakdown when he later realizes that one of his published works contains "four or five things of importance of which it is forbidden to speak, much less to write."²⁵ He is driven by his paranoid fear to voluntarily declare his crime to the Inquisition, despite ultimately realizing that his editor took the offensive articles out of the work. This is a noteworthy restriction on the contributions of Jews to medieval knowledge because it is being imposed on someone who claims to regularly cavort with Christian elites.

Despite the longstanding persecution of Jews in Europe, Jews managed to play an important role in Europe's emergence into the Age of Reason. This counterintuitive reality is excellently demonstrated in *Hayyei Yehudah*, the autobiography of a 17th century Venetian rabbi. The author, Judah Modena, is a prolific religious figure who frequently speaks in front of Christian noblemen and writes volumes of Italian poetry. He and his son also engage heavily in alchemy and astrology, important arts in medieval society. Moreover, his story demonstrates the intimate relationship between European Jewry and Jews in the Middle East, which uniquely positioned Jews to contribute to the Latinization of Greek sources that was the backbone of the Renaissance. Therefore, it is clear that Jewish communities played active roles in the development of Renaissance culture and knowledge. This is in spite of the real restrictions levied against them, from petty violence, to legal persecution, to ideological policing by the Inquisition. Nevertheless, Jewish communities in Renaissance Europe persevered and were able to make significant contributions to European society. In this way, the Renaissance was ultimately not a passing of the torch from ancient Greece to early modern Europe. It was a multilateral, complicated process of which the Jews played a thankless role.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

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Michael Schwartz

“TO BE LIKE OTHER SECTS”:

**RESISTANCE TO REFORM IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICAN
JUDAISM**

Baltimore 15th Dec. 48. ¹

My Dear Friend.

I think we are acquainted enough to talk with you freely, what my humble opinion is about the convention of Rabbis, spoken of in your last periodical. I know very much that you are sincere in religious matters as you are the latest [last]² who would make any innovation, but let me tell you as a friend you have to consider also, that in your early lives [life] you were mingled with the american life; many of your Ideas will not do for true Judaismen, though you may think it is no harm in it. The כוזרי³ says “כונתך רצויה ומעשיך אינם רצוים” (your intentions are acceptable but not so your acts), what is by many the case now. Further you know, that we have a certain class, which the word “Religion” is every moment in their mouth, but in their hearth is nothing as selfishness & the true we all act is wanting. What benefit shall arise from this “reunion”? If יראה⁴ according to our , one Jew can live in one corner of the world & yet שלחן ערוך⁵ we have with him one rule & regulation. Can we establish better rules as we find written down by our ancient [writers]⁶? Or will we please the spirit of [the] times? if we would adhere conscientiously to our rules? Will they not say? [::סנהדרין צט:] (“of what use are the Rabbis to us? They have never permitted us the raven, nor forbidden us the dove.” Talmud Babli—Sanhedrin 99:2.)

Is the convention of the German Rabbis lost from your memory⁷? Are our Rabbis better men? Have we not some wolves clothed in sheepcover? How

¹ Copied (though slightly edited for clarity) from Gary Phillip Zola and Marc Dollinger, *American Jewish History: A Primary Source Reader* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2014), 81-82.

² As a Bavrian immigrant to the United States, English was not Rice’s first language. Corrections in brackets such as this one were made by Harold I. Sharfman in *The First Rabbi: Origins of Conflict Between Orthodoxy & Reform: Jewish Polemic Warfare in Pre-Civil War America: A Biographical History* (pages 239-241). Sharfman only chooses to correct certain mistakes and not others. Zola and Dollinger copy his corrections into their book. For the purposes of historical authenticity, I will leave all mistakes left uncorrected by Sharfman in their original form.

³ Transliteration: Kuzari. Book of Jewish philosophy written by Spanish Jew Judah Halevi. Published originally in Arabic in 1140.

⁴ Transliteration: Yir’ah. Sharfman translates this as reverence, in reference to God. Another common definition is fear. I include both to be as comprehensive as possible.

⁵ Transliteration: Shuchan Aruch (lit. set table). Book of Jewish law for everyday use, incorporating biblical and rabbinic ordinances, written by Joseph Karo in Safed (then under Ottoman rule) in 1563.

⁶ Likely a reference to Babylonian Talmudic law, compiled in its final version in the 6th century CE.

⁷ In *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* Michael Meyer details three Rabbinical assemblies or “conventions” held in Germany in the mid-1840s. The assemblies made significant changes to Jewish practice, including the amendment and shortening of prayer, loosening of stringencies on ritual baths (see note 8), removing the second day of holidays in the diaspora (see note 9), among others.

is it possible to establish an equal Reform in our prayers? & if it were possible what is done for true religion? These are only form & not [the] essential part of religion. Would or can this convention establish rules for keeping the Sabbath strikly⁸? That every married Jewish lady has to go to ? Or will come the מקוה⁹ question for them, to abolish the second day of ? I, for my part, can tell this יי"ט¹⁰ prophesy, that the latter question will come sooner off.

You must not charge me, that I am too sanguinish, the heaven is my witness, that I deliberate very cool, but I am afraid for such a convention
 ואתה ! תקוה לגדל ענבים ותקבל באושים ויקר לעשות ענבים ויעש באושים ישעיה ה-ב
 ("And he looked that it should bring forth grapes, And it brought forth wild grapes." Isaiah 5:2¹¹)

The only result will be, we will have more permissiveness and liencies [licentiousness] & no strength at all will derive from it.

I ask you? are we better Jews, if we say not any longer ? Comes פיוטים¹² more Devotion in our Synagogues if we have a Choir.¹³ I say candidly, no! All is nonsense, we have here a Choir, Our Chasan¹⁴ & the whole Congn dont know what is devotion. This is all spoken of to please the spirit of [the] time[s] & to be like other sects.

In the same manner, I consider such a Convention, we like to be like other sects, they have their convention we must have ours too. Our שלחן ערוך¹⁵ is our Conference. We have no power to alter one Iod¹⁶. Instead to call חזק ונתחזק (Be strong and let us be strengthened for the sake of our people) we will call [ב"מ קז:] ("justify yourself and then justify others"—Talmud Babli—Baba Metziah 107:2¹⁷).

If every Rabbi has a true Jewish spirit & he will act according to our true religion, & keep st[r]ictly to our דין (law), than every one will bring back few to

⁸ The Jewish Sabbath lasts from Friday evening at nightfall until the emergence of three stars on Saturday night. As the Sabbath is ideally a day of rest, there are a plethora of rules forbidding common activities considered "work," such as manual labor, lighting fires, cooking, carrying in public, and many more.

⁹ Transliteration: Mikvah or Mikveh. This is a Jewish ritual bath of natural, still water. In Jewish legal tradition, after a woman ceases her menstrual bleeding, she waits a period of seven "clean" days before immersing herself in a mikvah. Until she completes this immersion, marital relations (according to some, even physical touch with her husband) are prohibited.

¹⁰ Abbreviation for יום טוב. Transliteration: Yom Tov. These are the particular days of biblical Jewish holidays (Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot), located at the beginning and end of the holiday, during which most work-related activities are forbidden. In the land of Israel, one day of Yom Tov is observed. In the diaspora, two days are observed. For example, in Israel, Passover is observed for seven days, with only the first and seventh as days of Yom Tov. In the diaspora, the first and second days of Passover are Yom Tov and the seventh and an additional eighth day are as well. These rules date back at least to the Talmud (6th century). Here, Rice is worried that a convention of Rabbis would band together to change diasporic holiday observance to that of the land of Israel.

¹¹ The Book of Isaiah is part of the Prophets section of the Hebrew Bible. It is a prophecy of redemption of Jerusalem around the era of the Babylonian exile and destruction of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.

¹² Transliteration: Piyyutim. These are Jewish liturgical poems. Rice was a proponent of keeping piyyutim in prayer services, despite the fact that they were often long and, as they were in Hebrew, not understood by many congregants.

¹³ In most Orthodox synagogues of Ashkenazi tradition there is no choir.

¹⁴ Hebrew: חזן. Leader of prayer services.

¹⁵ See note 4.

¹⁶ Hebrew letter י. The smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet.

¹⁷ Baba Metziah is a tractate of the Babylonian Talmud (Talmud Babli) which deals with damages and torts. Pages of the Talmud are recorded by the page number followed by the side of the page. In this case, it is the backside of the 107th page.

true religion

וכל המקיים נפש אחת מישראל כאילו קים עולם מלא [סנהדרין לז]

(“one who saves one Jewish life, is as he preserved an entire world”—Talmud Babli—Sanhedrin 37:1¹⁸). To bring the eyes of the world on our Convention is nothing for a man who will do nothing for the world, only for the good of his faith.

My Dear, I hope you will not find yourself offended by my talking. You know me—for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. Take therefore the admonition of a true friend & consider well, before you go in, for such a step; on the consequences of introducing such a convention, who will be attended with dangerous consequences[.]

I remain for ever, Your truly friend & humble servant

A Rice

NB. You must not laugh about my language. I write in English only for that reason, to make me more acquainted with the words.

American Jewish religious practice in the middle of the nineteenth century was characterized by various attempts at reform and subsequent traditionalist backlash. During this period, involvement in American Judaism began slipping due to a plethora of variables, including intermarriage, the isolation of Jews who participated in Western exploration, and disunity between Jews of German descent and those of Polish descent.¹⁹ American Jewish leaders, both Orthodox and Reform, proposed several solutions. The most prominent American Jewish reformer was Isaac Mayer Wise, whose efforts for unity and moderate reform caused adaptations and new Jewish movements. In 1848, Wise proposed a conference of leaders of American Judaism to create camaraderie amongst the country’s Jews.²⁰ Wise was not, however, the first American Jewish leader to suggest such an ecclesiastical gathering. In 1841, a Philadelphian Jew named Isaac Leeser suggested the same thing.²¹

Isaac Leeser immigrated to the United States from Germany in 1824. In 1829, Congregation Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia hired Leeser to lead prayers and help perform certain rituals as their *hazan*; Leeser was not an ordained rabbi.²² Leeser’s vision for his community was one of “regeneration.” Though he proposed the aforementioned union in 1841, Leeser was not a Reform Jew. He was Orthodox, and he publicly and frequently admonished his community for their sinning and breach of Jewish law. Yet, at the same time, he was firmly committed to adapting traditional Judaism—within the parameters of *halacha*, Jewish law—to modern American culture. He preached sermons in English

¹⁸ Sanhedrin is a tractate of the Babylonian Talmud (Talmud Babli) which deals with criminal law and punishments.

¹⁹ Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*, Second (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 70-74.

²⁰ Gary Phillip Zola and Marc Dollinger, *American Jewish History: A Primary Source Reader* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2014), 81.

²¹ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 104.

²² *Ibid.*, 76.

rather than German, Hebrew, or Yiddish.²³ He didn't excommunicate wayward members of the community, and he sought to join the modern, enlightened pursuit of knowledge and asceticism.²⁴ Leeser had a prolific writing career. He published his English sermons, translated the Hebrew Bible into English, and established a monthly journal titled the *Occident*. While a conference of Rabbis may have helped solve the *disunity* of American Judaism, Leeser's wide-ranging publications were an avenue for those isolated Jews taken westward by Manifest Destiny to reconnect to their faith in a uniquely American way.²⁵

Not all Orthodox Jews were open to Americanization. Chief among this category was Rabbi Abraham Rice. Rice immigrated from Bavaria in 1840. Unlike Leeser, he *was* a rabbi. In fact, Rice was the first ordained Rabbi to settle in America.²⁶ He soon became the rabbi of Baltimore Hebrew Congregation in Baltimore, Maryland.²⁷ Rice resisted reform perhaps more than any of his contemporaries. He was staunchly Orthodox; he called for renewed, strict observance of the traditional laws of burial, marriage, diet, prayer, and the Sabbath. Rice resented many aspects of modern American culture and chose to remain highly isolated from it. In his view, America—and, to a certain extent, its Jews—misguidedly chose excessive liberalism over religious obligation. As is reflected in this letter, Rice did not even attain fluency in English.²⁸ Unlike his Reform (or even Orthodox, in the case of Leeser) contemporaries, Rabbi Abraham Rice had no desire to Americanize Judaism or adapt its traditional observance to modernity.

In this 1848 letter, Rice conveys his worries about Wise's proposed conference of American Jewish rabbis to Isaac Leeser. Leeser, though Orthodox, had publicly (and unsurprisingly, considering he proposed such a gathering seven years prior) supported Wise's conference in the *Occident*.²⁹ Here, Rice ventures to change his mind, arguing that the convention would be nothing more than a breeding ground for significant and dangerous religious reforms. The language barrier is abundantly clear to any reader, as is Rice's Orthodoxy and breadth of Jewish textual knowledge; he references biblical, Talmudic, and other Jewish texts numerous times in their original Hebrew or Aramaic. For historical study, however, the most important elements of the letter are the particular methods and themes that Rice employs to try to change Leeser's attitude towards Wise's proposal. These themes—leadership, law, and interactions with modernity and other religious groups—were the defining struggles for American Judaism in the mid-19th century.

I. Jewish Communal Leadership

Rabbi Rice, the first ordained rabbi in the United States. Approximately

²³ Ibid., 78.

²⁴ Ibid., 78-79.

²⁵ Ibid., 81.

²⁶ Ibid., 92.

²⁷ Ibid., 87.

²⁸ Ibid., 94.

²⁹ Zola and Dollinger, *American Jewish History*, 81.

Eleven total European Rabbis immigrated over the course of the 1840s.³⁰ While congregational leaders existed in American synagogues and communities prior to Rice's arrival (Leeser was a *hazan*, for example), it is clear that Rice believed the lack of the true, unflinching leadership of an ordained rabbi harmed Jewish communities. In three places in his letter to Leeser, Rice demonstrates the power of rabbis and illustrates what had happened in America without them. First, without rabbis, American Jewish communities suffered from a lack of honest moral guidance. Rice accuses communal leaders of not truly caring about maintaining Judaism, saying, "Are our Rabbis better men? Have we not some wolves clothed in sheepscover?"³¹ By "Rabbis," he means not merely the dozen ordained immigrant rabbis but non-ordained leaders as well. Second, Rice does not believe that congregations can know true "devotion" without a Rabbi, even if they had a spiritual leader *hazan*. He writes, "Comes more Devotion in our Synagogues if we have a Choir. I say candidly, no! All is nonsense, we have here a Choir, Our Chasan & the whole Congn dont know what is devotion."³² Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Rice believes that the presence of rabbis can help rescue those Jews who were falling off the traditional path. He says, "If every Rabbi has a true Jewish spirit & he will act according to our true religion, & keep st[r]ictly to our דין (law), than everyone will bring back few to true religion."³³ This last quote indicates a very important value for Rice: observance of Jewish law. Without Rabbis, America had fallen out of observance, out of Orthodoxy. In this letter, it is clear that Rice thinks the proposed conference would not solve this problem but worsen it.

II. Jewish Law and Traditional Observance

Jewish law, sometimes referred to as *halacha* and by Rice as "דין" (law), has long been an established force in Judaism. Educated in the elite Bavarian Talmudic academies of Furth and Wurzburg, Rice was deeply entrenched in this legal tradition, and it shows in his letter to Leeser.³⁴ He references, in their original language, the Hebrew Bible, multiple tractates of the Talmud, and one of the defining texts of *halacha*, the *Shulchan Aruch*. He was a firm halachist and believed that Jewish law was the key to Jewish unity, saying, "If we all act according to our שלחן ערוך (*Shulchan Aruch*), one Jew can live in one corner of the world & yet we have with him one rule & regulation. Can we establish better rules as we find written down by our ancient [writers]?"³⁵ Though perhaps naive, Rice's position was that there was no need to meet with reformist splinter groups. Instead, unity would be generated if they simply dropped their protest and returned to *halacha*. As he says to Leeser, "Our שלחן ערוך (*Shulchan Aruch*) is our Conference."³⁶

Rice's letter indicates the particular areas of Jewish law, such as the Mikveh

³⁰ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 91.

³¹ Zola and Dollinger, *American Jewish History*, 81.

³² *Ibid.*, 82.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 91.

³⁵ Zola and Dollinger, *American Jewish History*, 81.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

and observance of Jewish holidays, which were most fragile in America and likely to be subject to reform. Following the laws of Shabbat, the Jewish sabbath, was of particular concern to Rice. Other contemporary sources back up this anxiety; Jewish immigrant peddlers and settlers of the West found it difficult to observe the rules of Shabbat to the utmost extent.³⁷ Rice also opposed the introduction of choirs into the prayer service and the removal of certain prayers. Though not strictly *halacha* (these rules are traditions or norms, not laws), it is clear that Rice did not condone these changes, despite congregants increasingly demanding them. To Rice, Jewish survival would dwindle without Jewish law and legal traditions.

III. Interactions with Modernity and Other Religious Groups

As the title of this paper suggests, modernity and the presence of other religions in an egalitarian America was likely what Rice feared the most. In numerous cases, Rice intimates that the demands of the reformers were the direct results of living amongst people of other religions. Of the proposal to introduce choirs into prayer services he says, “This is all spoken of to please the spirit of [the] time[s] & to be like other sects.”³⁸ In fact, the whole idea of an ecclesiastical conference, to Rice, came from other religions. “In the same manner, I consider such a Convention, we like to be like other sects, they have their convention we must have ours too,”³⁹ he argues. Once again, his concern has factual grounding. Many Jewish leaders, including the very recipient of Rice’s letter, were changing their religious behaviors because of local Christian groups. Leeser began preaching in English because of the indirect influence of the local Unitarian Church, where Christian leaders gave sermons to their parishioners in English as well.⁴⁰ Jonathan Sarna, professor and historian of American Jewish history, writes, “In his own public conduct, in everything from his clothing and demeanor to his writings, speeches, and pastoral work, he modeled himself on the practices of his high church Protestant counterparts.”⁴¹ The institution of Jewish Sunday School was an adaptation of a Christian practice too.⁴² Rice’s letter shows that, while some Jews saw living in an secular society and the resulting cultural diffusion as advantages, others saw it as an absolute threat to traditional Jewish survival.

In Rabbi Abraham Rice’s 1848 letter to Isaac Leeser, Rice writes frankly, nervously, and brashly. Yet, it’s also clear that he writes out of a sense of obligation to help American Judaism survive. According to Rice, if the conference was held against his wishes, “The only result will be, we will have more permissiveness and licencies [licentiousness] & no strength at all will derive from it.”⁴³ He was not trying to be provocative. But like Leeser and Wise, he had his own solutions to a very daunting issue, an issue which plagues

³⁷ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 70.

³⁸ Zola and Dollinger, *American Jewish History*, 82.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 77.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴³ Zola and Dollinger, *American Jewish History*, 82.

American Judaism to this day. His passionate appeal demonstrates a firm belief that far from adapting to American norms, Jews should hold tightly to tradition.

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Sarah Wintner

SURVIVAL BY ACCEPTING SEXUAL SLAVERY:

PIPELS IN THE CAMP

Kapos, “concentration camp prisoner[s]...to whom the SS gave authority over other prisoners,” were a key part in making the concentration camp system run smoothly.¹ Most survivor testimonies describe these people as ruthless and sadistic. The policy of prisoner self-administration was beneficiary to the SS in two ways. From an economic standpoint, the concentration camps did not have to employ as many SS guards and could use these kapos as unpaid laborers. Logistically, making some prisoners more important by giving them extra privileges made prisoner unity virtually impossible. Yet, despite the extensive body of research on the kapos system, the prevalent and systemic sexual assault against young boys by kapos in the concentration camps remains relatively undiscussed. These sexual interactions were so common that a nickname was developed in camp slang to describe the boys that were sexually abused: “pipels,” Yiddish for “small boy,” or alternatively, “Bettmann” meaning “bed man”.² This article will investigate the place of the pipels in the camps, what studying this phenomena can illuminate about the spectrum of consent in the lager (camp), and why discomfort with that spectrum may have -with other factors- led to the erasure of the story of pipels from the traditional narrative of the Holocaust.

I will be using “pipel” as a catch-all term for any sexual encounters between young boys and kapos, whether they were a continuous relationship or a one time “exchange.” While codified to an extent, these relationships were not part of any official Nazi policy and, therefore, inevitably existed on a spectrum. Harry Naujoks, a survivor of Sachsenhausen and Flossenbürg, explains in his autobiography how he remembers the pipels:

At the block for the new arrivals a ‘Criminal’ had the position of a block chief...When new transports arrived at the camp [Flossenbürg], he would pick out the most handsome boys. He gave them their own bed, distributed food, and little dainties. He kept them in

¹ “Glossary,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.), <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/glossary>.

² I would like to point out that there were many different terms in different camps used to describe young boys in sexual relationships with kapos. The term “pipel” seems to have been the most common and that is why I chose it as an umbrella term for this paper.

the barracks during the day, so they did not have to work. Those boys witnessed after a few days what had happened to their comrades who did not have protection.³

This quotation illustrates the complicated position of the pipel; these boys were, nonconsensually, entered into a sexual relationship, and yet, that position came with a degree of protection such that these boys were often envied or hated by their fellow prisoners. Naujoks explains how one pipel “didn’t really have to work but was rather flirting around with the foreman or another prominent prisoner.”⁴ Furthermore, the pipel could become a predatory figure; “If there was anything he needed he simply took it away from other inmates... Someone else polished his shoes. His bed was made by another prisoner. Most of the time he directed the distribution of the food rations and he decided how much everyone would receive.”⁵ The pipel was the “king of the block.”⁶

Postwar recollection of pipels is mostly extremely negative. On the one hand, many survivors categorize pipels as part of the class of privileged prisoners and explain how they took advantage of their positions. To some degree, this claim has factual basis. However, while remembering this is likely not true of all, we should also remember that many of the pipels were young children. Survivor

A.G Adler describes his encounters with one 14 year old pipel in Birkenau: “He is fat and has rosy cheeks. He does not even come up to the shoulders of most inmates but is a strong lout who can do whatever he likes.”⁷ The descriptor of “fat” for anyone in Birkenau is admittedly jarring; countless accounts of survivors note that most adults were only about 80 pounds at liberation. Yet, as Adler describes this child as privileged, he essentially ignores the repeated rape of a 14 year old child by an adult who could have had him murdered at any moment for any reason. In other words, his account discounts the psychological effects of such trauma and how those may have affected interactions with others. The phenomenon of pipels adds further nuance to the larger conversation about what was considered an “acceptable” form of Holocaust survival to the survivor community.

Although it may not have felt like this to the pipels in the relationship, to an onlooker the pipel looked very “lucky” and, therefore, was more likely to survive. Ultimately, luck was a major factor of survival in a Nazi concentration camp: would one be lucky enough to get a “good job”, a nice kapos, a decent

³ Robert Sommer, “Pipels: Situational Homosexual Slavery of Young Adolescent Boys in Nazi Concentration Camps,” ed. Hilary Earl and Karl A. Schleunes, *Lessons and Legacies* XI (2014): pp. 86-104, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv47wb5x.8>, 86.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷ Hermann Langbein, “Sexuality,” in *People in Auschwitz* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 423.

bunkmate? With matters like these out of prisoners' control, prisoners would try to barter what they could, including, often, their bodies. Dr. Gisella Pearl writes in her memoir, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, about the prostitution that she witnessed:

Detachments of male workers came into Camp C almost daily...These men were trusted old prisoners who knew everything there was to know about camp life, had connections in the crematories and were masters at 'organizing'...They chose their women among the youngest, the prettiest, the least emaciated prisoners and in a few seconds the deal was closed. Openly, shamelessly, the dirty, diseased bodies clung together for a minute or two in the fetid atmosphere of the latrine— and the piece of bread, the comb, the little knife wandered from the pocket of the man into the greedy hands of the woman.⁸

The reaction to adult women and young boys who traded sex for favors was similar; both were severely judged and shamed both during and after the war for their survival strategies. Many historical accounts of pipels are not from the pipels themselves but from other camp survivors. Consequently, they are often clouded with moral judgements. Pipel survivors were and are often afraid to speak out about their experiences, either because of intense trauma or because of fear of judgment by their fellow survivors or the world at large.

Furthermore, surviving pipels themselves could feel guilt over their elevation in status within the camp hierarchy to that of "privileged prisoners." Survivor Gilbert Metz, who was only between 12-13 years old during his times in Auschwitz, explains how his friend Yakov was the previous pipel of their kapos and was killed after Metz replaced him. Initially when the kapos made advances at him, he refused. After the refusal, he was sent to work as part of the Zonderkommando. Metz could not handle the extreme emotional stress of preparing his fellow prisoners for death and then disposing of their corpses. After the first day of his Zonderkommando detail, he submitted to his kapos sexually and was able to leave his job. On top of the shame because of the societal taboo of being a male victim of rape, Metz also expressed guilt over the death of his friend claiming that he "died for him."⁹ This double bind of feeling shame and trauma over sexual assault, but at the same time feeling guilty for the position that the submission to sexual slavery provided, makes the story of pipels all the more complicated.

Lacunae around discussion of pipels may be attributed to what historian Dorota Glowacka calls the "landscape of silence" around sexual violence during

⁸ Zoë Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust: A Feminist History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 78.

⁹ Gilbert Metz, interview by Adrian Hirsch, September 3, 1998, transcript and recording, USC Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive, <https://vha.usc.edu/viewingPage?testimonyID=48573&returnIndex=0#>.

the Holocaust, specifically when perpetrated against men and boys.¹⁰ Historian Robert Summner offers an explanation as to why we have this lack of information he explains how, “the subject of young adolescent boys as rape victims by men remains one of the greatest taboos in present-day society, probably because man-male rape signifies emasculation in addition to the physical pain and humiliation the victim suffers.”¹¹ Over the years, a combination of these factors have silenced the stories of pipels and, as historian Dorota Glowacka warns us, “failure to examine the full significance of that silence carries a risk that we will continue to perpetuate and even legitimize gender stereotypes.”¹² Recently, scholars and activists have been working to break down what is seen as the typical aspects of masculinity and femininity. At least as far as pipels are concerned, this has led to a positive shift. Some individuals are willing to be more open about life experiences or traumas that may not fall into the prescribed notions of what it means to be a man or a woman, such as men coming forward in cases of sexual assault or rape. Hopefully, this shift will help us to continue uncovering and understanding more stories and personal narratives of pipels.

Some pipel testimony exists, such as that of Roman Frister. Born in 1928 in Bielsko, Silesia, Frister was the only child of a wealthy family and grew up very well-educated. After the war broke out, he and his parents obtained false identity papers and continued to live relatively “normally.” Eventually, he and his parents were betrayed and sent to the Krakow prison, where his mother was murdered. He and his father were then deported to Plaszow and then to Auschwitz. In 1957, Frister immigrated to Israel and became a journalist, eventually passing away in 2015. In 1993, Frister published his memoir, “The Cap: The Price of a Life,” where, in chilling detail, he describes his experience of rape by Arpad Basci in Auschwitz: “Arpad Basci had a special status in the camp. An expert sculpture of chess pieces, he carved them from a rare material: bread. The camp guards who coveted his work brought him as much bread as he wished. Arpad Basci liked young boys, the young boys in the camp liked bread, and so the world went round.”¹³ Frister further explains how Basci used to force a group of young boys to chew pieces of bread for him so they would be malleable enough to form into sculptures. As payment for their work, the boys were given the crusts of the bread to eat. Frister clarifies that Basci “had a keen

¹⁰Dorota Glowacka, “Sexual Violence against Men and Boys during the Holocaust: A Genealogy of (Not-so-Silent) Silence,” *German History* 39, no. 1 (May 23, 2020): pp. 78-99, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghaa032>, 78.

¹¹ Sommer, *Pipels*, 95.

¹² Glowacka, *Sexual Violence*, 98.

¹³ Roman Frister and Hillel Halkin, *The Cap: The Price of a Life* (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 237.

eye for spotting new victims.”¹⁴ Frister was selected to join this crew of bread chewers only a few short days after his arrival in Auschwitz. After about two months working as a “bread chewer” Basci raped Frister as “payment” for the bread crusts:

My bunkmate said nothing when Arpad Basci ordered him out of our shared bed and slipped into his place behind me. Even before he touched me, I knew what was going to happen. His hand romed my body, a shaky finger searching for the entrance. Smearred with lard, it easily found my anus and corkscrewed into it. Although I tensed my muscles to prevent him, the old man got the better of me. As soon as his finger was withdrawn his penis rammed into me with a single quick thrust. The pain was terrible. I wanted to scream. As if knowing my reaction, he covered my mouth with his hand. In it was a slice of bread. I stifled my cry and ate the bread from his hand. When I finished the first slice a second filled my mouth. I swallowed it quickly in the hops of a third before he ejaculated. An expert rapist, he drilled into me with short, rhythmic strokes. My body felt torn apart. The sharp pain became a burning ache. I was bleeding.¹⁵

It is important to remember that Frister was only 16. I would like to call attention to two aspects of this story. Fristers’ description of Basci as an “expert rapist” illustrates the systemic nature of Basci’s preying on pipels. Basci’s silencing Frister with the bread warrants further review. One could speculate that this was Basci’s way of convincing himself that this sex was a trade, a sexual barter rather than a rape. I will return to the discussion of sexual barter vs. rape later in this article.

The horror of this story does not end with the act of rape, but rather with Frister’s understanding at the time of what had happened to him. Frister explains how after the assault he was “filled with humiliation and shame for having sold my honor for his bread. No, I wasn’t raped. I hadn’t resisted. I hadn’t called for help. I hadn’t even told him to stop. I had said nothing when he gave me a good-night slap on the rear and went off to sleep in his bunk.”¹⁶ This sense of responsibility by a survivor of sexual assault for their own actions or inactions, rather than those of the perpetrator, is common in survivors, especially children. Sometimes, this is an attempt to regain some sense of agency over the events. As someone who was still very much a child (legally, developmentally, emotionally), Frister may simply have not had the language to understand what was happening to him. Another survivor, Sam Weiss, who was also a pipel in Auschwitz at the age of 15, describes his rape by his kapos. Weiss recounts, “He took me to his bed, he raped me night after night. He used to give me that bowl of soup that belonged to someone else, and he stayed on top of me, I had to eat

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, 238.

¹⁶ Frister, *The Cap*, 238.

it. I didn't know what to do, I was a prisoner physically, mentally ... I had no choice ... I had no rights of any kind, I had nowhere to go."¹⁷

Another first hand testimony of the pipel experience comes in the testimony of Kenneth Roman. Born in Gorlitz in May 1926 and sent to Flossenburg in 1943, Roman was placed in block 19, a sort of children's block. He explains how one day, the kapos of Block 7, Willie, came to him and said:

You're not going to work, you're going to be my bettmann. And that was the rule. Every blockalteste had a bettmann [another term for pipel]. And the bettmann's job was to do all his bidding, whatever he wanted. He had a corner of the barrack, a big corner, where he had his own bed, white linen, wardrobe, table, chair. You had to look after it, to keep it tidy. Also you had to wash his shirts, underwear, socks, the lot.¹⁸

One night Willie told Roman to "strip and go into [his] bed."¹⁹ Roman explains how he felt that he had no choice and that he "was shivering so much that the bed was shaking."²⁰ Roman was raped by Willie. He says that "it's impossible to describe the excruciating pain. It was something-- I've been hit, I've been beaten, but there was no equivalent. I was screaming. The more I was screaming, the wilder he got. And he was going mad."²¹ Although Roman's experience was similar to Frister's, he explicitly describes his experience as a rape. Yet, even so, there were subtleties:

On the plus side, apart from not being beaten, he used to give me the odd extra bit of bread. He also-- always from the bottom, you know, when the ladle came, extra bits. And then he gave me underwear. A-- a vest and socks and-- because it was an unwritten rule among the blockaltestes that their possessions, the-- the little bettmenn, were vying with each other who was better looked after. I was his property, you see?²²

Although only 17, Roman clearly understood that sex was a commodity in the camp and was something that he could use to his advantage. This understanding most likely helped him to contextualize his rape as a trade and gave him some manse of mental solace and control. He says that his only outlet was to cry. Roman says, "...the reason why I cried [was] because of the helplessness of the situation. That I was in no position to either refuse or defend myself...one had to wear a false smile and look happy, because they wanted happy boys around them and not miseries."²³ Roman's story makes clear that pipels were not just subject to sex slavery but a comprehensive sex trade. The kapos "were trading boys

¹⁷ Glowacka, *Sexual Violence*, 87.

¹⁸ Kenneth Roman, interview by Shirley Mugraff, April 6, 1998, transcript and recording, USC Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive, <https://vha.usc.edu/viewingPage?testimonyID=43110&returnIndex=0#>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Roman, *interview*.

²³ *Ibid.*

between them,” and Roman himself was traded by Willie to another kapos named Max.²⁴

Roman says that, at the time, pipels received no sympathy for the abuse they faced:

Everybody was absolutely flaming jealous...people are dying of starvation. I mean, people were dying overnight in bed. The person lying next-- next to them, they used to break their hands if they clutched a piece of bread in it. And by the same token, kicking them out of bed to make a little bit more room, so he could rest a little bit better. People have no idea, you know, what hell it was.²⁵

Those hungry and jealous likely did not consider where the food came from just that some had it while they did not. In that context, it is clear why some pipels stayed in (and were sometimes even thankful for) these relationships.

A conservative estimate by historian Robert Summner estimates that there were 1,000 young boys who functioned as pipels.²⁶ With such a magnitude, how did the system perpetuate? It may have partially “worked” due to the nature of the targets. Historian Verena Buser argues that children were better at adapting to new situations in the camps. This argument, combined with survivor and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl’s explanation that camp survival necessitated that people suppress all human instincts other than survival, illuminates how children adapted to the pipel system. As horrific as the rapes were, sometimes the very young pipels did not understand sex enough (or at all) to comprehend what was happening to them. Furthermore, the tolerance for pain in the camps was immense if it meant that it would help the individual to stay alive.

Ultimately, this need or desire to stay alive may even trouble a word I have used multiple times in this article: “rape.” Admittedly, at least in the accounts above, abused boys received no sexual fulfillment from their encounters and describe what happened to them as extremely painful and (at least at first) unwanted. Yet, when discussing adult women in Auschwitz, historian Myrna Goldenberg uses the term “sex for survival” as distinct from rape.²⁷ Legal scholar Catherine MacKinnon and historian Zoe Waxman debate about whether any sexual relationships in a concentration camp could ever be considered consensual. MacKinnon argues that the extreme power imbalance that often led to these sexual relationships immediately eradicates any possibility of consent.²⁸ Waxman, however, says that some women

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Sommer, *Pipels*, 103.

²⁷ Myrna Goldenberg, “Sex-Baed Violence and the Politics and Ethics of Survival,” in *Different Horror, Same Hell: Gender and the Holocaust* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 2013). ²⁸ Waxman, *Women*, 109.

nevertheless did consent to sex in Auschwitz and even on occasion initiated it. To deny this is to deny women's ability to make strategic choices even in extremity—for example, to employ sex as another commodity to be bartered. If we are to see women in history as active agents—rather than as one-dimensional victims—then we need to take seriously the choices they make, even if they do not accord with our own moral values.²⁹

Waxman makes similar argument that many modern feminist scholars use to defend the rights and agency of sex workers: women are capable of evaluating their situation and recognizing that selling their bodies can lead to the best possible outcome. Of course, the situations of these women in Auschwitz are not comparable to those of free women who choose to engage in sex work today, but a similar principle can be applied: onlookers will make judgements on others' choices because they do not fall in line with their views on morality and life situation. Just as we should recognize the agency of modern sex workers, all the more so should we recognize the choices these women in Auschwitz (and in other concentration camps or other women in other situations such as in hiding) made for survival.

Despite the obvious differences between adults and children, we can arguably bring this discussion to the pipels. After all, by using the word "rape," this paper has a priori taken a side and now will grapple with that choice. Admittedly, the pipels most likely would not have been having sex with the kapos if they did not give them bread (or other "gifts" such as clothing) in return (it is noteworthy that although these boys could have been killed for their refusal, they could also have turned the kapos into the SS for "homosexual conduct"); though still, they most definitely did not initiate these interactions. Thus, we are looking at a position where any consent is suspect and with countless asterisks, but where there is some type of exchange occurring. Yet, an obvious objection would be that adolescent boys cannot make the same choices in the informed ways that adult women did

We may also be wrong to impose our image of children and childhood into the world of the lager. Children in concentration camps retained no sense of innocence; they had to be completely self-sufficient. Murder, hunger, and pain were commonalities of everyday life for children in camps. As a result, there was really not much of a meaningful difference between a 16 year old and a 35 year old in Auschwitz. Regardless of age, both faced the same expectations. Having to fight for survival, these children made strategic and risky choices to stay alive. It may be too simplistic to say that all pipels lacked agency. Some of these boys do seem to have evaluated their limited, terrible options and made choices about their survival. As Robert Summner notes:

A sexual relationship could transform rape to sexual barter. Both perpetrator and victim were interested in a long-term sexual relationship rather than a one time event. In any

²⁹ Ibid.

case, it became an active decision to accept sexual slavery and thereby gain a measure of agency. Such sexual barter therefore should be defined as a survival tactic and acknowledged by historians as such.³⁰

Pipels specifically had a sense of choice because of the homophobia of the SS. If a pipel were to report sexual abuse by another male prisoner, the perpetrator would have probably been executed. The abuse would end, but so would the pipels' privileged position. Thus, many boys chose to stay quiet.

Thus, the story of the pipels forces us to consider certain sexual encounters on a spectrum instead of a binary, with rape on one end and consensual sex on the other. Often, language like this emerges when justifying rape (such as the song "Blurred Lines" or various victim-blaming defenses of sexual assault cases). However, my intervention here would be to note that I only create the spectrum not to exculpate the perpetrator, but to recognize the agency of those in essentially impossible situations. The relationships of the pipels with their abusers would mostly fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum (with some closer to one end and some closer to the other). In some cases, pipels were forced into sexual servitude but choose to remain there (by not ratting out the kapos) for safety and privileges. In others, pipels were forced into the initial situation of the camps, but choose sexual servitude over worse possibilities. Nate Leipziger, one survivor, provides such an account of blurred lines. When in Fünfteichen (a subcamp of Gross-Rosen), he was raped by a block elder named Janek. Although this relationship started as rape, it later moved into one of exploitative sexual barter, as Leipziger states, "the relationship with the kapos was not without benefit."³¹ He never ran out of food and his fellow prisoners would leave him alone. To describe Leipziger's situation simply as rape would be to erase the agency that he saw himself as having. Furthermore, the term "rape" neglects how both parties often became interested in a longtime sexual relationship: sex for the powerful and food for the powerless. Leipziger's sexual relationship was his survival strategy. His ability to strategize and reconceptualize the initial attack and use it to his advantage is not something that should be ignored simply because it makes us uncomfortable.

In conclusion, the story of pipels is tragic but also so much more than that. It forces us to consider how to properly recognize the horrors of Nazi concentration camps without erasing the difficult decisions made by those living there. Young prisoners found themselves more able to quickly adapt to what Primo Levi called the "rules of the lager."³² Because of this, many pipels were

³⁰ Sommer, *Pipels*, 97.

³¹ Glowacka, *Sexual Violence*, 86.

³² Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1996).

able to use sexual slavery as a means of survival. Sadly, many stories of pipels are probably forever lost. Many survivors did not want to share their stories because of anticipated judgment and feelings of shame; their stories will die with them, and many already have. This article was a difficult one to write; these stories are painful to hear, as they offer us a glimpse into one of the darkest moments of humanity. Hopefully in the future, historians can work to not alienate any aspects of survival, no matter how uncomfortable they make us feel. We must remember that the Holocaust and other instances of genocide upset the normal rules of society and survival; language and concepts that we would balk at in “normal life” might be necessary to use. Recognizing these facts will provide a more complex reading of history and can also ensure that we do not silence any victims' voices.

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