Moses Zacuto

Hell Arrayed (Tofteh ʿarukh)

A Seventeenth-Century Hebrew Poem on the Punishment of the Wicked in the Afterlife

Translated, Annotated, and Introduced by
Michela Andreatta

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Moses Zacuto and Jacob Daniel Olmo, frontispiece of *Sefer tofteh ʿarukh [...] we-Sefer ʿeden ʿarukh*. Venice: Stamperia Bragadina, 1743. Harvard University, Widener Library, Heb. 41800.853. Photo: Michela Andreatta.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The idea of translating Moses Zacuto's dramatic poem *Tofteh 'arukh* originated several years ago while I was doing research in Jerusalem at the Library of the Yad Ben Tzevi Institute and at the National Library of Israel. At that time, I was working on a project on the prayer books of devotional Jewish confraternities in early modern Italy. Thanks to the unmatched resources of the two libraries and to their accomplished staff, I became aware of the extraordinary role that these groups played in producing, reading, and circulating religious and moralistic Hebrew poetry. Among the vast array of texts, largely still to be thoroughly investigated, *Tofteh 'arukh* stood out as the most singular one. A grant from the Cecil and Irene Roth Memorial Trust subsequently allowed me to focus my investigation on this remarkable work and the specific culture of which it was the product. My annotated Italian translation of *Tofteh 'arukh* with parallel Hebrew text was published in Milan in 2016 in the Bompiani series directed by the late Giovanni Reale.

While the present volume partly draws upon the research work done towards that first translation project, much of it is the result of subsequent reflections, spurred by the feedback that I received over the last few years through lectures and presentations delivered at the Renaissance Society of America, the Association for Jewish Studies, the British Association for Jewish Studies, the Medieval Hebrew Poetry Colloquium, and other academic venues.

The opportunity to collaborate as translator with the Los Angeles-based company Theatre Dybbuk on the production of *Hell Prepared*, which premiered in summer 2019 and whose script was inspired by *Tofteh 'arukh*, stimulated me to further consider the performative aspects embedded in Zacuto's work and how they conditioned the poem's reception. For that opportunity I am particularly indebted to Erith Jaffe-Berg and Aaron Henne. I would like to thank Matti Huss for reading the revised version of the manuscript and generously offering many insightful remarks.

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Michela Andreatta
University of Rochester

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

ON MOSES ZACUTO'S LIFE AND WORKS

From Amsterdam to Mantua

On 1 October 1697, a Tuesday and the second day of the holiday of Sukkot, Moses ben Mordecai Zacuto[1] passed away in his home in the *Contrada del Grifone* in the ghetto of Mantua.[2] A renowned practitioner of the Jewish mystical tradition known as Kabbalah, Zacuto was also a revered legal scholar and an extraordinarily accomplished poet in Hebrew. At the time of his death, he had been living in Mantua for almost thirty years, serving as a rabbi while also preaching to the community and teaching at the local yeshiva. He had relocated there in 1673 after spending the previous three decades at the service of the most prominent Italian Jewish community of the time, the one housed in the ghettos of Venice.

Zacuto's first ties with the Italian Peninsula dated back to an even earlier period. Born in Amsterdam at the beginning of the seventeenth century[3] into a family of Portuguese *converso* descent, as a young boy Zacuto studied under the guidance of Saul Levi Morteira (c. 1596–1660),[4] a former student of the Venetian

[1] The Hebrew version of his name, as Zacuto himself spelled it, was Zakhut. In the will that the rabbi dictated (see below, Chapter 1), Zacuto's name is spelled in Italian twice, first as *Zacuti* and then as *Zecut*. Within Jewish scholarly circles, Zacuto was also known as Ha-ReMeZ, based on the acronym of his Hebrew name (*Rabbi Mosheh Zakhut*). In Jewish exegetical jargon, the Hebrew word *remez*, which means 'allusion,' is a technical term indicating the second of the four traditional layers of interpretation of Scripture, also known as the allegorical one.

[2] In this period, Mantua's toponymy reflected the urban plan that had been devised and implemented at the beginning of the fifteenth century under the rule of Francesco Gonzaga II. Established between 1610 and 1612, the Jewish ghetto occupied an area partly overlapping with two *contrade*: the *Contrada del Grifone* and the *Contrada del Cammello*. See Signorini, *Mantova*, 16–19.

[3] The date of Zacuto's birth has long been surrounded by speculation, with some scholars, headed by Abraham Berliner (following in Leopold Zunz's footsteps), assigning it to c. 1625 and others favouring an earlier date, c. 1610. The debate has been summarized by Jozeph Michman, who, basing himself on the extant documentation, assigned Zacuto's date of birth to as early as 1607–1609 (Michman, "Moses Zacuto's Early Years," 129–130). Further evidence in support of an early date is provided in Bregman, ed., *"I Raise My Heart"*, 8. Zacuto's tombstone, which is currently held at the Museo Diocesano in Mantua, has been recently identified (see Perani, "Cimitero ebraico di Mantova," 141–142).

[4] On Morteira, see Saperstein, *Exile in Amsterdam*, and Fisher, "Opening the Eyes," which both provide ample bibliographic information. An author in Hebrew and Spanish, Morteira wrote sermons, *responsa*, and several works of apologetics in defence of Judaism.

rabbi Leon Modena. Morteira had arrived in Amsterdam in 1616 on a mission to bring to burial the embalmed body of Elijah Montalto (1567–1616), the famed polemicist and personal physician to Marie de Medicis and Louis XIII. Seeking to establish its own rabbinate, the local Jewish community later appointed him as a rabbi, teacher, and communal preacher. Also among his students was the young Baruch Spinoza, in whose excommunication Morteira was later involved as a member of the local Jewish tribunal. During these first years under Morteira's tutelage, in addition to receiving instruction in traditional Jewish studies and Hebrew, Zacuto probably also received training in the secular disciplines, such as rhetoric and the European languages. Regarding the Latin he had learned as a schoolboy, Zacuto would later, in adulthood, famously state he had observed forty days of fast in an attempt to forget it, thus apparently disavowing this aspect of his education.[5]

In Amsterdam, Zacuto's family engaged in international commercial brokerage; the extensive and varied trade several of its members engaged in is recorded in notarial documents starting from 1614. Zacuto's grandfather Henrique *alias* Moses, after whom he was named, is mentioned in more than fifty commercial deeds dealing with the importation and sale of a variety of commodities, ranging from textiles to sugar to diamonds. He also appears among the founders of the local Bet Jacob congregation and as a member of the dowry society Santa Companhia de dotar orphas e donzelas pobres, a charitable group that was established in 1615 and in which membership was open to those of Sephardi lineage, even if they were New Christians still ostensibly practicing Catholicism.[6] Six of Henrique's children are known from notarial documents: three of them, Abraham Zacuto, Mordecai Zacuto, and their sister Simcha, had joined their father in Amsterdam, where they seem to have also done business independently; another sister, whose name was Isabel Nunes, had remained in Lisbon; Rachel (whose married surname was Athias) had moved to Aleppo; while Sara was the wife of *ḥakham* Isaac

[5] See Schirmann, *Studies in the History of Hebrew Poetry and Drama*, 2:127; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 449. It is worth noting that statements repudiating non-religious studies undertaken at an early age were frequent among Jewish scholars of the time and seem to have constituted a sort of literary commonplace. Rabbi Azariah Figo, later to become a senior colleague of Zacuto in Venice, vividly described how, in his twenties, he resolved to forsake the "handmaid" and devote himself to the "true mistress," thus hoping, by delving into the study of the Torah at the expense of the secular curriculum, "to crowd out the very memory of the sins of my youth" (Bettan, "The Sermons," 459). On other similar statements by Figo, see Ruderman, "Jewish Preaching and the Language of Science: The Sermons of Azariah Figo," 93–94.

[6] On the society Dotar, see Roitman, "Marriage, Migration, and Money: The Santa Companhia de dotar orphas e donzelas pobres in the Portuguese Sephardic Diaspora."

Athias, who can possibly be identified with the homonymous scholar who served as the first rabbi of the Portuguese-Jewish congregation in Hamburg and then, after 1622, in Venice, where he eventually died.[7]

Mordecai Zacuto, Moses Zacuto's father, seems to have had a less smooth career in commerce than his parent. As a result of business difficulties, in 1617 a safe conduct was issued on his behalf by the Dutch authorities. The next year, probably in an attempt to re-establish his trade, Mordecai was in the Polish town of Poznań, dealing in textiles. Back in Amsterdam for a short period of time, in 1620 he must have been in Poznań again, since in that same year he and his brother Abraham got into trouble with the local Jewish community for allegedly not complying with the conditions attached to their trading permit.[8] After 1621, like other former *conversos* in the Netherlands, Zacuto's family relocated to Hamburg, a port city that had remained neutral in the war between Holland and Spain and could thus offer greater economic opportunities.[9] In one of his letters, Zacuto stated that he had studied in Poznań in his early years.[10] It is possible, therefore, that during his family's Hamburg period, when he was in his late teens or early twenties and the local Jewish community had yet to establish its own educational institutions, in view of his family's connections he was sent to the Polish town to study in the local yeshivas.[11] During his stay, he appears to have also studied Kabbalah under the guidance of a teacher by the name of Elhanan, whom he mentions in one of his letters.[12]

Whatever the case, in 1642, by now already in his early thirties, Zacuto was back in Hamburg. From there he sent a letter to Rabbi Samuel Aboab (1610–1694), confiding to him his resolution to emigrate to the Land of Israel and asking for the addressee's advice in view of his links with scholarly circles in Safed.[13]

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[7] See Koen, "Notarial Records," 103, n. 15; see also Michman, "Zacuto en zijn familie," 152.

[8] See Koen, "Notarial Records," 100, n. 1; see also Michman, "Zacuto en zijn familie," 150–151.

[9] See Michman, "Moses Zacuto's Early Years," 131.

[10] See *Iggerot ha-ReMeZ*, fol. 35^{v}.

[11] In 1629, Zacuto's aunt Simcha was still living in Poland. See Michman, "Zacuto en zijn familie," 152.

[12] See Benayahu, "Moses Zacuto from His Departure from Hamburg," 311. Gershom Scholem has proposed the identification of this elusive kabbalist figure with a homonymous follower of mysticism with ties to the city of Vienna (Scholem and Michman, "Zacuto, Moses ben Mordecai," 435). It must be noted that Kabbalah studies were not unknown in Amsterdam either. See Necker, "Kabbalah, Education, and Prayer" and Baumgarten and Safrai, "Moshe Zacuto and the Kabbalistic Circle of Amsterdam."

[13] See Benayahu, "Moses Zacuto from His Departure from Hamburg," 312.

Aboab, who was born in Hamburg into a family of former *conversos*, had been living in Italy since the age of thirteen, first in Venice and then, from 1639, in Verona, and might have played a role in Zacuto's move to Italy (later on, the two would be colleagues in the Venetian rabbinate). At that time, Venice was still a frequent point of embarkation for travellers bound for Egypt and, from there, Ottoman Palestine. Thus, in the spring of 1644, Zacuto visited the city to make arrangements for his proposed emigration.[14] He then returned briefly to Hamburg, probably to finalize his move. The next year, in another letter to Aboab written from Venice, Zacuto confessed that he had resolved to stay in the city on the lagoon for good, together with his wife and daughter.[15] Eager not to lose his services as a teacher and preacher, the Sephardic congregation had apparently pressured him into delaying his journey to the Holy Land. This circumstance seems to be confirmed by the fact that, shortly after his relocation, Zacuto was appointed assistant to Azariah Figo (also Picho, Pichio, or Piccio; 1579–1647). A famed preacher to the Sephardic community and a Talmudist, Figo was endowed with a personality in which strict religious observance was combined with thorough familiarity with secular culture. Both were traits that possibly resonated with his new younger colleague's own disposition, as revealed in Zacuto's letters of this period.

With its port, Venice was also a common destination for travellers, merchants, and pilgrims from around the Mediterranean basin. In the city on the lagoon, Zacuto met and consorted with some of the Palestinian emissaries sent from the famed centres of Kabbalah studies in the Holy Land to collect alms from the Italian communities. Two of them were kabbalists Benjamin ha-Levi of Safed and Nathan Shapira of Jerusalem, who together visited several communities in northern Italy between 1656 and 1663 (the latter died in Reggio in 1664).[16] During their stay, they also disseminated the teachings of Isaac Luria (1534–1572),[17] the leading rabbi and mystic of sixteenth-century Safed, including the distinctive

[14] See Benayahu, "Moses Zacuto from His Departure from Hamburg," 313; Benayahu, "Letters of Rabbi Samuel Aboab," 154, n. 66.

[15] See Benayahu, "Moses Zacuto from His Departure from Hamburg," 313.

[16] See Scholem, *Sabbatai Ṣevi*, 369–370, 478–479; Scholem, "Regarding the Attitude of Jewish Rabbis to Sabbatianism," 62.

[17] Isaac ben Solomon Luria Askenazi, also known as Ha-Ari (Hebrew for 'The Lion'). Although he only authored a few religious hymns and a commentary with glosses on individual zoharic sections, his theories and the liturgical practices that he initiated soon gained him the veneration due to a saintly figure and still largely account for what we know as the modern Kabbalah. Back in Safed, Benjamin ha-Levi had been one of the first editors and promoters of the writings of Luria's direct and most famous disciple Ḥayyim Vital (1542–1620), who had recorded the oral teachings of his teacher, assembling them into a compilation.

devotional practices that he had instituted and that were observed within his circle of disciples.[18] Mostly penitential in nature, these rituals revolved around one of the central concepts of Lurianic Kabbalah, that is, the theory of *tiqqun* (repair). According to this theory, men were responsible for mending the primordial fracture inside the divine substance—from which evil originated—through the strict observance of precepts, the study of traditional texts, and the performance of specific liturgies. Zacuto himself largely contributed to the popularization within Italian communities of two Safedian rituals inspired by the concept of *tiqqun*: the Midnight Vigil (*Tiqqun ḥatzot*)[19] and the penitential fasts known as *Shovavim ta"t*.[20] To encourage and support their observance within his own circle of students and followers, Zacuto also compiled special prayer books meant for the performance of the related ceremonies, some of which were printed during his Venetians years.

[18] See Scholem, *Sabbatai Ṣevi*, 369–370, 478–479. See also Scholem, "Regarding the Attitude of Jewish Rabbis to Sabbatianism," 62, quoting a letter by Zacuto in which the rabbi testified to having performed nocturnal rituals "innumerable times" with Ha-Levi.

[19] This nocturnal observance, whose purpose was to mourn the destruction of the ancient temple in Jerusalem and beseech its restoration, originated in earlier customs that prescribed spending the hours around midnight in prayer and study. In the form in which it was re-elaborated and expanded by Luria and subsequently popularized among the Jewish communities of the Diaspora, the Midnight Vigil was comprised of two distinct liturgies: the first, called "Rachel's Ritual" (*Tiqqun Raḥel*) consisted of the recitation of penitential Psalms, passages from the biblical book of Lamentations, and specially composed elegies (*qinot*); the second, called "Leah's Ritual" (*Tiqqun Leah*), less mournful in content because its focus was on redemption rather than exile, included the recitation of messianic Psalms (see Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, 146–150). Although documentary evidence shows that Italian kabbalists had been familiar with the content and form of the Lurianic Midnight Vigil since the first half of the seventeenth century, it would take a few more decades before the ritual spread and dedicated confraternities were established (see Horowitz, "Coffee, Coffee Houses, and the Nocturnal Rituals of Early Modern Jewry," 40–42 and Andreatta, *Poesia religiosa ebraica*, 70–71, 89, 91).

[20] Since the Middle Ages, among Jewish communities in Europe it had been customary to fast and recite special penitential prayers on Thursdays in the period between Hanukkah and Purim in order to avert epidemics, especially those affecting children, which were particularly feared during the winter months. This ritual was known as *Shovavim ta"t*, based on the initials of the eight portions of the Torah (six in non-leap years) that are read in the synagogue during this period. Under the impact of the Safedian Kabbalah, these days of fasting were reformulated as an expiatory ritual for sins of a sexual nature, especially nocturnal emissions. Making a play on words on the meaning of the Hebrew word *shovav*, indicating a naughty or unruly child (Jer. 3:14), the kabbalists used the acronym *shovavim* as a code term to indicate the demonic children that, according to tradition, men generate with the female demon Lilith whenever they improperly spill their semen—hence the necessity to fast and recite penitential prayers. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, 153–157; Hallamish, *Kabbalah*, 567–594.

In so doing, Zacuto was following a well-established path. Labelled with the technical term *tiqqun*, which also indicated the ritual itself, this kind of compilation had started to circulate in the second half of the sixteenth century in conjunction with the initial dissemination of Palestinian customs. By the mid-seventeenth century, liturgical compilations already constituted a sizeable portion of all Hebrew books printed at that time, and Zacuto thus contributed directly to the further expansion of the genre. His compilations *Shefer ha-tiqqunim* (Venice, 1659), for the liturgy performed on the eves of Shavuot and Hoshana Rabba, *Mishmeret ha-ḥodesh* (Venice, 1660), for the eve of the New Moon, and *Tiqqun shovavim* (Venice, 1673) would later be reprinted several times,[21] bearing witness to the enduring popularity of these rituals among Italian Jewish communities.

The active role that Zacuto played, beginning in his Venetian years, in the dissemination of Palestinian customs overlapped with his contribution to the study and systematization of kabbalistic literature, starting with the main work of medieval Jewish mysticism, the *Sefer ha-zohar* (The Book of Radiance). Less than a century after its first appearance in print, the *Zohar* enjoyed, among the followers of Kabbalah, the status of an authoritative text for both religious practice and doctrine, and had become the object of thorough study and interpretation. Zacuto compiled at least two commentaries on the *Zohar*, both of which were only partially published.[22] The first one was the completion of the compilation that the Venetian physician Joseph Ḥamitz (d. c. 1676), one of Leon Modena's former students, had started and then left unfinished because of his departure for Palestine. The commentary was eventually included in *Yod'e binah* (Those Who Know and Understand), Zacuto's and Ḥamitz's collaborative work on the *Zohar*. Besides their respective explications (including the anthologizing of extracts from previous commentators), *Yod'e binah* also included Luria's annotations on the *Zohar*, an explanation of foreign words found in the work, a list of customs of zoharic origin, and an index of the biblical quotations found in zoharic literature.[23] The compilation was published in Venice in 1658, but apparently never circulated. One of its sections, *Derekh emet* (True Path), collecting Luria's annotations on the *Zohar* and the *Tiqqune ha-Zohar* (a separate appendix to the main body

[21] See Lattes, "Zacuto's Printed Works," respectively nos. 29, 19, 37–42. On the compilation of prayers and hymns that Zacuto put together for the observance of the Midnight Vigil, see below, n. 33.

[22] See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 450.

[23] See Lattes, *Zacuto's Printed Works*, no. 8. On *Yod'e binah* and its place in the constellation of seventeenth-century commentaries on the *Zohar*, see Huss, "The Anthological Interpretation," 12–13.

of the *Zohar*, first published in the Mantuan edition), appeared independently in the same year.[24] As was the case for other Jewish intellectuals before him, Zacuto's career as a published author was interconnected with his involvement, from his first years on the lagoon, in the local production of and trade in Hebrew books. In his capacity as editor and proofreader at some of the printing houses then active in the city, Zacuto oversaw the issuing of several editions of Kabbalah texts, including a number of compilations by Palestinian authors, sometimes also contributing his own prefaces to the volumes.[25] Among them were the printing, in 1658, of *Zohar ḥadash* (New Zohar) and *Midrash ha-ne'elam* (Hidden Midrash),[26] on which Zacuto worked with the same Ḥamitz. Both works comprised zoharic materials that had been only partially included in the first printed editions of the *Zohar* and that were now offered in their entirety, with the addition of Luria's notes.

Zacuto was still living in Venice when, around the mid-seventeenth century, word of the self-proclaimed Messiah Sabbatai Zevi (1626–1676) generated a whirlwind of religious enthusiasm among the Italian communities, followed by a deep crisis of faith and communal strife when he subsequently converted to Islam in 1666. From the beginning, Zacuto's attitude towards the movement had been of cautious expectation. His friend and colleague Samuel Aboab, who at the time was the head of the local Jewish academy, looked with favour on the penitential fervour triggered by the movement, although he harboured doubts concerning the messianic nature of Zevi. Zacuto, on the contrary, did believe in the tidings, but rejected the authority of Nathan of Gaza, Zevi's self-proclaimed prophet, who in his letters to the Italian communities was exhorting them to discontinue some of the Lurianic practices—including the Midnight Vigil—as redemption was now completed.[27] According to Sabbatian sources, when in 1668, after Zevi's conversion, Nathan of Gaza arrived in Venice a few days before Passover, Zacuto met with the by-now-controversial visitor before he was given formal permission

[24] See Lattes, *Zacuto's Printed Works*, no. 4. Zacuto's own annotations on *Tiqqune ha-Zohar* were published in Livorno in 1794, under the title of *Ḥiddushe ha-ReMeZ* (Novelties of Rabbi Moses Zacuto) (Scholem, ed., *Bibliographia kabbalistica*, 207–208, no. 93; cf. Lattes, *Zacuto's Printed Works*, no. 43). The second of Zacuto's commentaries on the *Zohar*, titled *Miqdash ha-Shem* (The Lord's Sanctuary), was included in an abridged version in *Miqdash melekh* (The King's Sanctuary) by Shalom Buzaglo, which was published in Amsterdam in 1750 (Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 450; see also Scholem, ed., *Bibliographia kabbalistica*, 188–189, no. 15 and 207, no. 92). On Zacuto's work of explication of the *Zohar* in light of Lurianic Kabbalah, see Luboshitz, "R. Moses Zacuto's *Zohar* Commentary."

[25] See Lattes, *Zacuto's Printed Works*, nos. 57–61.

[26] See Lattes, *Zacuto's Printed Works*, no. 6.

[27] See Scholem, *Sabbatai Ṣevi*, 501–503.

to disembark and enter the ghetto. During the subsequent fortnight, Nathan of Gaza was questioned by the Venetian rabbis. They eventually forced him to sign a retraction and later drafted a *Memorandum to the Children of Israel*—to which Zacuto also contributed—to be circulated among the European communities. The document denounced Zevi as a false Messiah and an impostor and denigrated his prophet and emissary, warning the Jewish communities about Nathan of Gaza's missionary purposes.[28] From that time on, Zacuto became an open, albeit not vocal, opponent of the movement. However, two of his closest students in Venice, Abraham Rovigo (c. 1650–1713) and Benjamin ha-Kohen Vitale of Reggio (1651–1730), remained staunch 'believers,' as adherents of Sabbatianism called themselves.[29]

Summoned by the Mantuan Jewish community to serve as a rabbi at an annual salary of 2,640 Mantuan *lire*,[30] a considerable sum of money for the time, in 1673 Zacuto moved to the city of the Gonzagas, which at that time was home to one of the largest Jewish communities in Northern Italy. During the years that he spent in Mantua as a rabbi, Zacuto played a prominent role in the public affairs of the community, thus further strengthening his reputation and authority as an expert in Halakhah. In 1676, Zacuto was one of the three local rabbis entrusted by the community with the task of drafting, by order of Duke Ferdinando Carlo Gonzaga, a statute regulating the community's internal legal procedures in matters of civil and personal law.[31]

The city also held a special significance among the followers of Kabbalah as the place where one of the first editions of the *Zohar* had been printed, in 1558–1560.[32] In Mantua, Zacuto continued his activity as a promoter of mystical customs and practices by establishing, in the same year as he settled in town, his own devotional confraternity. The sodality, which was called *Ḥadashim labeqarim* (Daily Renewal), included some of Zacuto's local students and used to gather in the rabbi's own *bet midrash* (house of study) in the ghetto for sessions of study and prayer. Even after his death, his former disciples and followers continued to observe and propagate the liturgical observances he had popularized

[28] See Scholem, *Sabbatai Ṣevi*, 764–768.

[29] See Scholem, *Studies in Sabbateanism*, 510–529.

[30] See Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 580.

[31] See Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 361–366.

[32] A second edition of the *Zohar* appeared, almost simultaneously, at the hand of competing printers in the nearby town of Cremona.

based on Palestinian usages, starting with the Midnight Vigil.[33] They thus largely contributed to the steady affirmation of this special rite, which would become a staple of the nocturnal life of Italian Jews throughout the eighteenth century—possibly Zacuto's most enduring legacy to the communal life and religiosity of early modern Italian Jewry.

In Mantua, as he had done earlier in Venice, Zacuto also devoted sustained effort towards acquiring, studying, and disseminating the writings of Palestinian kabbalists, in particular those forming the corpus of Luria's teachings as transmitted by Ḥayyim Vital. Besides compiling his own systematizations of Lurianic materials, in this period Zacuto also instructed professional scribes, some of them recruited from among his students, to copy a variety of kabbalistic works on his behalf.[34] He thus further consolidated his reputation as one of the pre-eminent scholars, interpreters, and promoters of Lurianic Kabbalah of his age. An engaged and enthusiastic acolyte of mystical trends from Palestine for almost his entire life, Zacuto never fulfilled his desire to relocate to the Holy Land, a project that, as mentioned, had led him to move from Hamburg to Venice in the first place. In 1679, Zacuto wrote a letter to his disciple Benjamin ha-Kohen Vitale, who at that time was serving as rabbi in his native town of Alessandria in Piedmont, recommending they both put aside their plans to relocate to Ottoman Palestine because of their moral obligations towards their respective communities and in view of the precarious health of both their wives.[35] Zacuto's first wife, Esther, to whom the rabbi refers in the letter as "badly suffering of boils," would indeed die later

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[33] Zacuto's compilation for the Midnight Vigil held during the three weeks between the fast days of the seventeenth of Tammuz and the ninth of Av was first published after his death as *Seder tiqqun ḥatzot* (Venice, 1704) at the initiative of an unspecified *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* confraternity, possibly local. In 1712, a prayer book containing the midnight prayers according to the use established by Zacuto was printed by the Mantua confraternity *Shem ṭov we-so'ed ḥalashim* (Good Name and Support of the Weak) (see Lattes, *Zacuto's Printed Works*, no. 36). Several other compilations for the Midnight Vigil according to Zacuto's own ritual usage were to appear in print in the following decades.

[34] See Avivi, "Solet Nekiya," 91–97; Avivi, *Kabbala Luriana*, 2:724–746. During Zacuto's years in Mantua, one of these scribes was Samuel David Ottolengo (1659–1718), who later was to serve as a rabbi in Padua and then in Venice. In the 1680s, likely carrying out Zacuto's own instructions, Ottolengo copied several manuscripts containing kabbalistic materials, including some of Zacuto's own compilations. See, for example, JCM, Ms. ebr. 54 and Ms. ebr. 108; BL, Add. Ms. 27082; LHAS, Ms. Kaufmann A 368; RSL, Ms. Guenzburg 411; JTS, Ms. 1593; NLI, Ms. Heb. 1960=8.

[35] See Roth, 147–148; see also Benayahu, *A Single Generation in the Land*, 338, 348; Benayahu, "Letters of Rabbi Samuel Aboab," 156–157.

in that same year.[36] Zacuto then remarried, and went on to spend the rest of his uncommonly long life in Mantua.

Poetry and Drama

On account of his complex personality and remarkable life, Zacuto encapsulated several of the cultural traits and existential contingencies characteristic of early modern Judaism.[37] During his early years, first in Amsterdam and then in Hamburg, he absorbed the specific culture of the Iberian immigrants, most of them of Portuguese origin, who formed the backbone of the newly born local communities. Many among them were former *conversos* who had returned to the religion of their ancestors after their families had lived for generations as Catholics in the Iberian Peninsula. Therefore, several bore the signs of the disjunctive experience they had gone through. Religious skepticism, the harbouring of heterodox opinions, or a defiant stance towards rabbinical authority were among the variegated attitudes marking the inner life of these individuals, whose wide spectrum also included, at the opposite end, staunch and zealous adherence to the reclaimed Mosaic faith and practice.[38] These communities were moulded by Iberian culture: their scholars and men of letters were steeped in Spanish and Portuguese literatures, and consciously adhered to Iberian models even when they chose to write in Hebrew. Less well versed, for lack of exposure, in traditional studies, the Jews of Amsterdam looked for support and assistance to older and more established communities in Italy and Eastern Europe. To consolidate their internal autonomy and authority, the new communities hired Sephardic rabbis from Venice—some of whose communities had already experienced the challenges posed by the integration of former *conversos* returning to Judaism—and sent their more promising youngsters to train in Halakhah in the famous yeshivas of Poland.

Zacuto's relocation to Italy brought to completion the processes of mobility and multisided acculturation that he had been undergoing since his early years. First in Venice and then in Mantua, he also became actively involved in the thick network of relations linking the Jewish centres in Ottoman Palestine to Italy

[36] See Bregman, ed., *"I Raise My Heart"*, 14.

[37] For an analysis of the main historical and cultural factors that shaped the early modern Jewish experience, see the comprehensive study by David Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry*.

[38] On the social and religious issues that marked the life of communities of former *conversos* in this period, see the classic studies by Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation*; Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, 110–178, 308–377; Kaplan, ed., *Religious Changes*; Yovel, *The Other Within*.

and the rest of the European diaspora. The range of action of this network went from collecting alms to support the yeshivas and synagogues of the Holy Land, to printing the works of Palestinian authors in the Venetian Hebrew printing shops, to aiding emissaries visiting the European communities—all domains in which Zacuto made his distinctive contributions.

The seventeenth century, most of which coincided with Zacuto's remarkably long life, saw the rise of Kabbalah to near hegemony in Italian Jewish culture. This phenomenon had started in the second half of the previous century with the spread of Lurianic theories, their penetration into Jewish liturgy and customs, and the consequent explosion of mystically inclined devotional and ethical literature, all developments to which, as mentioned, Zacuto's contribution was paramount. A follower of both speculative and practical Kabbalah, Zacuto was also a noted exorcist and healer, acquainted with contemporary medical practices and natural philosophy and, as testified by his letters, an active participant in networks in which healing knowledge was circulated and exchanged.[39] It is worth noting that among his closest disciples were Jewish scholars of rank, some of them endowed with similarly multifaceted mindsets, such as the Mantuan rabbi Aviad Sar-Shalom Basilea (c. 1680–1749). Himself a stern defender of Kabbalah, Basilea was also a keen student of optics, with a hands-on attitude towards scientific inquiry.[40]

Italy was also the place where Zacuto wrote most of his poetic oeuvre in Hebrew, pursuing genres that were prominently cultivated by contemporaneous Italian authors too, such as occasional poetry, devotional and religious lyric, and drama. Unsurprisingly, Zacuto's poetry is also the area of his intellectual production in which the degree of his multifaceted acculturation can be most appreciated. His occasional compositions and dramatic verse in particular exemplify his remarkable ability to appropriate Italian baroque poetics as well as some of the rhetorical devices typical of Counter-Reformation literature, graft them onto the mould of formal elements borrowed from the works of the Spanish Golden Age (*Siglo de Oro*) that had informed his early cultural heritage, and eventually transfer all these differing conventions into Hebrew by adapting them to Jewish topics and themes.

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[39] On this fascinating aspect of Zacuto's activity, see Chajes, *Between Worlds*, 87–95; Chajes, "Rabbi Moses Zacuto as Exorcist"; Weinstein, "Kabbalah and Jewish Exorcism"; Baumgarten, Harari, and Safrai, "Zacuto's Alpha-Beta."

[40] See Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 213–228. On Basilea, see also Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 696–697 and *passim*.

Zacuto's extant works—partly still unpublished[41]—are as numerous as they are varied. Indeed, they bear testimony to their author's formidable command of Jewish traditional sources, his astonishing mastery of the Hebrew language, and an intellectual sensitivity attuned to the tenor of his times. Spanning from halakhic commentaries to kabbalistic compilations to manuals on the magic use of divine names, Zacuto's non-poetic writings began to be widely circulated soon after his death. As testified by a vast manuscript tradition, his mystical and legal works were widely copied and disseminated; in some cases they were excerpted and abridged by other scholars who quoted them at length in their own publications.[42] Zacuto's commentary on the Mishnah was published as early as 1719, in Amsterdam under the title *Qol ha-ReMeZ* (Voice of Rabbi Moses Zacuto).[43] A collection of his legal responsa appeared in print in Venice in 1760, in an edition that also included halakhic rulings on related issues by other rabbis among Zacuto's contemporaries.[44] A selection of sermons attributed to him, whose authorship is still a matter of debate, was published in Salonika in 1786, inserted in the collection *Be'er mayim ḥayyim* (Well of Living Waters) by Isaac ben Jacob Levi.[45] Finally, a selection of his letters containing references to Kabbalah was published in Livorno in 1780.[46] Although it included only a small portion of Zacuto's vast correspondence, the publication was indicative of the interest and reverence surrounding his figure. In fact, while letter-writing held a central place in early modern Hebrew literacy, personal correspondence was seldom printed.

Zacuto's poetic oeuvre similarly knew a wide circulation. Due to their intended readership and specific modalities of consumption, several of his occasional poems and sacred lyrics were already circulated and published during his lifetime. Animated by a tireless flair for experimentation and innovation, Zacuto engaged a varied array of literary genres and forms, constantly seeking to expand the potentialities of poetic expression and overcome the limitations of a linguistic medium confined to written texts. As his extant autograph manuscripts show,

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[41] For a list of Zacuto's published works, see Lattes, "Zacuto's Printed Works"; Bregman, ed., *"I Raise My Heart"*, 7, n. 7. An ample although incomplete list of the manuscripts containing Zacuto's writings is included in Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 740–741.

[42] See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 450–451. Specifically on Zacuto's works on Kabbalah, see Scholem, *Catalogus Codicum Hebraicorum*, nos. 60, 62 and 105–113; see also above, n. 24.

[43] See Lattes, "Zacuto's Printed Works," no. 22.

[44] See Lattes, "Zacuto's Printed Works," no. 26.

[45] See Lattes, "Zacuto's Printed Works," no. 46; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 450.

[46] See Lattes, "Zacuto's Printed Works," no. 1.

he was also a meticulous editor of his own compositions, a characteristic that indicates his deep concern with his own reputation as a poet.[47] Zacuto's poetic production contributed significantly to his fame as one of the most prominent authors of his age and inspired eloquent tributes by contemporary fellow-poets as well as immediate epigones. Jacob Frances (1615–1667), alongside Zacuto the greatest representative of Italian-Hebrew poetry of the baroque, praised him as a superb poet and certainly the greatest among his contemporaries.[48] A native of Mantua, Frances had been linked to Zacuto by ties of friendship and mutual respect, an interesting circumstance given his animadversion towards Kabbalah and his open criticism of some of its adherents. Zacuto's poetic genius would later also be acknowledged by the famed Italian poet and mystic Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto (1707–1747), who in his treatise on poetics labelled him as "great divine light" and "first among the poets."[49] More than a century later, Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865), in his introduction to the festive prayer book according to the Italian rite, would describe Zacuto as an "eminent and vigorous poet."[50] Unsurprisingly, Zacuto is also mentioned in the list of Jewish authors compiled in rhymed verse by his contemporary Daniel Levi de Barrios (1635–1701), himself of Marrano descent and a poet in Spanish.[51]

The extensive corpus of Zacuto's poetic production has as many facets as the many-sided personality of its author. Broadly speaking, it can be clustered according to three main sub-genres, namely religious verse, occasional poetry, and moral drama. The first category comprises a sizeable number of sacred hymns for special occasions, some of which had a penitential nature, such as those meant for the Midnight Vigil, while others marked major recurring festivals in the Jewish calendar. This specific section of Zacuto's production was, in fact, part of a wider cultural phenomenon. Starting in the second half of the sixteenth century, the spread of Kabbalah and the penetration of mysticism into liturgical practice had triggered a revival of liturgical Hebrew poetry (*piyyuṭ*), soon to become a far-reaching phenomenon. Italian rabbis and literati started to pen a variety of para-liturgical hymns to be recited on specific occasions or during the newly instituted

[47] See Bregman, ed., "*I Raise My Heart*", 24.

[48] See Naveh, *Poems of Jacob Frances*, 267.

[49] See Luzzatto, *Sefer leshon limmudim*, 52, 55.

[50] See Luzzatto, ed., *Maḥzor kol ha-shanah*, 2 [= part 3]:18.

[51] See Kayserling, "Histoire de la littérature juïve," 92. For further commendations of Zacuto's poetic work by his contemporaries, see Bregman, ed., *"I Raise My Heart"*, 22–23.

observances established locally under the impact of Palestinian usages.[52] By the mid-seventeenth century, several of the collections of *tiqqunim* then circulating in print also incorporated modern *piyyuṭ*, and in some cases the contribution of modern authors was pre-eminent. Zacuto followed suit by inserting his own hymns in the special prayer books that he himself compiled.[53] Indeed, thanks to the impact of print and owing to the reverence in which his figure was held, some of his sacred compositions would soon become fixtures in the ever-expanding and otherwise fluid repertoire characterizing this specific category of devotional writing.

Acquainted with the latest literary trends and the book market, Zacuto also worked for several decades at a collection of sacred hymns meant for the different festivities of the Jewish calendar. Eventually printed posthumously in Amsterdam in 1712, with the title *Hen qol ḥadash* (Here's a New Voice),[54] Zacuto's collection was modelled on similar compilations by Palestinian and Ottoman authors that had been circulating in print since the mid-sixteenth century. Among them, the most influential had been *Zemirot Yiśra'el* (Israel's Songs) by Israel Najara (c. 1555–c. 1625), the first monographic collection by a Hebrew poet to be published (and then also republished) while its author was still alive.[55] Liturgical and semi-liturgical poetry was customarily meant to be sung, and Zacuto's own compositions were no exception. Therefore, following a system already used in Najara's *Zemirot Yiśra'el*, Zacuto's collection too provided an indication of the tune that each hymn had been set to, some of them drawn from the traditional synagogue repertoire while others were borrowed from popular songs.[56]

A second important segment of Zacuto's poetic production is formed by his occasional poems. These include a conspicuous number of compositions celebrating single events of a communal or semi-private nature, such as weddings,

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[52] On the resurgence of sacred Hebrew poetry in early modern Italy, see Pagis, "Liturgical Poetry in Seventeenth-Century Italy." Specifically on modern *piyyuṭ* composed for devotional confraternities, see Andreatta, "The Printing of Devotion," and its bibliography.

[53] For a list of Zacuto's compositions that appeared in print, see Davidson, *Thesaurus*, 4:447, s.v. *Mosheh ben Mordekhai Zakhut*. Some of Zacuto's hymns remained in manuscript and were published only recently in Bregman, ed., *"I Raise My Heart"*, nos. 194–200.

[54] The title is a playful paraphrase of the famous verse from Eccl. 1:9: "nihil novi sub sole" (*en kol ḥadash taḥat ha-shemesh*). On the compilation, see Lattes, "L'opera letteraria," 3–5.

[55] A bestseller of the time, Najara's collection had been printed for the first time in Safed in 1587, then reprinted in Salonika in 1599 in a slightly expanded edition and, in the same year, in a much larger version in Venice.

[56] See Seroussi, "The Musical World."

circumcisions, and deaths.[57] In the early modern period, occasional poetry formed the bulk of the poetic oeuvre in Hebrew of most Jewish authors, a predominance that reflects the intrinsically social function of poetry inside the walls of the ghetto. Epithalamia, elegies, epitaphs, and poems celebrating doctoral degrees, the dedication of new places of worship, or the anniversary of confraternal organizations were often written under commission and could be remunerated. Originally transcribed or printed onto *fogli volanti* (broadsides) for distribution at the event that they were meant to celebrate, Zacuto's occasional poems were passed from hand to hand.[58] Meant for lasting memorialization, some of his epitaphs are still visible, engraved on the tombstones of the Jewish cemeteries of Venice, Mantua, Amsterdam, and Hamburg. Often referred to as best exemplifying Zacuto's mastery of occasional verse are the elegies that he wrote to mark the deaths of famous rabbis and scholars. Among them, the elegy composed to commemorate the passing of Saul Levi Morteira stands out for its sophisticated and innovative prosodic form. It consists of a crown of seven sonnets—one for each day of the Shiva or week-long mourning period—that eloquently bespeaks the respect and gratitude that Zacuto nourished towards his former teacher.[59]

A scholar and cultural promoter, Zacuto also penned several encomiastic poems for books to celebrate the printing of works by Jewish authors.[60] This part of his production in verse is tightly related to his involvement in the Hebrew publishing industry in Venice and, indeed, several of these compositions celebrate works of Kabbalah and Halakhah in whose publication he participated as editor or proofreader. Inserted, as was customary, in the initial pages of the book, these compositions were an integral part of the publication's para-text and played a crucial role in presenting, advertising, and commending the newly printed volume,

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[57] On Zacuto's occasional verse, see Bregman, "Wedding Poems." See also Bregman, ed., *"I Raise My Heart"*, nos. 1–43 (wedding songs; of which nos. 28–43 are riddle poems), nos. 44–53 (poems for circumcisions), nos. 105–118 (elegies), and nos. 119–193 (epitaphs).

[58] See the testimony by grammarian and rhetorician Anania Coen stating that in his youth he was able to collect and transcribe several occasional poems by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italian Hebrew poets, which he intended to publish in a collected volume (Coen, *Saggio di eloquenza ebrea*, 39).

[59] The elegy was first published in Kaufmann, "L'élégie de Mosé Zacout," and recently republished in Bregman, ed., *"I Raise My Heart"*, nos. 111–117. See also Bregman, ed., *A Bundle of Gold*, nos. 229–235; Bregman, ed., *The Golden Way*, 255–256.

[60] See Bregman, ed., *"I Raise My Heart"*, nos. 69–82; see also Lattes, "Zacuto's Printed Works," nos. 57–71.

its author, and not infrequently the people involved in the printing.[61] Together with the rest of Zacuto's occasional poems, they open a fascinating window on contemporaneous Jewish society and its cultural practices, as well as on the network of personal and professional relations that marked their author's life.

Both Zacuto's sacred and occasional verse illustrate his extraordinary ability to employ a variety of prosodic techniques, from those pertaining to classical *piyyuṭ*, to the ones developed in medieval Iberia, to forms adapted from Italian poetry, such as *terza rima*, the sonnet, and the octave. Similarly, he often used forms adopted from the Spanish Golden Age, such as the *quintillas* and the *rendodillas*.[62] Some of the characteristic features of Zacuto's poetry, such as the taste for complex and unusual imagery, the frequent resort to plays on words, and the preference for verbal and conceptual accumulation—coinciding with some of the stylistic conventions of the baroque—are well represented in this part of his poetic production. In particular in his sacred hymns, references to Kabbalah are abundant.[63] As it emerges from his work in verse, Zacuto's personality strikes the modern reader as marked by austere religiosity and strict moral integrity. Indeed, unlike other Hebrew poets of his age, some of them rabbis like him, Zacuto did not write love poems and rarely integrated comic elements into his compositions, even when he put his pen at the service of a festive occasion.[64]

A subcategory of Zacuto's occasional verse is riddle poems. He wrote approximately twenty such compositions, a genre that he is credited with introducing into Hebrew and that he helped to formally crystallize, as well as popularize among his fellow poets.[65] In this peculiar genre, a poem of variable length and structure was matched with an image, called a "figure" or "emblem." The image, which sometimes could be replaced by a verbal description, also in verse, was meant to suggest the concept or word that constituted the key to the poem.

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[61] On the role played by poems for books in the design and marketing of early Hebrew printings, see Andreatta, "The Poet in the Printing Shop." On early modern para-text more generally, see Sherman, "On the Threshold," 67–81; Smith and Wilson, "Introduction,"1–14.

[62] For an assessment of the impact of both Italian and Spanish poetry on Zacuto's own poetic works, see Schirmann, *Studies in the History of Hebrew Poetry and Drama*, 2:127–129.

[63] For a discussion of kabbalistic elements in Zacuto's occasional poems, see Bregman, "Moses Zacuto Poet of Kabbalah."

[64] Remarkably, among the few places in his poetry in which Zacuto resorted to humour are the first strophes of *Tofteh 'arukh*, on which see below, Chapters 1 and 3.

[65] See Pagis, "Baroque Trends." On Zacuto's role in introducing this genre into Hebrew, see Pagis, *A Secret Sealed*, 28–33; Bregman, "On the Mystery." Three riddle poems by Zacuto are included in Pagis, *A Secret Sealed*, 225–238; another fifteen have been published in Bregman, *"I Raise My Heart"*, nos. 28–43.

Clues were disseminated in the text itself, sometimes by means of terms in Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese bearing an assonance with a given Hebrew word, in an artful verbal camouflage. A favourite game within scholarly circles, riddle poems soon became a sophisticated and yet popular form of entertainment during social events, such as weddings, at which full-fledged contests were not infrequently held that contributed to transforming this literary pastime into a fashionable practice.[66] Cultivated mostly by Hebrew poets in Italy and Holland—hardly a surprising circumstance given the ties linking some of their Jewish communities—riddle poems fully embodied the spirit of the baroque, with its tendency to interpret reality as puzzling and deceptive, and to construe the world as a labyrinth whose intricacies individuals are expected to navigate with the help of a sagacious and discriminating mind. It is worth noticing that the conceptual complexity that characterized these compositions effortlessly squared with the esoteric side of Jewish tradition, in fact exposing the enigmatic potential of some of the classic devices of kabbalistic speculation such as the numerical value of Hebrew letters and their combination (*gematria*), acrostics, and anagrams. Such elements feature prominently in riddle poems, a circumstance that might contribute to explaining the appeal this genre apparently exerted on Zacuto.

If Zacuto's time was marked by a fascination with riddles, emblems, and verbal complexity, it was as much enthralled with theatre and, in general, with performance, which, far from being confined to the stage, was seen as a constitutive element of a variety of social rituals and conventions. Underlying this attitude was both the quintessentially baroque idea of the world as a gigantic *mise-en-scène* in which individuals each perform their role, and the prominent place held by theatrical practice in contemporary culture. Since the mid-sixteenth century, the Society of Jesus had been prominent in the development of a new form of theatre and an alternative to the secular stage of the classic *commedia dell'arte* by popularizing and promoting didactic and moral drama in the main Catholic countries of Europe. In so doing, the Jesuits also shaped the writing techniques of the literati and the tastes of audiences in all the lands touched by the cultural impact of the Iberian superpower.[67] Under the influence of the pedagogic agenda of the Order, drama had become a staple of both the ethical and rhetorical training of the young

[66] See Pagis, "Baroque Trends," 509–512.

[67] On Jesuit theatre, see McCabe, *An Introduction to the Jesuit Theater*, particularly Part 1; Wetmore, "Jesuit Theatre and Drama," online, and its rich bibliography; Oldani and Yanitelli, "Jesuit Theater in Italy." On the impact exerted by Jesuit culture on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jewish literati, see Miletto, "Jesuit Influence." For a discussion of Zacuto's figure in relation to Jesuit culture, see Bonfil, "Rabbis, Jesuits and Enigmas."

in Jesuit colleges across western and southern Europe. Like didactic poetry and emblem books—two other genres onto which the Jesuits put their distinctive educational stamp in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—school drama was considered an effective medium for inculcating religious and moralistic tenets both in the performers and in the audience. Furthermore, by dramatizing philosophical and theological debates, didactic drama functioned as a students' workshop in the art of disputation, helping them to learn the oratorical and dialectical devices necessary for the confirmation of truth. In an age racked with religious conflicts and cosmological uncertainties, that task was paramount. Written and produced as dramatic exercises rather than professional plays meant for a paying audience, Jesuit drama was deeply concerned with theoretical questions such as those posed by the Horatian reinterpretation of Aristotelian poetics in the attempt to overcome the dichotomy between pedagogic obligations towards 'usefulness' and the hedonistic search for poetic enjoyment. Historical plays set in the classical past were a favourite subgenre, and thus sometimes texts could be written in Latin rather than in the vernacular language.

It appears that Zacuto wrote his first dramatic poem—a didactic work set in the biblical past—when he was still a youth, possibly as part of the training in Hebrew that he received in Amsterdam and Hamburg. Such a circumstance seems plausible if we bear in mind that Zacuto's teacher Morteira had participated in the composition of *Diálogo dos montes* (Dialogue of the Mountains), a dramatic poem in praise of Judaism by former *converso* Reuel Jesurun (*alias* Paulo de Pina), for which he wrote the sermons that were incorporated into the text as parts recited by its allegorical characters.[68] Zacuto's *Yesod 'olam* (The World's Foundation)—the title is a biblical quote from Prov. 10:25 and a metaphorical reference to the figure of the righteous—is constructed around the dramatic rendition of some of the main events in the life of the biblical Abraham, thus presenting an epic portrait, in verse, of the ancient patriarch.[69] In fact, more than

[68] See Philip Polack's introduction to Jessurun, *Diálogo dos Montes*, 12–20.

[69] Until the discovery of *Tzaḥut bediḥuta de-qiddushin* (A Brilliant Comedy of Betrothal) by the Mantuan playwright, theatre producer, and theoretician Leone de' Sommi (on whom see below, Chapter 3), Zacuto had been long considered the father of Hebrew theatre. In fact, although he was not the initiator of Hebrew drama, with *Yesod 'olam* he was nevertheless the first to write a dramatic poem in Hebrew inspired by a biblical subject. *Yesod 'olam* was published for the first time in 1874 by Abraham Berliner, unfortunately in a non-vocalized edition marred by errors and lacunae. In 1875, it was published again by D.J. Maroni, in Livorno, this time in an edition flawed by arbitrary editorial interventions (including the division of the texts into three acts). The incipit of the poem was published in Schirmann, ed., *Anthologie der hebräischen Dichtung*, 289–295; the sections of the poem in which Zacuto adopted the sonnet form are

from the Bible itself, for his dramatic poem Zacuto drew inspiration from *Bereshit rabbah*, the midrash (a form of commentary) on the book of Genesis. According to the exegetical method typical of this kind of literature, the biblical narrative surrounding Abraham was expanded and details that were missing in the original supplemented, thus compensating for the conciseness of the scriptural text.[70] In line with the midrashic reading, *Yesod ʿolam* depicts Abraham as the righteous who rebelled against idolatry, first by shattering the figurines of the idols in his father Terach's workshop to confront his faith, and then by proclaiming his own belief in the only God in a lengthy monologue before King Nimrod; put to test, Abraham survives the ordeal of the fiery furnace, thus also scoring a victory in defence of his creed. In its extant form, *Yesod ʿolam* is unfinished. Apparently, the poem should also have included a second part covering the events related to the later years of the life of the patriarch.[71] Stylistically, it displays a search for poetic experimentation, with the commingling of a variety of prosodic forms (from Spanish *redondillas*, to octaves, to sonnets) according to a convention typical of the Iberian genre of the *auto sacramental*. This feature, combined with the absence of kabbalistic motifs and references, confirms, according to some scholars, its nature as a juvenile exercise in rhetoric and Jewish erudition.[72]

In line with Jesuit school drama, *Yesod ʿolam* focuses on theological questions and aims at religious persuasion. It portrays the epic confrontation between true and false beliefs by staging a series of debates between opposing characters, some taking the form of tense dialogues, others structured as long monologues. What, however, of its intended meaning? On this question, scholars have offered differing interpretations. According to Abraham Berliner, who first edited the text of *Yesod ʿolam*, the poem covertly alludes to the persecutions endured in the Iberian Peninsula by *conversos* suspected of Judaizing, by exalting their spirit of self-sacrifice. The patriarch's figure would thus assume exemplary value, and the poem would function as an exhortation addressed to those who were persecuted

included in Bregman, ed., *A Bundle of Gold*, nos. 213–235. A complete modern edition of the text is still a desideratum. For a critical assessment of the poem, see Calò, "Il *Yessod ʿolam* di Mosè Zacuto"; Michman, "Moses Zacuto's Play *Yesod Olam*"; Sierra, "Lo *Jessòd ʿolàm*"; Bregman, *The Golden Way*, 256–265; Rathaus, "Disputa teologica," online; Davidi, "Hebrew and Jewish 'Autos Sacramentales'," 213–216.

[70] See *Bereshit rabbah* 38:13.

[71] See Schirmann, *Studies in the History of Hebrew Poetry and Drama*, 2:130.

[72] See Schirmann, *Studies in the History of Hebrew Poetry and Drama*, 2:129; Michman, "Moses Zacuto's Play *Yesod Olam*," 24–26.

as well as to those who were witnessing their tragedy.[73] Jozeph Michman, on the other hand, has proposed to frame the composition of *Yesod ʻolam* against the backdrop of the doctrinal controversies that were racking Jewish communities of former *conversos* around the mid-seventeenth century, the most important among them being the one regarding the immortality of the soul. Fuelled in part by the rise of philosophical rationalism and the advent of the New Science, the spread of skeptical theories had turned belief in the immortality of the soul into a litmus test for religious orthodoxy among both Christians and Jews. Besides religious authority, social and political order were perceived to be at stake too in this debate. According to Michman, the composition of *Yesod ʻolam* was triggered, specifically, by the excommunication of Uriel da Costa (also known as Uriel Acosta or d'Acosta; c. 1585–1640), an episode that had perturbed the Jewish communities of Amsterdam and Hamburg in the 1630s. A returning Jew of *converso* background, in his writings da Costa had openly challenged rabbinical authority, the authenticity of the Jewish Oral Law—and hence of revelation—and the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.[74] Conceived as a response to the spread of dangerous unorthodox theories within the communities of former *conversos*, *Yesod ʻolam* should to be read, according to Michman, as the attempt of young Zacuto to endorse rabbinic tradition and thus validate its authority and fundamental role in preserving Judaism as the true religion.[75]

Translating Tofteh ʻarukh

A deep concern with theological questions and the desire to deliver moral instruction also characterize Zacuto's other dramatic poem, the more mature and much more popular *Tofteh ʻarukh* (Hell Arrayed). Apparently composed during the author's Italian years, the 925-verse poem graphically depicts the hereafter of sinners according to the teachings of Kabbalah. Initially circulated within Zacuto's own devotional confraternity in Mantua, the poem was eventually printed in 1715 and was instantly transformed into an early modern 'cult book': explicated and

[73] See Berliner, ed., *Jessòd ʻOlàm,* XXIV. This hypothesis was also backed by Schirmann (Schirmann, *Studies in the History of Hebrew Poetry and Drama*, 2:130). See also Bregman, *The Golden Way*, 237.

[74] On Uriel da Costa and the 'da Costa affair,' see Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy*, 165–173; Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, 53–63. On the *Exemplar humanae vitae*, da Costa's autobiography, see Goldish, "Perspectives on Uriel da Costa's *Example of a Human Life*," and its ample bibliography. On da Costa's critique of rabbinic tradition, see Salomon's introduction to Da Costa, *Examination of Pharisaic Traditions*, 1–24.

[75] See Michman, "Moses Zacuto's Play *Yesod Olam*," 24–26.

annotated, later supplemented by a 'paradisiacal' sequel by a fellow poet, it went through several reprints and was even the object of public readings verging on theatrical performances. Its eccentric and scabrous topic captured the imagination of generations of readers, who were as much enthralled by its outlandish kabbalistic imagery as bewildered by its unrivalled linguistic sophistication.

In view of its remarkable inventiveness and the prodigious complexity of its language, *Tofteh 'arukh* has been generally regarded by scholars as a towering work of pre-modern Hebrew literature and as one of the greatest examples of baroque poetry in Hebrew.[76] Lying at the intersection of esoteric mystical studies and popular religiosity, the poem innovatively mixes homiletics and drama, while drawing upon both the Italian literary tradition and the stylistic conventions of the Spanish Golden Age. As such, *Tofteh 'arukh* is perhaps the poetic work of Zacuto that best conveys the polycentric culture of early modern Italian Jewry of which it was the product and the complex and multifaceted intellectual personality of its author. Despite its significance, the poem still remains to be exhaustively investigated. The first complete modern editions of the Hebrew text have appeared only recently.[77] Previously, only excerpts of the Hebrew poem had been anthologized[78] or published in abridged form.[79] Moreover, except for a translation into Yiddish and a few into Italian,[80] Zacuto's poem is still scarcely known outside the Hebrew-speaking world.[81] The present work aims to fill this lacuna by making *Tofteh 'arukh* available to the English-reading public in the first annotated translation of the original Hebrew text.

The English translation offered here is based on the first edition of *Tofteh 'arukh* published in Venice in 1715. Zacuto's autograph manuscript of the poem, upon which the printing was likely based, has not survived. Most of the manuscripts in which *Tofteh 'arukh* is extant were copied in the eighteenth century and

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[76] Schirmann, *Studies in the History of Hebrew Poetry and Drama*, 2:131.

[77] See Bregman, "A Few Words on *Tofteh 'arukh*," 338–376, and Zacuto, *L'inferno allestito*, 105–208.

[78] See Schirmann, *Anthologie der hebräischen Dichtung*, 296–306.

[79] See David Friedman's partial edition of *Tofteh 'arukh* published in 1922 (Friedman, ed., *Tofteh 'arukh*). Besides cutting a substantial portion of the original, Friedman added stage directions and arbitrarily treated some parts of the text as refrains in an attempt to make Zacuto's poem fit into conventional theatrical parameters.

[80] See below, Chapter 1.

[81] A free English translation of the first eight strophes of the poem is available in Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 611–612. A poetic rendition of strophes 23–48 by Leonard S. Levin is included in *The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization*, 5:1138–1140.

based on either the 1715 edition or on its expanded reprint that included Jacob Daniel Olmo's sequel *'Eden 'arukh* (Paradise Arrayed), which appeared in 1743. One manuscript copied between the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, thus predating the 1715 edition, was produced within the circle of Zacuto's students and acolytes and was apparently based on the autograph.[82] A comparison of the 1715 printed edition with this manuscript supports the assumption that the printed version of *Tofteh 'arukh* did not deviate from Zacuto's authorial intentions and can therefore be relied upon for accuracy and correctness.[83] Furthermore, the 1715 printed edition includes the fully vocalized text of the poem (the original manuscript possibly included only the marking of the short vowels for prosodic reasons); in addition, it is supplemented with a marginal apparatus of explicatory notes and linguistic glosses by Zacuto's former student, the already-mentioned Aviad Sar-Shalom Basilea. As was probably the case for most early modern readers of the poem, I found Basilea's apparatus to be a useful tool for a full comprehension of Zacuto's intricate text. Whenever his glosses helped me to elucidate the meaning of particularly difficult passages for my translation, I have referred to them in my own apparatus of footnotes.

In composing *Tofteh 'arukh*, Zacuto drew upon a variety of different sources whose reconstruction reflects Zacuto's extensive knowledge of biblical, rabbinical, and kabbalistic texts. Therefore, the running commentary I have provided for the translation is primarily meant to assist the reader in unfolding the frequent inter-textual references by citing the sources upon which Zacuto drew and, whenever relevant, by also providing their full text. Such references allow the reader not only to fully understand the contents of the poem but also to better appreciate Zacuto's ability to adapt and reconfigure his many and varied sources into a coherent poetic narrative.

While reproducing the strophic structure of the original and including the occasional rhyme, my English translation of *Tofteh 'arukh* strives to convey the literal meaning of the original Hebrew, rather than offering a poetic rendition of it. Of necessity, most of the linguistic complexity of the original is lost in the translation. There is barely a single verse in the entire poem in which Zacuto did not resort to some of his favourite rhetorical devices, such as alliteration, homophony, and homography. His proclivity for verbal acrobatics responded as much to the poetic conventions of the baroque as to an intentional process of crafting an arcane language, which contributed to making the poem a challenge to understand

[82] LHAS, Ms. Kaufmann A 534. On the manuscript and its vicissitudes, see Chapter 1.

[83] On the reliability of the 1715 edition, see also Bregman's introductory remarks to her edition of the Hebrew text (Bregman, "A Few Words on *Tofteh 'arukh*," 338).

even for its first readers. While this process is lost in the translation, it is discussed and illustrated in the preliminary chapters. It is also occasionally referred to in the commentary to the translation.

Like the poem's prosodic pattern, a further feature of Zacuto's style that is only imperfectly conveyed in translation is his brilliant treatment of single scriptural and rabbinical allusions. Following a well-established convention among Hebrew writers of the pre-modern period, Zacuto excelled at interpolating biblical and rabbinical quotes in his writing, skilfully recomposing them to have new meanings in different contexts. The process relied on the reader's familiarity with the original source and on the ensuing contrast between the expectations created by quoting a certain scriptural line and its actual use in a novel semantic context. The following are a few examples of this kind of clever adaptation. At v. 35 of the poem, the protagonist describes the deep slumber that he fell into after his doctors gave him a disgusting preparation to sip. To convey the idea of sound sleep, Zacuto writes *Lo nim we-lo nim tir we-lo tir, namti*, which I have translated as "It was no doze or nap, but rather sound sleep." The English translation does less than justice to the allusion contained in the verse, for Zacuto is here adapting the rabbinical expression "asleep yet not asleep, awake yet not awake" (*nim we-lo nim, tir we-lo tir*), which in the Talmud indicates the condition of dozing off. The English, though, retains the author's ironic intention, as the sleep to which the protagonist refers is in fact the deepest of all, since he is dead. At v. 387, Zacuto makes a pun on the different meanings of the word *hevel* ('breath,' 'vapor,' and, by extension, 'vanity,' 'transience'), which in Hebrew is also the name of the biblical figure of Abel: *evel we-req hevel ke-ḥayye Hevel* ("grief and idle vanity, as vain as Abel's life"). At this point in the poem, the protagonist is being savagely beaten by one of the demons in charge of the preliminary judgement at the end of which his fate will be sealed. Zacuto's pun on the literal meaning of the biblical name bears an obvious allusion to the tragic end of Abel and thus, implicitly, to the fate that has befallen the protagonist. At v. 490, Zacuto similarly quotes a biblical name, but this time to allude to its literal meaning: *Betakh ke-vet Peretz*—which I have translated with "Your abode is a place of ruin"—is taken from Ruth 4:12: "May your home be like that of Peretz," with reference to Tamar's son. Relying on the literal meaning of the word *peretz* (fracture), Zacuto deliberately turns the auspicious meaning of the familiar biblical verse into an ominous imprecation.

Sometimes Zacuto ingeniously altered words in his quotation to convey an entirely new meaning while retaining an echo of the original. Thus, for example, at vv. 719–720, he refers to a specific category among the inhabitants of the second compartment of hell: *Sham ya'arikh lo yom we-lo yomayim / okhel aruḥat rash melo ḥofnayim*, which I have translated with "There the one who heartily partakes

of the pauper's meal / Will stay—and not for just one or two days!". Zacuto is here making a pun by modifying the expression *ya'arikh yamim* (literally 'will prolong his days'), which, in a neutral context, means 'will live long.' His irony is in fact double, as for the reader familiar with the biblical text, the verse also bears an allusion to Eccl. 7:15: "And there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his evil-doing." Another example is provided at v. 769, where Zacuto, in describing the untimely death of the young at the hands of one of the demons that inhabit the third compartment of hell, makes a pun based on the Hebrew root *ḥ.r.p.*: *Ki yeḥeraf ḥorpo we-lo yafriaḥ* ("So that in a perpetual winter he will never bloom"). Again in this case, the polysemous nature of the Hebrew original is lost in translation. In fact, Zacuto is here alluding to the biblical expression *yeme ḥorpo shel ha-adam* (literally, 'the winter days of man'), based on Job 29:4, an expression that is traditionally interpreted as referring to 'youth.' Here, the baroque taste for conceits also adds to the linguistic involvement. Thus, the initial semantic association between winter and youth is further complicated by the symbolism of winter as the season of death, and eventually contrasted to the image of blooming, as synonymous of life, conveyed by the similarly sounding root *p.r.ḥ*.

Given the role played by language in *Tofteh 'arukh* through Zacuto's frequent use of alliteration, homophones, homographs, and plays on words, I have employed a simplified system of Hebrew transliteration that nevertheless enables distinctions between homophone letters (such as *vet* and *waw*, *ṭet* and *tav*, *kaf* and *qof*, *samekh* and *śin*). I have used the underdot to mark *ḥet* and the phonetic group *tz* to render *tzadi*. Letters preceded by a hyphenated prefix are not doubled, nor is the letter *shin* when used with *daghesh*. Biblical names are rendered according to the *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*. Rabbinic names are rendered according to common English conventions. Medieval and early modern names have been anglicized.

The translation is preceded by preliminary essays that help the reader contextualize Zacuto's poem within the composite cultural backdrop that shaped its composition and conditioned its immediate reception. The first preliminary essay reconstructs the nexus of relationships and contingencies that shaped the initial circulation and consumption of *Tofteh 'arukh*. To identify useful insights, this chapter looks towards a set of broader phenomena in early modern Judaism, such as the impact of printing on authorship, reception, and contemporary reading habits; the rise of moralistic, Kabbalah-inclined literature; and the way devotional confraternities took centre stage as cultural brokers in the life of Jewish communities. The second preliminary chapter situates *Tofteh 'arukh* in the Jewish cultures of the day by examining the poem against the frame of contemporary beliefs

concerning the afterlife, along with related devotional and kabbalistic literature. Besides surveying Zacuto's sources, this chapter also discusses the poem's twofold agenda, in which both intellectual and moralistic motives intertwined, thus shedding further light on the hybrid and polycentric nature of Zacuto's work as a site of contact between the spheres of elite and popular cultures. Finally, the third preliminary chapter addresses *Tofteh 'arukh* as a dramatic work. It reconstructs the intended modalities of its consumption in light of conventions proper to "closet drama" and the Jesuitic formula of "theatre of the mind." It then discusses both the aesthetic and emotional implications carried by the semantic density and metamorphic verbality of the poem and, in relation to these, the role of Kabbalah in Zacuto's poetic imagery.

While functioning as a macabre cautionary tale, *Tofteh 'arukh* is also a sophisticated work that shares some of the traits of the humanistic 'learned drama' (*teatro erudito*), such as the emphasis on the literary and formal aspects of the work. It also shows an affinity with the Counter-Reformation *commedia grave* (serious comedy), in particular in its mingling of pathos and humour. The graphic specificity that characterizes Zacuto's description of the otherworldly reality reflects the complex overlapping of material and spiritual, sensorial and intellectual that is characteristic of much of Spanish literature of the Golden Age. That same contrasting mixing of tangible, metaphysical, and psychological elements also embodies the distinctive spirit of baroque culture, at whose core was a relentless striving to intellectually engage, surprise, and move the audience. As such, Zacuto's poem attests to the complex and contradictory zeitgeist of the seventeenth century.[84] I hope this translation demonstrates the poem's value for both Jewish studies and European literatures, and that it will serve students and scholars alike by expanding the still-too-small library of early modern Hebrew poetry that has been translated, in whole or in part, into English.

[84] On the aspiration to reconcile opposing aspects as a constitutive element of the baroque cultural enterprise, see Battistini, *Il barocco*, 7–12.

CHAPTER 1

MICROHISTORY OF A HELLISH BOOK

Nocturnal Devotions, Books, and Poetry

In 1695, two years before his death, Zacuto's will was drafted by a notary in front of the prescribed number of witnesses: two Jewish, as required by Halakhah, and five Christian, in observance of civil law. By then advanced in years and afflicted by gout, Zacuto dictated his will—as he himself states in the document—while "lucid, alert, not impaired in my sight, hearing and judgement, nor suffering from any illness that might hinder my reason (although burdened with old age)." After opening with the conventional formulaic preamble and the list of gifts to Mantuan houses for the poor, the will proceeds to the itemization of the testator's possessions for bequest. We thus learn that Zacuto's personal library of printed books was left, in its entirety, to his grandson Isaac Pappo.[1] Isaac, who at that time was living in the Dalmatian town of Ragusa (modern Dubrovnik), had been provided for financially for years by his grandparent, as we learn from the document itself. To his wife Rachel, besides all the belongings in the couple's household, Zacuto also left his personal copies of the *Zohar* and the Mishnah,[2] both inscribed with his own marginal annotations, along with all his other manuscript works ("libri scriti a mano et altri foglii da me composti").[3] The bundle of unspecified manuscript materials that Zacuto bequeathed to his wife probably also included a sizeable portion of his poetic production, which, as we have seen, was comprised of hundreds of occasional compositions, an array of religious hymns, and two lengthy dramatic poems. While, as mentioned, some of Zacuto's occasional verse

[1] Isaac was the son of Zacuto's daughter Judith-Hana, married Pappo, who died in Venice in 1661 at the age of twenty-two. She seems to have been Zacuto's only child, or at least the only one of his children who reached adult life. Her husband, Samuel, had been a former student of Zacuto. See Bregman, ed., *"I Raise My Heart"*, 12–13. For Judith-Hana, Zacuto composed an epitaph in Hebrew as touching as it was stylistically sophisticated, on which see Bregman, "Now a Stone Will be Placed over My Daughter."

[2] As noted in the will, Zacuto's personal copy of the Mishnah included the commentary *Tosefet Yom-Ṭov* by the Bohemian rabbi and legal scholar Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller (1579–1654).

[3] The will was first located in the State Archives of Mantua by Shlomo Simonsohn (Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 738, n. 296) and recently published in Ioly Zorattini, "Il testamento," 594–600.

had been disseminated as *fogli volanti*, and several of his religious hymns had been printed in the prayer books for special liturgical occasions that the author himself had compiled, at the time of his passing his two dramatic poems had seen a very limited circulation. Was Zacuto's decision to entrust his wife with his manuscript works an act of caution meant to avoid their being mislaid? Whatever the case, after his death, his widow apparently allowed the members of his husband's devotional confraternity, the above-mentioned *Ḥadashim la-beqarim*, among whom were some of the late rabbi's closest disciples, to access his papers and thus find, amidst Zacuto's written materials, the autograph of *Tofteh ʿarukh*.

As noted above, the confraternity had been established a few decades before, in 1673,[4] the year that Zacuto had relocated from Venice to the city of the Gonzagas. Based on the scant information available, it seems that the group was dedicated to daily sessions of study and prayer, probably held, as the name of the confraternity seems to indicate, in the last hours of the night. The members of the confraternity also likely performed some of the penitential rituals that Zacuto had been promoting among his coreligionists since his Venetian years, such as the Midnight Vigil and *Tiqqun shovavim*. By the time Zacuto established his own confraternal group in Mantua, though, his coreligionists already had some acquaintance with nocturnal devotions. In fact, in Italy, observances inspired by the theory of *tiqqun* had been attested since the second half of the sixteenth century, initially in the form of a pre-dawn penitential watch that had rapidly gained currency among the Jewish communities of northern and central Italy. First attested in Venice, groups known as *Shomerim la-boqer* (Morning Watchers, based on Ps. 130:6)—a name denoting their focus of devotion—had started to appear in any sizeable community and soon organized themselves as confraternities (*ḥavurot*).[5] They thus joined the traditional mutual aid societies already active in the ghetto, while from the beginning circumscribing their range of activity to deeds of ritual piety.

The establishment and propagation of devotional confraternities in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian Jewish communities was a complex phenomenon in which religious, social, and cultural elements combined and in which the model offered by contemporary Christian confraternities and the centrality of devotion and rituality in Counter-Reformation culture also played a role. From

[4] See Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 555.

[5] See Shulvass, *Jews in the World of Renaissance*, 212–213; Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 553–554; Horowitz, "Jewish Confraternities in Seventeenth-Century Verona," Chapter 4; Horowitz, "Jewish Confraternal Piety in the Veneto"; Rivlin, *Mutual Responsibility in the Italian Ghetto*, 152–155.

their inception, confraternities of the *Shomerim la-boqer* kind provided members of the middle class with not only an important setting for the expression of their religiosity, but also a valuable frame in which to experience sociability. The question of whether the ritual practices observed within devotional confraternities and the underlying mystical theories were the exclusive domain of narrow groups of initiated Kabbalah adepts or, rather, whether these confraternities had a more popular character is still a matter of debate. The first groups of watchers were mostly created at the initiative of local figures who actively engaged in kabbalistic studies or had some connection with the Palestinian centres. Following the example of mystical sodalities active in the Land of Israel,[6] their Italian counterparts might have, at first, similarly envisioned confraternal life as a realm of esoteric knowledge and practice, and a dedicated setting for elitist socialization. Be that as it may, over time the proliferation of confraternities of watchers—sometimes with more than one group operating in the same town—and the customization of their nocturnal devotions brought about the popularization of the mystical beliefs they were based on and, therefore, their demystification. As scholarly research has underscored, something similar had also happened with the parallel penetration of kabbalistic rituals into the realms of both domestic and synagogue observance.[7] As a matter of fact, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, societies of the *Shomerim la-boqer* kind had become a staple of Jewish life inside the Italian ghettos, thus paving the way for the establishment of other confraternal groups, each with its own ritual specialization.

The far-reaching impact that devotional groups exerted on Jewish culture within the ghetto is also evidenced in the major role that they played in fostering a new efflorescence of religious poetry. Several of the authors who contributed most significantly to what the late Dan Pagis defined as "the later *piyyuṭ* from Italy"[8]—referring to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century revival of Hebrew sacred verse—had their compositions included in one or more collections compiled for the *Shomerim la-boqer*. Not infrequently, those same authors were also actively involved in the life of the confraternities. Ritually customized compositions written for specific purposes by established poets thus found their way into the special collections of prayers and hymns to be recited during the ceremonial gatherings. Inserted alongside those by the poetically minded among the sodalities' members or by local literati, they demonstrate the role of these confraternities as a primary arena for the practice and consumption of mystically inclined poetry

[6] See Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos*, 76–77.

[7] See Hallamish, *Kabbalah*, 287–630.

[8] See Pagis, "Liturgical Poetry in Seventeenth-Century Italy," 289.

and sacred lyric in general. The printing of the compilations played a crucial role in tangibly advertising the sponsoring groups and promoting their ritual practices. It also contributed to the dissemination of the modern *piyyuṭ* they included, further boosting the creation and circulation of Hebrew devotional poetry.[9]

The *tiqqunim* printed for the watchers were, in fact, part of a vast and variegated corpus of devotional works that had begun to materialize on the Hebrew book market in the second half of the sixteenth century, following the spread of mystical theories and customs from Ottoman Palestine. The gamut of these publications was wide, ranging from manuals and handbooks detailing the principles of ethical behaviour to moralistic works providing the faithful and devoted with spiritual guidance, from detailed lists of daily religious practices (*hanhagot*) to collections of para-liturgical poetry by famed Palestinian authors, from breviaries for special occasions to illustrated guides to the graves of saintly figures in the Holy Land targeting the aspiring pilgrim as well as the armchair traveller. The effort that authors and printers invested in the field of Hebrew devotional literature paralleled, although on a minor scale, what was then happening in the much vaster world of Christian publications. Indeed, due to the Church's increased commitment to the edification of believers, since the second half of the sixteenth century and then throughout the Counter-Reformation period the Christian market had overflowed with an outpouring of devotional books. Venetian printers were particularly attentive to the renewed demands of Counter-Reformation institutions, and many publishers operating in the city on the lagoon made their fortune with the printing of devotional literature. Besides collections of sermons, moralistic treatises, and guides to individual piety, works of spiritual and religious verse, including sacred plays, accounted for a significant portion of these devotional printings.[10] At a more popular level, religious hymns and songs circulated widely in the form of a myriad of booklets and leaflets printed for devotional sodalities and lay religious confraternities for use during their regular gatherings or for the public ceremonies and processions that so often marked the communal life of these groups. It was in this climate of revived devotion and pervasive rituality, in which the printing press acted as a powerful instrument and ally in advancing religious

[9] On the printing of prayer books for the Morning Watch, see Benayahu, "The *Shomerim la-Boqer* Confraternity"; Andreatta, "The Printing of Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Italy." On how the inclusion of modern *piyyuṭ* shaped both the content and the external typographic features of these printings, eventually contributing to the creation of a specific genre, see Pagis, *Change and Tradition in the Secular Poetry*, 282–285; Pagis, "Liturgical Poetry in Seventeenth-Century Italy," 288–290.

[10] On the printing of Christian devotional literature in Italy, see Quondam, "La letteratura in tipografia," 594–596.

literature and its underlying ideology and didactic agenda among both Christians and Jews, that *Tofteh ʿarukh* resurfaced from amidst the papers bequeathed by Zacuto to his wife Rachel. Thus began its eventful afterlife.

From Zacuto's Drawer to Print

Details of the circumstances surrounding the finding of *Tofteh ʿarukh* among Zacuto's unpublished papers and its subsequent publication can be gleaned from the foreword to the first edition of the poem, printed in Venice in 1715. We learn about the vivid impression that Zacuto's work, apparently in view of its eccentric and novel nature, made on the members of the *Ḥadashim la-beqarim*, and how they soon realized the pedagogic potential inherent in the poem's moralizing agenda. As stated in the foreword, sponsoring the printing of *Tofteh ʿarukh* aligned with both the confraternity's constitutive pledge to further traditional studies and the group's commitment to the spiritual benefit of the larger community:

> Always zealous for the benefit of the many in their studies, [the leaders of the confraternity] found a work among the teacher's writings that had no equal. It was devoted to the punishments inflicted upon the wicked (who [in hell] are being stewed as if in a pot, or snatched by a horde of demons and immersed by their head into filthy liquids!) and whose fate could therefore arouse sinners, miscreants, and rebels to contrition. Therefore, they gave instructions that it be printed along with the explication of its difficult words, so that the less educated and the young could also easily read it.[11]

When *Tofteh ʿarukh* was being printed, the *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* still convened in Zacuto's private house of study, which they had been able to secure for use as the confraternity's headquarters after the rabbi's death.[12] Prior to his death, Zacuto had entrusted David Finzi (d. 1735) with the leadership of the confraternity, probably based on seniority. Finzi, later to become a rabbi and rabbinical judge, wanted the group's rituals to continue in his own house of study. With the purchase of the space that once had belonged to Zacuto himself, a rift was created within the confraternity: under the guidance of two of the confraternity's leaders (*massari*), Raphael Modigliano and Isaac Reggio, one group continued to meet

[11] *Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 2ʳ. Here and hereafter all translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[12] See Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 556.

for their sessions of prayer and study in the old *bet midrash*, while Finzi went on to perform the special rituals established by Zacuto in his own house of study. Determined to claim sole rights to the legacy of the late rabbi, in 1722 the *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* brought a formal complaint to the Mantua community, asking its leaders to settle the dispute between them and Finzi and determine whether the devotions instituted by Zacuto could be performed in the competitor's house of study or rather should be restricted to being recited in the old *bet midrash*, and thus *de facto* brought under the exclusive 'jurisdiction' of the confraternity.[13]

Rivalries and conflicts were not unusual in the crowded and dynamic world of devotional confraternities and were partly fuelled by the proliferation, over time, of groups with similar devotional focuses, all equally eager to claim their ritual autonomy and gain social visibility within the ghetto. Inevitably, competition was also strong in the sphere of the confraternities' sponsored activities, first and foremost the printing of the *tiqqunim* that each group had established, for it was the specific ritual custom that essentially differentiated one group from the other. Ritual and social primacy could be thus consolidated or crushed through print. Cast against the framework of the confrontation that was then building up between the official *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* and Finzi, the publication of *Tofteh 'arukh* in 1715 seems to have been part of the formers' effort to establish their control over the spiritual inheritance of the venerated late rabbi. It is worth noting, in this regard, that the preliminary materials inserted in the publication also included a statement claiming the group's ownership over the text. Placed right on the verso of the foreword and signed by the above-mentioned Raphael Modigliano and Isaac Reggio, the statement also issued a warning against any unauthorized reprinting for the following ten years, threatening potential transgressors with excommunication.[14] Printing *privilegia* were not a novelty in early modern Hebrew print culture, in which reprinting was a common practice and the legal status of authors, printers, and sponsors was largely still not formalized. They were usually issued by local authorities such as the Venetian Cattaveri; sometimes rabbinical approbations that performed the function of copyright *ante litteram* could be included too.[15] And yet, it is hard not to see in the statement that the confraternal *massari* took care to include in the print of *Tofteh 'arukh* a thinly veiled form of intimidation directed to a specific competitor in the battle over Zacuto's inheritance that was then being fought in the ghetto of Mantua.

[13] See Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 556.

[14] *Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. [2^{v}].

[15] On rabbinical approbation of books for print (*haskamah*) in Venice, see Benayahu, *Copyright, Authorization and Imprimatur*. On the privilege system with reference to Italy, see Nuovo, *The Book Trade in the Italian Renaissance*, 195–257.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Bragadina printing house, from whose presses *Tofteh ʿarukh* was issued, was one of the few Hebrew printing shops still active in Venice. At that time, it was printing almost exclusively works of devotional literature. From the same printing house, back in 1704, the members of an unidentified *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* group—possibly local—had commissioned the publication of Zacuto's compilation of prayers and hymns for the special observance of the Midnight Vigil, titled *Seder tiqqun ḥatzot*. According to the preface, the publication was meant to commemorate the towering spiritual and intellectual stature of the late rabbi and, at the same time, promote the group's rituals.[16] This publication followed in the steps of previously published *tiqqunim* containing Zacuto's prayers for special occasions, some of them, as mentioned above, compiled by the late rabbi himself. The publication of Zacuto's *Tiqqun ḥatzot* was the beginning of a wider, albeit haphazard, project, contextually led by multiple confraternities, to appropriate and redistribute the late rabbi's legacy. The publication of *Tofteh ʿarukh* was destined to be a chapter of this same project.

The role that the members of the Mantuan *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* strived to carve for themselves as Zacuto's endorsed legatees encompassed not only sponsoring the printing of *Tofteh ʿarukh*, but also providing prospective readers with the tools necessary to approach the poem, thus eventually also guiding and controlling their consumption of the text. In fact, the inclusion, mentioned in the above-quoted foreword, of a glossary was rendered indispensable by Zacuto's frequent resort to rare words, his recurrent use of homophones and homographs, and even, in a few cases, the creation of neologisms. The apparatus of lexical elucidations, which also included a list of the biblical occurrences of each term, was the work of the above-mentioned Aviad Sar-Shalom Basilea, who also compiled a strophe-by-strophe explication of parts of the poem.

In view of the personal ties that had linked him to Zacuto[17] and his close familiarity with the late rabbi's teachings, it is possible that Basilea was entrusted with the editorial work that preceded the publication and perhaps with the overall supervision of the printing. Be that as it may, it is certain that what was to become Basilea's para-textual apparatus to the printed version of *Tofteh ʿarukh* well predated the printing project. In fact, from Basilea's own introductory note included

[16] See *Seder tiqqun ḥatzot*, fol. [1ᵛ].

[17] The close relationship that linked Basilea to Zacuto seems to be confirmed by Basilea acting as one of the two witnesses signing the nuptial agreement when Rachel, Zacuto's widow, remarried in 1707 (Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 739, n. 296). Rachel, née Cohen, had been Zacuto's second wife and was probably several years his junior. On Zacuto's first wife, see above, Introduction.

in the poem's first reprint in 1743, we learn that he had resolved to compile an explication of the poem and of its most difficult terms once he realized that "the words of this work and its discourse had become impenetrable and that what was once transparent had turned obscure, so much so that the members [of the confraternity] had stopped reading it."[18] Basilea's note is of particular significance, for it provides information useful for reconstructing the stages that eventually led to the material production of *Tofteh ʿarukh* as a print artifact. Indeed, from Basilea's remarks we infer that the compilation of the explicatory apparatus predated the publication. Moreover, we also learn that the poem was initially circulated among the confraternity members and possibly even read during the group gatherings.

Further evidence concerning the circulation of *Tofteh ʿarukh*, prior to its printing, among students and scholars active within the orbit of Mantua's Jewish confraternities is preserved in a manuscript copy of the poem extant at the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest.[19] The manuscript was transcribed around 1700 by David Portaleone (Shaʿar Aryeh). A teacher and a scribe, Portaleone is mentioned in a document pertaining to communal expenditures for the five private houses of study existing in Mantua in 1708, one of which was headed by Portaleone himself.[20] Other documents detailing the educational institutions then located inside the Mantuan ghetto prove that he also taught at the local community school (*Talmud Torah*), where he served alongside the abovementioned Raphael Modigliano and Isaac Reggio as well as Aviad Sar-Shalom Basilea, all prominent members, as we have seen, of the *Ḥadashim la-beqarim*.[21] The manuscript copied by Portaleone then landed in the hands of Shimshon Cohen Modon (1679–1727), a student of a former disciple of Zacuto, Judah Briel (c. 1643–1722). An accomplished poet in Hebrew, Cohen Modon was later to become a rabbi, a rabbinical judge, and a published author and would leave behind a sizeable number of works, including sermons, *responsa*, moralistic treatises, and several occasional poems.[22] In 1707, as he took care to indicate in an owner's note inscribed at the end of the manuscript copied by Portaleone, Cohen Modon finished reading and annotating the text of *Tofteh ʿarukh* and had enthusiastic words of commendation for Zacuto's poem.[23]

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[18] *Tofteh ʿarukh* (1743): *ʿEden ʿArukh*, fol. [2^{v}].

[19] LHAS, Ms. Kaufmann A 534. For a description of the manuscript, see Weisz, *Katalog der Hebräischen Handschriften*, 172, no. 534).

[20] See Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 590, n. 299.

[21] See Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 591, n. 300.

[22] See Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 703.

[23] LHAS, Ms. Kaufmann A 534, fol. [13^{v}]: "I have completed reading and annotating this laudable book (*sefer mehullal zeh*) on the 18th of Ḥeshwan 5467, a Wednesday."

Although Zacuto may never have intended for his poem to be disseminated, the initial circulation of *Tofteh ʿarukh* among the members of the *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* was not necessarily a betrayal of the expectations of the confraternity's late founder: this type of consumption, be it individual or conducted within a small, intimate group of people in the frame of religious study and devotional rituals, was in line with the modality of reading that Zacuto likely had in mind when he penned his poem and possibly also with the type of readership that he was ideally addressing. Moreover, in the frame of both individual study and confraternity gatherings, the reading of texts, like the recitation of prayers, was customarily marked by a state of mental and emotional absorption known as *kawwanah* (intention). This state meant that in perusing Zacuto's poem the members of the confraternity were expected to concentrate on extracting a religious and moral teaching from the poem, rather than merely pursuing a form of aesthetic enjoyment. At any rate, the inclusion of *Tofteh ʿarukh* among the confraternal readings, whose lists probably included traditional texts such as the Torah and the Mishnah alongside the *Zohar*, bespeaks the deep-seated reverence in which the *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* held the late rabbi. It also demonstrates that the poem was seen as an additional tile in the mosaic of teachings that formed Zacuto's spiritual legacy. Indeed, there is no doubt that in view of the poem's topic, its pervasive concern with sin, and the consequent exhortation for expiation it conveyed, the members of the confraternity must have also perceived the intrinsic affinity between *Tofteh ʿarukh* and the penitential ideology underlying the confraternal rituals that they observed. More importantly, though, the reading of the poem allowed the *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* to renew symbolically their link with the late rabbi and founder of the sodality. At the same time, it also contributed to strengthening confraternal ties by creating a sense of identity specific to the group through an experience that, similar to ceremonial prayer, was as much inward and individualized as it was extrinsic and social.

After the initial circulation of the manuscript, printing the poem was a further step towards the metamorphosis of *Tofteh ʿarukh* into a ready-made tool for both self-edification and confraternal study. It was, though, also much more. Indeed, the printing initiative was a deliberate move towards disseminating Zacuto's poem beyond the narrow circle of initiated readers and members of the sodality. That the confraternity was consciously pursuing such an agenda can be inferred from the reference to "the less educated and the young" included in the above-quoted foreword to the print. By sponsoring the printing of *Tofteh ʿarukh*, the *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* were in fact playing the role of cultural agents: they were not just circulating a work that in both nature and content could efficaciously

convey the ideology underlying confraternal ceremonies; rather, they were also joining in the renewed effort towards the edification of the believer typical of the age, thus fitting into the general climate of revived piety that characterized contemporary religiosity. Moreover, as can be inferred from the foreword, the special appeal that Zacuto's poem exerted on the *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* lay as much in the poem's moralizing message as in the graphically morbid imagery by which that same message was artfully sustained and amplified. A closer look at the poem is thus now in order.

Doctors, Demons, and the Damned

The opening lines of *Tofteh 'arukh* stage what is, ostensibly, a drama unfolding in a sick room. Speaking in the first person and depicting himself as gravely ill, the protagonist rants about the ineptitude of the doctors, their pomposity and venality, and the utter ineffectiveness of medical practice. He even makes a thorough list of the remedies that have been applied, with no success, to his wretched body, thus providing a sort of catalogue of common early modern therapeutic techniques.[24] Of course, Zacuto's tirade against the ineffectual, even counter-productive, outcomes of the application of medical knowledge is not new and, in fact, resonates with a long-standing tradition of satirical literature targeting the profession.[25] At the same time, his verses vividly convey the psychological anguish of the patient whose sickness is incurable, thus giving voice to the fears and frustrations associated with a situation that was quite common in pre-modern society—except for one detail. As the introductory note to the poem informs us, the protagonist is not lying in his sick bed, but rather he is already dead! Thus, what he describes as the symptoms of his incurable ailment are in fact the post-mortem physical changes of a rotting corpse. The cold shivers racking his body are not due to his bedclothes

[24] See *Tofteh 'arukh*, vv. 1–35.

[25] One of Zacuto's contemporaries, the Italian-Hebrew poet Jacob Frances, penned a comic epitaph depicting an inept doctor lying in his grave surrounded by his victims—that is, his former patients—all dead like him. The motif is a classic one, but in Frances' poem the practitioner himself speaks in the first person, railing against death for not having been granted a delay although he had zealously served it [...] while treating the sick! (Naveh, ed., *The Poems of Jacob Frances*, 216). Immanuel, Jacob's brother, also wrote an epitaph for a physician in which the passer-by is urged to thank God for not having been one of the deceased's patients, because, if he were, he would not now be reading the inscription! (Bernstein, ed., *The Diwan of Rabbi Immanuel Frances*, no. 88). Zacuto himself wrote a sequence of seven sonnets in which he lampooned a physician named ha-Levi (Bregman, *"I Raise My Heart"*, nos. 99–103; Bregman, *The Golden Way*, 254–256).

slipping off the pallet—as he assumes—but rather are caused by the frigidity of the interred coffin in which he lies; in the same vein, the insufferable stings tormenting his flesh are not the unwelcome outcome of callow medical treatments, but rather the relentless biting by worms and bugs at his decaying flesh. Overcome with frustration and excruciating pain, the protagonist even compares his situation to the far better fate of the deceased, eventually incongruously invoking death to come and rescue him from his torments.[26] His addled misunderstanding—whose irony is a source of black humour for the knowing reader—yields to horrified wonder as his grave sinks to Gehenna and the protagonist's bewildered senses are now confronted with the reality of the netherworld. Faced with a physically aberrant and fiery landscape, he contemplates the spectacle of the infernal pandemonium: flocks of dead of all ages, infants, women, and men, are being subjected to the fury of terrifying demons. Some of them are being hung by their tongues or nostrils, others are gnawing their own flesh like cannibals reduced to self-consumption; some are being flayed with sharp combs, others have their limbs chopped off, in a long, insistent sequence of horrors and pain.[27]

Astonished and frightened, the protagonist still doubts, nonetheless, the truth of his horrific position. The hopelessness of his lot will be revealed to him by one of the demons, a monstrous creature of gigantic height, whose "face is the face of doom, the countenance of plague, / The cadaverous look of the dead lying in the grave."[28] As indicated in a 'stage note,' the demon in question is in charge of the Beating of the Grave (in Hebrew, *ḥibbuṭ ha-qever*), the preliminary punishment inflicted upon all dead before their post-mortem fate—be they destined to ascend to heaven or descend to hell—is sealed. Indeed, he swiftly approaches the protagonist and starts right away to bludgeon him with a rod. A surreal dialogue follows in which the dead protagonist begs the demon to tell him what place it is in which he now finds himself, who the demon is, and why he is hitting him so savagely with his rod. He even pathetically attempts to appease the demon's anger by offering him all kinds of earthly goods and riches in the illusory hope of being spared, a common motif in moralistic literature on death since medieval times. To the protagonist's questions and offers, whose senselessness is comically amplified by their essential incongruity, the demon retorts with short, enigmatic utterings echoing the last word pronounced by his interlocutor, thus only adding to the

[26] See *Tofteh 'arukh*, vv. 36–80.

[27] See *Tofteh 'arukh*, vv. 131–240.

[28] See *Tofteh 'arukh*, vv. 249–250.

latter's befuddlement and despair.[29] The dramatic function of this disconnected dialogue is to increase the tension and irony of the situation depicted. But the exchange also offers Zacuto's meta-commentary on the essentially moral nature of the poem: the demon in charge of the Beating of the Grave is the embodiment of the protagonist's evil inclination (*yetzer ha-ra'*) and at the same time the instrument of its punishment in the afterlife.[30] Moreover, in terms of 'on stage' dramatic action, the dialogue binds together the first and the second parts of the poem, with the dead protagonist gradually giving way to his antagonist and doppelgänger the demon, whose monologue will indeed occupy the entire second part of the poem.[31] It also marks the transition from the dual perspective of the poem's first half—in which the dead protagonist's faulty understanding had its corrective in the audience's knowing judgement—to the unified outlook of the demon, who from now on will be the sole dispenser of truth.

Since the function of the Beating of the Grave is that of a preliminary judgement, the demon acts as prosecutor and, while hitting his victim relentlessly, he also rattles off the endless list of the protagonist's sins. This is a detailed, painstaking, and at times pleonastic catalogue of crimes, which in fact amounts to a confession of sins, albeit coercive and conducted vicariously by the demon.[32] Once

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[29] See *Tofteh 'arukh*, vv. 256–335. The echo verse was a popular form in contemporary Italian poetry, whose origins lay in sixteenth-century pastoral lyric and drama. In view of its 'stereophonic' potentialities, it was also a hugely popular device in contemporary instrumental and vocal music. Zacuto also experimented with echo structures elsewhere in his poetry, namely in some of his occasional compositions. Far from being just a coloratura effect, the resort to the echo device in Zacuto's poetry is invariably functional with regard to the inherent meaning of the text and to its 'solution' by the reader. On Zacuto's echo poems, see Bregman, "On the Mystery of the Echo." Bregman, *In Two Voices*.

[30] The double role of the demon as the one who both induces men to sin on earth and then punishes them in the afterlife is symbolized by the name with which Zacuto chose to denote such a creature, i.e., *mashḥit*. Mentioned in the Talmud as the name of one of the six angels of destruction (see TB *Shabbat*, fol. 55^{r}), *mashḥit* indeed derives from a root meaning 'to ruin, destroy,' but also 'to sin, corrupt.' For the reader familiar with the liturgy, Zacuto's terminology also conveyed a reference to Ps. 78:38: "But He, being merciful, forgave iniquity and *would not destroy* (*we-lo yashḥit*); time and again, He restrained His wrath and did not vent His fury," which is part of the prayers added on Mondays and Thursdays to the recitation of *Shaḥarit*. Zacuto is thus turning the demons of hell into the executors of God's fury. Ultimately, Zacuto was building on rabbinical literature, where the association of the Angel of Death with the evil inclination was rooted (see, for example, TB *Bava Batra*, fol. 16^{r}).

[31] Levy, "Hellish Hebrew Theatre," 52.

[32] See *Tofteh 'arukh*, vv. 346–670. For a discussion of the formal and stylistic features of this section, see below, Chapters 2 and 3.

the Beating of the Grave is over, the protagonist, who has been found guilty, is condemned to descend to hell. Now silent, since the part of his soul connected with sensory functions is destined to remain, as stated in the *Zohar*, by the grave,[33] the protagonist—and the reader with him—is led by the demon on an underworld voyage through the seven infernal chambers of Gehenna. A hallucinatory itinerary begins whose purpose is the illustration, in unmitigatedly macabre tones, of hell and the torments there inflicted upon its unfortunate guests. The physical formation of the infernal compartments, the different categories of demons presiding over them, the various typologies of sins punished in each chamber, the rationale governing the retribution thus inflicted—all elements whose characterization is steeped in a mystical imaginary surrounding the afterlife—are here described in detail.[34]

Zacuto's precise overview of the innumerable forms that human depravity can take and of their dire consequences in the afterlife masterfully concludes with an evocation of the paradisiacal vision of heaven, whose light momentarily illuminates, from above, the dark recesses of hell. This is a final *coup de théatre* whose purpose is to vividly contrast the state of ineffable blessedness of the righteous with that of the interminable pain of the damned and, in so doing, remind the reader that a rather different fate is in store for the virtuous.[35]

How Tofteh ʿarukh *Became an Early Modern 'Cult Book'*

That finding *Tofteh ʿarukh* caused such a sensation among the members of the *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* is not surprising given the poem's topic, lugubrious tone,

[33] According to zoharic theology, the human soul is comprised of three parts, each corresponding to a different level in psychic life. The first and lowest, which is called *nefesh*, governs the animal functions and, being connected to the senses and the body, is subject to instincts. The second part, which holds the middle position, is called *ruaḥ* (literally, 'spirit'): it allows human beings to distinguish between good and evil, thus presiding over moral virtues. The third part, which is called *neshamah*, is the highest and is connected to the intellect. This is the part of the soul that allows human beings to acknowledge the existence of God, and as such also to enjoy the bliss of eternal life. Later kabbalistic speculations proposed the existence of two additional parts of the human soul, though not all individuals are endowed with them. These two parts, both of them more elevated than the standard ones, are *ḥayyah*, which enables one who possesses it to envisage and comprehend the divine as it operates and unfolds in the creation, and *yeḥidah*, which allows the most perfect individuals to reach a state of intellectual union with God. On kabbalistic theories concerning the soul, see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 152–165; Tishby, *The Doctrine of Man*.

[34] See *Tofteh ʿarukh*, vv. 671–880.

[35] See *Tofteh ʿarukh*, vv. 886–920.

and graphic quality. As much alluring as disturbing, the 'theatre of horrors' staged in the poem was designed to rouse the reader to salutary fear of hell and, by means of empathic identification with the punishments evoked, to inspire contrition and repentance. It could thereby befit both the spiritual and the educational agendas of the confraternity. In fact, the enthusiastic reception of *Tofteh 'arukh* within its early modern readership cannot be properly understood except in relation to the moralizing scope that dictated its initial circulation. Similarly, the poem's pedagogic character was the feature that both enabled and ensured that it reached a wider public. In this respect, the level of agency demonstrated by the confraternity in printing *Tofteh 'arukh* can hardly be underestimated.

As noted above, Zacuto's autograph manuscript of *Tofteh 'arukh*, on which the 1715 edition was likely based, does not survive.[36] Nonetheless, the question of where Zacuto's own work begins and ends and of how we situate it in relation to Basilea's contribution can be answered with relative confidence and without much anxiety about their respective relationships to the text. Comparison with the only manuscript copy of *Tofteh 'arukh* that demonstrably predates the print publication[37] shows that Basilea only contributed the marginal strophe-by-strophe elucidations (*be'ur ha-'inyan*) and the explication of difficult words (*be'ur ha-millot*) to the printed version. The collocation and distribution of these reading devices on the page, and their printing in a non-vocalized semi-cursive typeface, clearly help to mark them as 'collateral' to the poem. All other para-textual elements, such as the introductory and terminal notes at the beginning and end of the poem, as well as the few 'stage directions,' are clearly marked as authorial, and we may confidently suppose that they appeared in Zacuto's original manuscript as such. By contrast to the text of the poem, which is printed in vocalized square typeset, most of these authorial notes are still in non-vocalized semi-cursive script, but their distribution on the area of the page allocated for the main text unambiguously signals their attribution and authority. This visual arrangement, which reproduced the method devised for the printing of Hebrew sacred texts in editions that also integrated exegetical commentaries, was a familiar one for Jewish readers, and allowed them to immediately differentiate the 'canonical' text from the accompanying 'non-canonical' glosses.

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[36] That Basilea, however, based his work on multiple copies of *Tofteh 'arukh* is implied in his commentary on v. 86, where he states he had corrected Zacuto's text to conform to the prosodic structure of the verse, although "in all the versions" consulted the same reading was in fact attested. See *Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 4^{v}.

[37] LHAS, Ms. Kaufmann A 534, on which see above, p. 44.

Entrusted with the task of both sifting and circulating knowledge, Basilea's apparatus was rendered necessary by the nature of the publication itself. For the reading of *Tofteh 'arukh* to produce both its intellectual and spiritual benefits, comprehension of the text was essential. With its cryptic imaginary and intricate language, *Tofteh 'arukh* apparently posed insurmountable challenges even to the members of the confraternity, who probably possessed varying degrees of familiarity with kabbalistic literature and different levels of Hebrew literacy. Hence the indispensability of a glossary, alongside a strophe-by-strophe explication of parts of the poem. Besides illustrating the meaning of the frequent homographs and rare words used by Zacuto by resorting to synonyms and periphrases, Basilea often provides context for them by indicating a location in the Bible where they are attested with similar semantic value. In several instances, he corroborates his interpretation by citing non-biblical sources, such as the Targum, the Mishnah, and the Talmud. The analysis of his explications reveals that he relied heavily on the works of the French medieval commentator David Kimhi (c. 1160–c. 1235), although he did not always acknowledge his source. Thus, for example, all his references to *Targum Jonathan*, the Aramaic paraphrase of the prophetical books of the Bible, are not first-hand, but rather derived from Kimhi's commentaries *ad locum*.[38] Kimhi's compilations on grammar figured prominently in the *curriculum studiorum* of Italian Jews; similarly, his biblical commentaries, all marked by a focus on language, were hugely popular among Italian Jewish scholars. Indeed, it is likely that Zacuto himself drew upon them in composing *Tofteh 'arukh*, a circumstance that seems to be confirmed by Basilea's own substantial reliance on Kimhi's works in his apparatus.

The following are some examples taken from Basilea's glosses.[39] At vv. 427–428, in contrasting the earthly pleasures in which the protagonist revelled in the past to the terrible fate he is met with in the afterlife, Zacuto makes a pun on the multiple meanings of *me'od* (very; might, power), which could have proved difficult to understand for readers not familiar with rabbinical literature: *Emesh [...] totzi me'od u-rekhush u-vilti sefeq / Ha-yom me'od tishta' be-makkot sefeq*, which I have translated as "Yesterday, [...] you immoderately squandered money and possessions. / Today, you greatly fear the abundance of blows." Therefore, in his

[38] See Basilea commentary to vv. 398, 423, 432, 565.

[39] That the commentator's concerns lay primarily with the language of *Tofteh 'arukh*, rather than with its specific kabbalistic content, seems to be proved by his referring to Zacuto's sources only once, with regard to the beginning of the section devoted to the description of the seven compartments of hell. This circumstance suggests that he was addressing readers whose interpretive priorities were likewise predominantly lexical, rather than content related.

marginal commentary, Basilea gives the source for Zacuto's specific word usage: "In its first recurrence *me'od* means money, as the rabbis have said: '*And with all your might* (Deut. 6:5) meaning with all your money, as *might* is referred to in the Bible as money' [cf. *M Berakhot* 9:5]."[40] At vv. 432–433, Zacuto makes another pun using the word *petaḥ* twice, the first time in its usual sense as 'opening,' 'door,' the second with the meaning of 'waved sword.' In the apparatus, Basilea explains that Zacuto is using this term as a synonym of the related word *petiḥah* (opening, beginning; drawn sword): "*Petaḥ:* in its first recurrence, it has its literal meaning; in the second, it means 'sword,' by analogy with *Yet, they were drawn swords* [petiḥot] (Ps. 55:22)."[41]

Whenever Zacuto's word choice is open to multiple interpretations, Basilea reviews them for the sake of the reader. Strophe 88 (vv. 436–440) is constructed on the homography and assonance between the Hebrew word *'erev* (evening) and the polysemous root *'arav* (to be pleasant, delight; to guarantee, post bail for). Zacuto here refers to wolves and crows as metaphors for the tormenting demons, who, insofar they inhabit the Other Side, are connected to darkness and the night: *Ki 'orevim ḥovakh ze'eve 'erev / Gam 'orevim ha-orevim ba-'erev*, which I have rendered as "Nocturnal wolves now collect on your debts / And so do the crows that lurk at dusk." In his commentary, Basilea explains Zacuto's image as follows:

> For the demons, who are similar to wolves and crows in view of their blackness, are now 'pledging' you against your crimes; or, according to a different meaning, they are using your crimes as a security, as in *[Do not be one of those who give their hands], who stand surety for debts* (Pr. 22:26); or, according to a different meaning, they trade your crimes and make profit out of them, as in *Those who carried on your traffic* (Ezek. 27:27), since all the abundance that should have come to you is now going to them until your sin is cleansed.[42]

In some instances, Zacuto's resorts to neologisms are noted (and justified) by Basilea. At v. 429, in describing the protagonist's abject condition in hell, Zacuto writes: *Et 'enekha tasha' we-'od lo shoa'*, which I have translated as "You shut your eyes and no longer crave." The term *shoa'* is, in fact, Zacuto's own creation, about which Basilea offers the following assessment: "According to grammar, the correct form should be [the infinitive] *she'ot*, but, as it seems,

[40] *Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 10^{v}.

[41] *Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 11^{r}.

[42] *Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 11^{r}.

for the author *shoa'* and *she'ot* are equivalent, something confirmed by what RaDaK [David Kimhi] wrote about the root *sh.w.'* [in his *Sefer ha-shorashim*]."[43] If confronted with irregularities in vocalization, Basilea signals them. Thus, for example, at vv. 544–545, Zacuto creates a rhyme based on the homographs *we-yashiqukha* and *we-yaśiqukha*, about which Basilea makes the following remark: "In its first recurrence, the meaning is 'they burn you,' based on *They will make fires and feed them with weapons* (Ezek. 39:9), while in the second, the meaning is 'they flood you,' based on *And vats shall overflow with new vine and oil* (Joel 2:24); in this case, though, the *yod* should have been vocalized with *ḥiriq*."[44]

As noted above, Basilea frequently resorts to Kimhi's works in his explanatory comments. The following are a few examples. At v. 403, Zacuto writes: *Mar meryekha yamir ḥalifat ḥelef*, which I have translated as "Your embittered rebellion makes the decree harsher." In his commentary, Basilea explains the meaning of the verbal form *yamir* as follows: "*Yamir*, meaning 'will increase.' And this is how RaDaK has illustrated the verse *Has any nation changed* [hemir] *its gods?* (Jer. 2:11), that is [by analogy with] *You shall enjoy the wealth of nations and revel* [tityammaru] *in their glory* (Is. 61:6)."[45] At v. 551, in contrasting the earthly pleasures in which the protagonist revelled during his life to the fate decreed for him in the afterlife, Zacuto writes *Emesh, shelew ruaḥ be-shuvah shavta*, which I have translated as "yesterday, with careless spirit you lived in peace." Basilea explains the meaning of *shavta* by referring to Kimhi's *Sefer ha-shorashim*: "*Shavta*: in its first recurrence, it means 'you were tranquil,' based on *The Lord your God will restore your fortunes* (Deut. 30:3), as RaDaK wrote in reference to the root *sh.w.v*."[46]

In several instances, Basilea illustrates the connotations of specific terms by providing their equivalent in the Italian vernacular in Hebrew transliteration. At v. 63, for example, he elucidates the meaning of the word *pishpeshim* as follows: "This is the insect that infests beds and that in the vernacular is called *cimice* [bedbug]."[47] With regard to v. 177, he adds the following note: "*Retiḥut qetzef*: This is the scum that floats on the top of beverages (which in the vernacular is called *schiuma* [foam]), as in *Like foam upon water* (Hos. 10:7)."[48] In his marginal commentary to v. 284, Basilea explains the meaning of the Hebrew *shabbelul*

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[43] *Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 10^{v}. Cf. Kimhi, *Sefer ha-shorashim*, col. 498.

[44] *Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 14^{v}.

[45] *Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 10^{r}.

[46] *Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 14^{v}. Cf. Kimhi, *Sefer ha-shorashim,* col. 493.

[47] *Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 4^{r}.

[48] *Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 6^{r}.

(snail), resorting to the Lombard dialect variant of the Italian word *lumaca* (slug): "This is that crawling creature that in the vernacular is called *lumaga*."[49]

Although Basilea intended his running commentary and linguistic glosses primarily as a reading aid, there is no doubt that his apparatus played a role in establishing the poem's reputation as well as in facilitating the inclusion of Zacuto's work in the contemporary canon of rabbinic and devotional literature. Indeed, most of the subsequent reprints of *Tofteh ʿarukh* maintained Basilea's marginal apparatus, which far from being seen as supplementary to the text and hence detachable, was clearly perceived as an integral part of the work, certainly a necessary interpretive device given the challenges posed by the poem's intricate language.[50] Moreover, Basilea's hermeneutic effort was also a way to explore Zacuto's poem by examining and dissecting it, thus ideally re-establishing a dialogue with the late teacher. Being in an entwined relation of interdependence and reciprocal intelligibility with the text of the poem, Basilea's apparatus of marginal notes goes beyond the function of the para-text as it was first conceptualized by Gérard Genette.[51] Rather, it fits Jacques Derrida's theoretical elaboration on the *parergon* as "a space which both frames and inhabits the text."[52] As such, its role in guiding the understanding of Zacuto's poem by its readers and conditioning the consumption practices that would develop around it cannot be minimized.

Transformed into a portable book, the printed *Tofteh ʿarukh* left the premises of Zacuto's former house of study, crossed the walls of Mantua's ghetto, and reached the city of Ferrara, then part of the Papal States, there to become the object of an avid and passionate reception. Members of the local *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* confraternity started to use it during their gatherings, following the practice of their Mantuan counterparts. In the summer of 1720, they even staged a series of dramatized readings of the text, open to the entire community. As noted above, Jacob Daniel Olmo (c. 1690–1757), the leader of the local confraternity and the initiator of the public readings, who was a poet in his own right, later wrote a sequel titled *ʿEden ʿarukh* (Paradise Arrayed). Centred around the description of the delights awaiting the righteous in heaven, Olmo's poem had a similar structure

[49] *Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 7^{v}.

[50] It is worth noting that Basilea's commentary was also maintained in several manuscripts produced in the eighteenth century that were based on the printed edition of *Tofteh ʿarukh*.

[51] That is, as a kind of "threshold [...] that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back," and a "transitional zone between text and beyond-text" (Genette, *Paratexts*, 1–2, 407).

[52] See Smith and Wilson, "Introduction," 7 and Heller-Adrist, "The Friction of the Frame," 34–36.

to Zacuto's, but antithetical content: the invectives against the medical profession were replaced by wise reflections on the inadequacy of human knowledge and capabilities when confronted with death; instead of the demon, the dead protagonist was met by an angel who accompanied him to heaven; from the same angel, the protagonist learned that the earthly sorrows and tribulations that had marked his "yesterday" were now replaced by the joy and bliss of an eternal "today"; finally, the poem concluded with a description of the seven paradisiacal halls, to which Zacuto had only briefly referred at the conclusion of *Tofteh 'arukh*. Like Zacuto's characterization of the seven infernal compartments, Olmo's description of the paradisiacal habitations was similarly based on mystical sources, and in terms of structure, organizational principles, and nomenclature closely followed the zoharic depiction of the Seven Palaces of Holiness.[53]

Olmo's sequel to *Tofteh 'arukh* sits at the intersection of reverence, emulation, and literary tradition. *'Eden 'arukh* would be easy to spurn as the inferior work of an epigone, but its composition in fact embodied the application of two rhetorical principles that contemporary literary training and practice considered essential to the study and apprehension of great authors (and especially the classical ones), that is, the principles of *imitatio* (imitation) and *variatio* (variation). In their pedagogic implementation, these two principles meant the mimetic assimilation of the style of the poet or writer constituting the model, and its remodulation according to new rules of composition. These goals are precisely what Olmo accomplished with *'Eden 'arukh*. More importantly, Olmo's paradisiacal sequel opened a new chapter in the afterlife of *Tofteh 'arukh*, thus also shaping, to a great extent, its circulation among a Jewish readership over the next century and a half. Indeed, in 1743, the Ferrara *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* sponsored the publication of a second edition of *Tofteh 'arukh*. This printing brought about a further expansion of the original compilation, for the new publication also included Olmo's poem, complemented, as its prequel, by a dense marginal apparatus elucidating both content and lexical issues. As in the 1715 printing, the text of Zacuto's introduction to the 1673 edition of his *Tiqqun shovavim* was inserted as an appendix, thus reiterating the devotional nature of the compilation in relation to the ritual customs originally popularized by Zacuto. Thus assembled, the new publication acquired a multi-voiced and multi-authored nature. The formula proved to be a successful one, and indeed several following editions opted to maintain the two-poem structure in which prequel and sequel were published in tandem.

Copied, annotated, printed, and expanded, *Tofteh 'arukh* succeeded in creating a sort of micro-society of actively engaged readers among the members

[53] See *Zohar* 2:fols. 244^{v}–262^{v}.

of devotional confraternities whose ritual practices were similar to those that Zacuto had promoted among his disciples. A sort of "textual community"[54] was thus formed, whose members shared a common understanding of the cultural significance of the poem, its interpretive potentialities, and possible modalities of consumption. In the following century and a half, manuscript copies, mainly based on the 1715 and 1743 editions, continued to be produced, for manuscripts were still a feasible and often-used recourse, especially among the young and the less affluent. In the meantime, though, *Tofteh 'arukh* was reprinted three times. In 1777, a reprint of Zacuto's and Olmo's poems appeared in Metz in an edition that, alongside Basilea's apparatus, also included a translation in Judeo-German. In 1880, an edition of Zacuto's poem alone was printed in Kolomyia, a town in Eastern Galicia (nowadays Ukraine) that at the time was home to about twelve thousand Jews. In the subsequent year, *Tofteh 'arukh* was reprinted in Jósefów, in east-central Poland, in an edition that also included Olmo's sequel, furtherly attesting to the work's popularity among Ashkenazi Jewish communities.[55] The printing afterlife of *Tofteh 'arukh* in eastern Europe followed the spread of Kabbalah literature eastward[56] and partook of the rise of ethical literature, both phenomena that provided Zacuto's work with new spaces of cultural representation within which the poem's relevance could be still appreciated.

In Italy, the addition of Olmo's paradisiacal sequel to Zacuto's original poem allowed a Jewish readership to have access to a compilation similar on the surface to the *Divine Comedy*, a work familiar to Italian Jews since Dante's time. In addition to shaping the material consumption of the work, the combined publication of Zacuto's and Olmo's poems possibly also influenced the parameters of interpretation of *Tofteh 'arukh*. In fact, even though, among the Hebrew imitations and adaptations of the *Divine Comedy*, Zacuto's is the most distant both in style and spirit, Italian rabbis and scholars saw in Zacuto's poem the Jewish answer to Dante's masterpiece.[57] Thus, for example, in his treatise on Hebrew stylistics, Italian grammarian Anania Coen (1751–1834) did not hesitate to emphatically state that *Tofteh 'arukh* held among Jewish readers the place that Italians attributed

[54] On the seminal concept of "textual community," see Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, 88–92, 522.

[55] See Ravenna, "Moses Zacuto's Play," online.

[56] See Gries, *The Book in the Jewish World*, 75–76.

[57] The idea of a direct dependence of *Tofteh 'arukh* on Dante's *Inferno* has long been common currency among modern scholars too. See Iona, "Some Considerations on Moses ben Mordecai Zacuto," 98; Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, 4:180; Scholem and Michman, "Zacuto, Moses ben Mordecai," 436; Bregman, ed., *A Bundle of Gold*, 242; Bregman, ed., *The Golden Way*, 114.

to the *Divine Comedy*.[58] Be that as it may, the reception of *Tofteh 'arukh* among Italian Jewish readers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seems to be linked to the parallel, partly nationalistic, revival of Dante's work in contemporary Italian culture. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that in this period two Italian translations of Zacuto's were made less than a century apart from one another. The first one, by Salomone Isacco Luzzati, appeared in 1819 and was a free adaptation of the poem: Zacuto's highly stylized verses were transposed into Italian sestinas in a rendition that often departed from the original Hebrew.[59] The second, by Cesare Foà, was published in 1901, and was in prose. Although it adhered more to the literal meaning of the text, Foà's translation too was oblivious to its kabbalistic contents, thus incongruously detaching Zacuto's work from the ideology that produced and framed it.[60] Overall, both translations were more interested in the literary aspects of *Tofteh 'arukh*, rather than in approaching it as the expression of the specific Jewish culture of its age.

[58] See Coen, *Saggio di eloquenza ebrea*, 37–38.

[59] See Zacuto, *L'inferno preparato*.

[60] See Zacùt, *Toftèh gnarùch.*

CHAPTER 2

ON DEATH, KABBALAH, AND WHY ONE SHOULD BELIEVE IN HELL

Beliefs about the Hereafter

The famed Venetian rabbi and scholar Leon Modena (1571–1648) has left us a vivid account of the sudden illness and subsequent passing of his father, as they unfolded at the beginning of December 1591 in the village of Montagnana, on the Veneto mainland. As he recounts in his *Autobiography*, his father, who at the time of his death was seventy-two years old, took to bed "sick and in a crazed state," his infirm body racked by a "persistent burning fever,"[1] languishing in that state for five days. Before he died, in the early hours of the day, he confessed in the presence of ten men, as was the custom, and bestowed his blessing upon his child. He had expressed the wish to be buried in the nearby town of Padua, then home to a sizeable Jewish community, but since the day of his death was a Friday and the inclement weather had made roads unpassable, Leon Modena decided to bury him in Montagnana, and "lay his body and soul to rest immediately." Although he regretted not being able to fulfil his father's last wishes, he took solace in the idea that a timely burial in the last hours before the start of the Sabbath could "spare him the beating of the grave (if it really exists)."[2]

The tradition to which Leon Modena referred in his *Autobiography* is the kabbalistic belief in the preliminary judgement of the afterlife, the same ritual that Zacuto vividly represented in *Tofteh 'arukh*. According to it, after burial the soul of the departed re-enters the body. The deceased is then summoned for judgement by the Angel of Death who, with the assistance of ministering angels, beats them savagely with rods made half of iron and half of fire. The ritual extends over three days and ends once the sensorial part of the soul—on which the evil inclination held its grip on earth—has atoned for all the sins committed in life. This allows the more spiritual portions to continue their voyage through the afterlife and eventually receive that which is due to them, be it the torments of Gehenna for the wicked, or direct ascent to heaven for the righteous. Tradition has it that all the dead, even the righteous, undergo this preliminary judgement, for nobody is

[1] Cohen, *Life of Judah*, 93.

[2] Cohen, *Life of Judah*, 94.

entirely devoid of sin. Only those who die in the Land of Israel or who are buried on the eve of the Sabbath—as Leon Modena was evidently aware—are spared the Beating of the Grave, since on that holy day the torments inflicted upon the damned in hell come to a pause too.[3] Leon Modena is generally known as a stern opponent of Kabbalah, some of whose tenets he would later lambast in his own writings. Therefore, his mentioning, albeit with cautious skepticism, the Beating of the Grave and some of the collateral beliefs attached to it is of particular significance, since it shows the extent to which notions of kabbalistic origin had permeated Jewish society, shaping the everyday religious practice of all its different components.[4]

As it is the case for most kabbalistic beliefs, the Beating of the Grave drew upon previous traditions. Some of the elements that characterize it already appeared in the Talmud.[5] The first detailed elaboration of this afterlife ritual, though, is found in two later midrashim. The first one, titled *Massekhet ḥibbuṭ ha-qever* (Treatise of the Beating of the Grave), includes the most extensive treatment; the second, called *Massekhet gehinnom* (Treatise of Hell),[6] is more circumscribed, while still offering some additions. Both texts were the work of early medieval redactors who produced spurious expansions of pre-existing rabbinic sources. In *Massekhet ḥibbuṭ ha-qever*, the Beating of the Grave is described as follows:

> Thus said Rabbi Joshua: The Angel of Death holds in his hand a chain of sorts, made half of fire and half of iron, and with it he beats the deceased once; he thus passes judgement on him and charges him. And concerning the chain in the [angel's] hand half of which is fire,

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[3] On torments in the afterlife as being paused on a Sabbath, see TB *Sanhedrin*, fol. 65^{v}; *Zohar* 1:fols. 48^{r}; 62^{v}; 197^{v}; 2:fols. 31^{v}; 88^{v}; 203^{v}; 3:fol. 94^{v}.

[4] It is worth noting that in the first edition of his treatise on Jewish customs, published in Paris in 1637 with the title *Historia degli riti hebraici* (History of the Jewish Rites), several chapters of which are devoted to funerary practices and views on the afterlife, Leon Modena pointed out that the Beating of the Grave was a belief shared "by those who are of less than mediocre intelligence" (*il che vien creduto da quelli che son meno che di mediocre ingegno*) (Modena, *Historia degli riti hebraici*, 214). Probably due to fear of the Inquisition, the belief was not referred to in the second edition of the *Riti*, published in Venice in 1638. Originally written in Italian, Leon Modena's compilation addressed a Christian readership and aimed to give a neutral and rational description of Jewish practices, as devoid of superstitious elements as possible. See Cohen, "Leone da Modena's *Riti*."

[5] See TB *Berakhot*, fol. 18^{v}. In rabbinical sources, the ritual is referred to as "the judgment of the grave" (*din ha-qever*).

[6] Both texts have been edited in Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrasch*, 1:147–152.

> thus said Rabbi Joshua ben Levi: [When he beats the deceased] once, his limbs fall apart, and [when he beats him] twice, his bones fall apart. And here come the ministering angels who collect [his limbs and bones] and put them back together, and at that point [the Angel of Death] beats him a third time, until the deceased is turned into ashes. On the second day, they pass judgement on him in the same way, but on the third day, they [beat him] even more, since they pass judgement on him with regard to [sins committed with] his two eyes and his two ears and his lips [...]. Thus, they submit him to judgement and punish him measure for measure.[7]

From the midrash, the tradition of the Beating of the Grave made its way into the *Zohar*, where, following in the steps of the *Talmud*, it is referred to in several passages as the "judgement of the grave" (*dina de-qivra*).[8] Subsequently revived by Safedian kabbalists, the belief was eventually popularized by devotional works of a mystical nature whose source of inspiration lay, besides Lurianic Kabbalah, in zoharic lore. By the first half of the seventeenth century, as a result of the spread of kabbalistic customs from Palestine, the belief in the preliminary judgement had become an integral component of contemporary teachings concerning the afterlife. Although it had no doctrinal sanction, but rather was confined to the realm of popular devotion, it enjoyed extraordinary currency, as Leon Modena's own account proves.

Among the followers of Kabbalah, some of whom had intimate familiarity with the writings of the Lurianic school, the Beating of the Grave was imbued with mystical connotations of which the common believer was largely unaware. An illuminating exposition of the theosophic meaning that kabbalists attached to this belief is found in *Ma'avar Yabboq* (The Crossing of the Jabbok)[9] by Leon Modena's cousin, the Modenese rabbi Aaron Berechiah Modena (d. 1639). First published in Mantua in 1626, the compilation was a collection of readings, prayers, laws, and customs meant to guide and assist the faithful during illness, on a deathbed, and through burial and mourning rites. Heavily influenced by Kabbalah, of which, unlike his cousin, Aaron Berechiah Modena was a fervent adept, the book is one of the first comprehensive examples of *ars moriendi* in Judaism. It is also

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[7] Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrasch*, 1:151.

[8] See *Zohar*, 2:fols. 151^{r}; 199^{r-v}; 211^{v}; 3:fols. 53^{r}; 126^{v}–127^{r}.

[9] By referring to Jacob's ordeal as recounted in Gen. 32:22–31, the title of the compilation alludes to the purifying river of fire over which, according to the kabbalists, the soul passes after death.

a valuable source of information on the process of thorough, highly prescriptive ritualization that early modern death had undergone, and the contribution of mysticism towards placing dying and its rituals at the centre of both individual and collective life.[10] A bulky book and certainly not an easy read, *Ma'avar Yabboq* was reprinted in full only a handful of times after the first edition. Its abridged and translated versions, though, knew enduring popularity, with more than two dozen reprints appearing in the following two and a half centuries, thus supplying generations of readers with a practical guide to all things related to death.

The exposition of the Beating of the Grave offered in *Ma'avar Yabboq* exemplifies well the erudite insights underlying this kind of popular belief. Closely following in the steps of Ḥayyim Vital's *Sha'ar ha-gilgulim* (The Gate of Reincarnations), in which the Lurianic interpretation of the Beating of the Grave had received one of its first elaborations,[11] Aaron Berechiah Modena establishes a connection between the afterlife ritual and the theory of "husks" (*qelippot* in Hebrew), that is, those elements that hide and obstruct the divine substance and are synonymous with the evil forces at work in the universe. The concept of husk was not new and, in fact, derived from the *Zohar*, where it contributed to a dichotomous interpretation of the cosmos—one that Lurianic Kabbalah appropriated and expanded. According to it, all things, including the human soul and body, both reproduce and respond to the cosmic pattern featuring an inner kernel covered with a shell of husks. Therefore, the Beating of the Grave is constructed as both a material and spiritual procedure, whose essentially mechanical nature is meant to achieve the complete detachment of the husks from the human soul, or kernel. Once freed of all evil debris, the soul can then continue its afterlife journey towards hell or heaven:

> In the commentaries by the disciples of the Ari [Isaac Luria] I found written that after the burial come four angels who make the grave sink into the earth until it reaches a depth that equals the deceased's height, as it is found in the midrash. The husk being bound to both the body and the soul, these two are now reunited; thus, the angels hold the deceased, two by his arms and two by his feet, and shake him

[10] The compilation was composed at the request of the Modenese confraternity for the care of the dead. On *Ma'avar Yabboq*, see Bar-Levav, "Rabbi Aaron Berekhiah Modena." On the rites surrounding death and the dying in early modern Judaism, see Goldberg, *Crossing the Jabbok*; Bar-Levav, "Ritualisation of Jewish Life and Death"; Bar-Levav, "Dying by the Book"; Bar-Levav, "Games of Death."

[11] *Sha'ar ha-gilgulim* 23:3.

> while beating him with iron rods, in the same manner as one beats a garment in order to shake off the dust that has adhered to it (this is the reason why the grave needs to sink, so that there is enough space to beat and shake the deceased). Thus, they keep on beating, while bit by bit said husk is detached from the deceased, until it is completely extirpated, this being the actual meaning of the Beating of the Grave. And in truth, not everybody deserves the aforementioned trial, since the righteous who performed good deeds during their lives were, in fact, [already] beating themselves to shake off the husk by means of the afflictions and suffering they bore while on earth, as well as by means of the Torah that sanctifies the body of the man. Even so, to shake it off completely is impossible; but while none is spared the Beating of the Grave, the wicked is inflicted with added hardship. Furthermore, the Ari [...] taught that whoever is buried on a Friday, after the fifth hour of the day, or during it, will not undergo the Beating of the Grave,[12] for the sanctity of the Sabbath will preserve the deceased from suffering (this being the mystery of the Friday, which is that addition by virtue of which this day, starting from that hour on, is in fact already Sabbath).[13]

Ma'avar Yabboq was probably familiar reading to Zacuto.[14] Nevertheless, Aaron Berechiah Modena's exposition of the Beating of the Grave was neither the direct nor the main source upon which he drew in penning *Tofteh 'arukh*. In fact, Zacuto's poem makes no allusion to the theory of husks. Moreover, the Beating of the Grave, as staged in the poem, takes a rather different form than in the passage that we have just quoted. One commonality, though, between Zacuto's poem and *Ma'avar Yabboq* lies in the sinking of the grave into the earth, a detail that had been given special emphasis in Lurianic elaborations and that already featured in Vital's treatment. But if not from Modena's account, where did Zacuto draw inspiration for his peculiar depiction of the preliminary judgment, the afterlife ritual that sits at the centre of *Tofteh 'arukh* and whose description in fact occupies almost two-thirds of it?

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[12] See above, n. 3.

[13] *Ma'avar Yabboq*, fol. 111^{v}.

[14] One of the several digests of *Ma'avar Yabboq* then circulating, titled *Qeri'ah ne'emanah* (*Faithful Reading*) (Venice, 1715), was compiled by a former student of Zacuto, Samuel David Ottolengo, on whom see above, Introduction, n. 34.

The Rabbi's Library

In the introductory note to *Tofteh 'arukh*, Zacuto informs the reader that what follows is based on rabbinic teachings on the destiny of the soul in the afterlife and the ritual of the Beating of the Grave. In particular, he states that the subject of the poem draws upon two specific sources. The first one is the Talmudic tale of the lame and the blind found in *Sanhedrin*, a moralistic story in which the two impaired individuals join forces to raid an orchard and then to claim innocence in view of their disabilities. With a few variations, this narrative was attested in a variety of ancient traditions outside of Judaism. In its rabbinic version, it became an allegory of the common fate of the body and soul after death, when they would be reunited to be jointly judged:[15]

> [The Roman emperor] Antoninus said to the rabbi: "The body and the soul can exempt themselves from judgement. How so? The body says: 'The soul sinned, as from the day when it departed from me, I have been thrown like an inanimate stone in the grave.' And the soul says: 'The body sinned, as from the day when I departed from it, I have been flying in the air like a bird'." [The rabbi] said to him: "I shall tell you a parable. To what is this matter comparable? To a king of flesh and blood who had a fine orchard, and in it there were fine firstlings, and he appointed two guards in charge of it, one lame and one blind. Thus, the lame said to the blind: 'I can see fine firstlings in the orchard; come and carry me on your shoulders, and we will pick and eat them.' And the lame rode upon the shoulders of the blind and they picked [the fruits] and ate them. One day, the owner came to the orchard. He said to the guards: 'Those fine firstlings—where are they?' The lame said: 'Do I have any legs with which to walk?' And the blind said: 'Do I have any eyes to see?' So, what did [the owner] do? He placed the lame man on the shoulders of the blind and judged them as one. Similarly, the Holy One, Blessed be He, summons the soul and casts it into the body, and judges the two as one, as it is stated: *He shall call to the heavens above and to the earth, that He may judge His people* (Ps. 50:4), which is to say, *He shall call*

[15] The story also appears, with the same moral, in midrashic compilations (see *Wa-yiqra rabbah* 4:5 and *Mekhilta de-Rashbi* [on Ex.] 15:1). From rabbinic sources the idea that the body and soul are judged together in the afterlife entered mystical literature and indeed is referred to in multiple places in the *Zohar*. See *Zohar* 1:fol.65^{v}; 79^{r}; 130^{v}; 201^{v}; 218^{v}; 227^{r}; 2:fol. 199^{v}; 3:fols. 53^{r}; 126^{v}.

> *to the heavens above*—this being the soul; *and to the earth, that He may judge his people*—this being the body."[16]

The second source to which Zacuto refers in his introductory note to *Tofteh 'arukh* is the above-mentioned *Massekhet gehinnom*. This early-medieval midrashic compilation includes the account of the supernatural journey undertaken by one of the *amoraim* (expounders) mentioned in the Talmud, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, who, under the guidance of the prophet Elijah, enters hell and there watches the torments inflicted upon the wicked in the afterlife:

> Rabbi Joshua ben Levi recounts: "One day I was walking in the street, when I stumbled across the prophet Elijah, may his memory be for a blessing, who told me: 'Would you like to stand at the entrance of hell?' 'Of course!', I replied. Thus, he showed me men hanging by their nostrils, and others by their hands, and some hanging by their tongue, and others by their feet. And he showed me also women hanging by their breasts, and men hanging by their eyes, and some forced to devour their own flesh, and others forced to partake of blazing thorns. And [indicating] some men seated still while worms were devouring their flesh, he said: 'Those are the ones about whom it is written: *Their worm shall not die* (Is. 66:24).' And then he showed me men forced to eat fine sand, smashing their own teeth when swallowing it, while the Holy, may he be blessed, was telling them: 'O you wicked ones, when you devoured the haul of your robberies it tasted sweet to your palate, but now you cannot eat!' which fulfills the [biblical] verse: *Thou break the teeth of the wicked* (Ps. 3:8). And then I saw people being thrown from fire to snow and from snow [back] to fire, like a shepherd moving his flock from one mountain to the other, and in fact about those it is written: *Like sheep they head for Sheol, with death as their shepherd. The upright shall rule over them in the morning, while their form shall waste away in Sheol from their dwelling there* (Ps. 49:15)."[17]

In view of the teaching that it conveyed on the conjoined judgement of body and soul, the Talmudic story of the blind and the lame affirmed the physical as well as spiritual nature of the Beating of the Grave. But what role did *Massekhet*

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[16] TB *Sanhedrin*, fol. 91[r-v].

[17] Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrasch*, 1:148.

gehinnom play in the overall thematic structure of *Tofteh ʿarukh*? From this source, Zacuto derived the powerfully horrifying description of the variety of punishments meted out to sinners during the Beating of the Grave, a catalogue of horrors that he borrowed and adapted to depict the torments inflicted upon the dead in the preliminary judgement.[18] From this same compilation, he also derived the depiction of the fiery landscape of hell, whose geography is made of blazing mountains and rivers of sulphurs. And yet, despite these evident debts, if we compare the text of *Massekhet gehinnom* with that of *Tofteh ʿarukh*, we cannot but notice several gaps and discrepancies. Indeed, although the Beating of the Grave is mentioned in *Massekhet gehinnom*, the compilation does not expand on it. Therefore, it seems that the two works referred to at the beginning of the poem do not come close to exhausting the number and variety of sources that Zacuto weaved together into the new whole that constituted the underground world of *Tofteh ʿarukh*. Indeed, Zacuto's 'reference library' was much larger than he acknowledged in his introductory note.

In fact, the notion that everybody, even infants, undergoes the preliminary judgment is not mentioned in *Massekhet gehinnom*. It rather stems from *Massekhet ḥibbuṭ ha-qever*, the early medieval midrashic compilation mentioned above that constitutes one of the earliest and most thorough accounts of the preliminary judgement. It is in this specific source that the procedure is presented as promiscuous and non-selective, with no respect for rank, hierarchies, or the gravity of the sins committed:

> Rabbi Meir [...] said: Hard is the day of judgment, since the Lord, may He be blessed, judges somebody in his grave more harshly than in hell. Indeed, the judgment executed in hell affects sinners whose age is twenty years and above, while the judgment in the grave is executed even upon the righteous, and even upon babies that have just been weaned; even nurslings undergo it.[19]

From *Massekhet ḥibbuṭ ha-qever*, Zacuto also derived the poignant image of the soul re-entering the body for the Beating of the Grave and the depiction of the demons in charge of administering it as gigantic creatures covered with eyes and enfolded in fire, according to a representation that, in turn, drew upon the traditional rabbinical image of the Angel of Death:[20]

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[18] See *Tofteh ʿarukh*, vv. 186–235.

[19] Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrasch*, 1:151.

[20] On the Angel of Death as "full of eyes," so that his gaze is inescapable, see TB *ʿAvodah zarah*, 20^{v}; *Midrash Ba-midbar rabbah*, 12:3; *Midrash Ekhah rabbah*, 1:29. On his sword see

> When somebody is about to die, [four] angels come to him, the first of which is a servant angel, the second is the Angel of Death, the third serves as the scribe and the fourth assists him; the Angel of Death tells the dying person: "Get up! Thy time hath come!" But the person answers: "Not yet!" And then the dying person opens his eyes and beholds an angel whose size covers the entire world from one edge to the other, and who is covered from head to toes by eyes and clothed in fire and enfolded by fire, and who is all fire and bears in his hand a knife from which the bitter drop trickles down. Because of that drop that man dies, because of it he putrefies, because of it his face discolours.[21]

This same representation would later also influence the zoharic imaginary surrounding the preliminary judgement and the angels in charge of it:

> As soon as a man is concealed in his grave, Dumah [i.e., the angel overseeing hell] hastens to summon a court of three [angels], who are in charge of the Beating of the Grave. Three fiery sceptres are in their hands, and they judge soul and body jointly. Woe for that judgment! Woe for the deeds of that man! In the hour in which that man is seized in the King's inclemency and the final judgement has been decreed upon him, while no advocate has been found on his behalf, here the King's guard [i.e., Dumah] descends, and stands in front of the deceased, right at his feet, brandishing a sharp sword. The man raises his eyes and sees the walls of his house ablaze with fire. And then he sees Dumah right in front of him, covered from head to toes with eyes, and clothed in fire, and blazing in his very presence.[22]

We have thus seen that some of the main features marking Zacuto's representation of the Beating of the Grave can be traced back to a much wider selection of sources than acknowledged by the author. What, however, of the other elements that compose the rest of Zacuto's wild, chaotic, and yet highly structured netherworld? The concept of hell as comprised of seven compartments, or

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TB *ʿAvodah zarah*, 20^{v}. On fire as one of his attributes, see TB *Moʿed qaṭan*, 28^{r}.

[21] Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrasch*, 1:150.

[22] *Zohar* 3:fol. 126^{v}. The ineluctability of the preliminary judgment and its being inflicted upon both the wicked and the righteous are referred to in *Zohar* 2:fol. 151^{r}.

habitations, originates in a variety of rabbinic sources, starting with the Talmud, which contains a list of the seven names of hell:

> Thus spoke Rabbi Joshua ben Levi: Gehenna has seven different names, which are: Netherworld, Destruction, Pit, Gruesome Pit, Miry Clay, Shadow of Death and Underworld.[23]

From the Talmud and the midrash this tradition found its way into mystical literature and in fact is referred to in several places in the *Zohar*.[24] In one of those places, the existence of the seven compartments is explained in relation to qualitative differences among sinners, which result in each category of sinful behaviour being punished in a different infernal habitation:

> There are seven entrances to hell, and seven compartments in it. Likewise, there are seven categories of sinners: the wicked, the vile, the sinner, the evil, the corrupter, the reprobate and the arrogant. For all these sinners there are compartments in hell, with one fit for each category [of sinner]; according to the level of his sin, each of them is assigned to a [different] compartment in hell.[25]

Although it displays some inconsistencies, where in a few cases the same sin is punished in more than one compartment, Zacuto's hell adheres to this overarching concept. It is thus organized so that different categories of sinners are punished in specific sectors that relate to the nature of the crime committed. More importantly, though, according to Zacuto's infernal topography hell is structured in seven encased compartments (in Hebrew, *medorim*), each of them more confined than the previous one as hell funnels downward. He also envisions them as hierarchically organized, with gravely sinful acts punished in the lower compartments, although, as we shall see, in the poem the strict graduation of crimes and punishments is not always observed. The idea of hell as a self-contained, graduated place was deeply seated in the Italian poetic imaginary related to the afterworld due to the overwhelming influence of Dante's *Inferno*. Zacuto's depiction, though, had a parallel in Jewish sources too. Indeed, a similar structure is mentioned in *Midrash Rut ha-ne'elam* (Hidden Midrash to the Book of Ruth), a compilation of early

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[23] TB *'Eruvin*, fol. 19^{r}. On the seven compartments of hell see also TB *Sotah*, fol. 10^{v}; *Midrash Tehillim*, 11:6.

[24] See *Zohar* 1:fols. 40^{r}; 62^{v}; 237^{v}; 2:fols. 150^{v}; 263^{r}–268^{v}; 3:fols. 178^{r}, 285^{v}–286^{r}.

[25] *Zohar*, 2:fol. 150^{v}.

zoharic materials omitted, except for minor portions, from the first editions of the *Zohar*. Drawing together heterogeneous texts, *Midrash Rut ha-ne'elam* offers a mystical interpretation of parts of the homonymous biblical book, interspersed among a variety of other topics. Among those collateral subjects we find a description of the seven compartments of hell, according to which the infernal divisions are placed one on top of the other and therefore organized in upper and lower levels:

> There are seven names for Gehenna: Pit, Ruin, Silence, Miry Clay, Hell, Shadow of Death and Underground. And there are seven entrances to Gehenna, each of them corresponding to one of its seven names. There are there seven compartments (*medorim*), one on top of the other, each of them reserved to the wicked that are there being judged. Their body perishes in the grave, while their souls are being burned and consumed by fire.[26]

Onto this overall frame, whose architecture, as we have seen, already partook of an array of rabbinical and mystical sources, Zacuto efficaciously grafted a variety of elements and motifs that he borrowed from the same *Midrash Rut ha-ne'elam* and, in even more substantial measure, from the description of the Seven Palaces of Impurity (*Shiv'ah hekhalot ha-ṭum'ah*) contained in the main body of the *Zohar*.[27] This latter zoharic section is part of *Parashat pequde*—thus called because of its location in the Mantua edition[28]—and contains a treatment of the *hekhalot*, that is, the heavenly palaces associated with the seven higher *sefirot*. In harmony with the zoharic principle according to which "what is low can be comprised in what is high,"[29] this section is followed by an account of the parallel palaces inhabited by demonic uncleanness. The zoharic description of the Seven Palaces of Impurity configures itself as a theosophic reflection around what the medieval authors of the compilation construed as the material embodiment of the Other Side (*siṭra aḥra*), that is, the reign of evil in which impure forces are generated and from which they acquire their power. From this portion of the *Zohar*, Zacuto derived most of the list of sins punished in hell, as well as the typologies of punishments dispensed in each of its compartments. From this same source he

[26] *Midrash Rut ha-ne'elam*, fol. 11^{r}.

[27] See *Zohar*, 2:fols. 262^{v}–268^{v}. For a preliminary survey of the mystical sources of *Tofteh 'arukh*, see Hamiel, "*Tofteh 'arukh* by Moses Zacuto," and Lattes, "La concezione della morte."

[28] See *Zohar*, 2:fols. 244^{v}–268^{v}.

[29] *Zohar* 2:fol. 244^{v}.

also borrowed most of the outlandish nomenclature and attributes marking the demonic creatures that rule over hell.

In fact, the taxonomic correspondence between the Seven Palaces of Impurity and the seven infernal compartments established in *Tofteh ʿarukh* had already been presented in the *Zohar*, where it was mentioned in a passage from the same *Parashat pequde* that furnished Zacuto with much of his infernal imagery:

> There are differing aspects and degrees of the evil inclination. [...] These seven names [of the evil inclination] correspond to the seven degrees of its palaces, which are all located in the Other Side, as we mentioned, and to the seven names of Gehenna, that is the place in which the wicked is condemned. These names [i.e., the names of hell] are as follows: Pit, Ruin, Silence, Miry Clay, Hell, Shadow of Death and Underground. These are the seven compartments of Gehenna, corresponding to the seven names of the evil inclination. In fact, the Seven Palaces of the Other Side are called with the same names as the seven compartments of hell.[30]

The conceptual transposition operated by the *Zohar* and the consequent overlapping between the Seven Palaces of Impurity and the seven infernal compartments are of particular significance for Zacuto, since they establish the essential affinity between hell and the dark powers of evil, thus also bearing a corollary of theosophic implications. Indeed, since the Other Side is parallel to the Divine Side and like that interfaces with the sphere of the living, it follows that a synergistic relation exists between the demonic forces spilling from there to roam the world and human sin. As a result of this relationship, demonic powers tempt men into sinning by rousing their evil inclination. In fact, they behave like savage abductors who, once their victims have submitted and sinned, deposit their soul in the depths of hell; in this way, men's impurity feeds, revives, and strengthens the Other Side. This process also means that men prepare a place in hell for themselves while still on earth by succumbing to the seductions of the evil inclination and sinning, thus choosing vice over virtue. This concept is reiterated by Zacuto in several places in the *Tofteh ʿarukh*. It also informs the poem's entire central section, in which the sins committed "yesterday" by the dead protagonist are contrasted with the tribulations that the demon in charge of the Beating of the Grave is inflicting upon him "today."[31]

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[30] *Zohar* 2:fol. 263ʳ.

[31] See *Tofteh ʿarukh*, vv. 346–670.

In fact, the idea of a causal nexus between men's conduct on earth and their destiny in the afterlife is already enunciated in the poem's title, a quotation from Isaiah's oracles against the Assyrian Empire[32] in which the fiery image of the *tofteh* (also called *tofet*) is evoked. This Hebrew term was often associated with the Valley of Hinnom (in Hebrew, *Gehinnom*), located south-east of Jerusalem, to indicate the place in which, according to the Bible, human sacrifices were performed to the Canaanite divinity Moloch.[33] In fact, the idea of punishment by fire evoked by Isaiah had led the rabbis of the Talmud to include the *tofet*/*tofteh* among the various denominations of Gehenna (a variant of the name Gehinnom) in a passage, certainly not unknown to Zacuto, in which the link between the evil inclination and its afterlife consequences was clearly established:

> Is not there [also the name] *Tofteh*, as it is written: *For its pyre* [tofteh] *is arrayed of old* (Is. 30:33)? That [name indicates] that anyone who allows himself to be seduced by his [evil] inclination will end up there.[34]

Following in the footsteps of the Talmud, the direct link between the evil inclination and punishment in the afterlife was explicitly asserted in one of Zacuto's sources, the midrashic compilation *Massekhet gehinnom* to which, as noted above, he refers at the beginning of *Tofteh ʿarukh*:

> And why is it called *tofteh*? Because everybody enters it due to the seductions of the evil inclination.[35]

We thus have been able to draw a fairly precise picture of the works that Zacuto had at his disposal when he undertook the composition of *Tofteh ʿarukh* and which formed the mosaic of sources from which he borrowed and then infused with his own poetic imagination and distinctive mode of expression. The presence of the *Zohar* among these sources is certainly not surprising: Zacuto was a close reader of this core work of Kabbalah literature, on which, as noted above, he wrote more than one commentary. Small portions of *Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam*

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[32] See Is. 30:33: "The pyre (*tofteh*) is arrayed (*ʿarukh*) of old, it is ready for the king too; wide and deep is the firepit, fire and firewood are plenty. Like a stream of sulphur, the breath of God doth kindle it."

[33] See Lev. 18:21ff.

[34] TB *ʿEruvin*, fol. 19^{r}.

[35] Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrasch*, 1:147.

had been included in the Cremona edition of the *Zohar*, but left out of the Mantua one. This work, which some did not consider to be part of the zoharic corpus, was first printed in its entirety in Tiengen, in 1559, under a different title, and later reprinted in Venice in 1566. Eventually, it was included in the 1658 Venetian edition of *Zohar ḥadash*, a work that, as mentioned, had been prepared for print by Zacuto himself in collaboration with Joseph Ḥamitz.[36] The decision by the two editors to also include this section of *Midrash ha-neʿelam* constituted an innovation by comparison to the two previous editions of the *Zohar ḥadash*, that is, the *editio princeps* that had appeared in Salonika in 1597 and the 1603 reprint issued in Krakow, and seems to demonstrate the relevance that they ascribed to the compilation. As for the Talmud, during Zacuto's lifetime this foundational work that formed the body of Jewish law and lore was still included in the Catholic Church's *Index librorum prohibitorum*, the list of forbidden books. Italian Jews, though, had overcome the prohibition on printing, owning, or reading it by resorting to medieval commentaries and compendia, among which the most popular was the *Sefer halakhot* (Book of Laws) by Isaac ben Jacob Alfasi (1013–1103). This compendium had been first printed in Constantinople in 1509, and then republished in Venice in 1521 in an expanded version.

What, however, of *Massekhet gehinnom* and *Massekhet ḥibbuṭ ha-qever*? These were minor, obscure texts that knew a limited circulation, as testified by a scanty manuscript tradition. This being the case, where did Zacuto come across them? Certainly, he must have had the opportunity to peruse these two compilations thoroughly, since they inspired him to compose a poem that clearly drew upon their contents. The answer to this question seemingly lies in Zacuto's encounter with another book, a book that, like a Chinese box, contained all the sources that contributed to the complex patchwork of inter-textual references laid out in *Tofteh ʿarukh*. This book was the devotional manual *Reshit ḥokhmah* (Beginning of Wisdom) by the sixteenth-century Palestinian rabbi and kabbalist Elijah de Vidas (d. c. 1593).[37] First published in Venice in 1579 during the author's lifetime, de Vidas's compilation gained instant popularity and was subsequently reprinted more than forty times, both in integral and abridged forms.[38] Written

[36] See Huss, *The Zohar: Reception and Impact*, 104–105. On Zacuto's and Ḥamitz's edition of *Zohar ḥadash*, see above, Chapter 1. On *Midrash ha-neʿelam*, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 181–186; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1:2, 12.

[37] Very little is known about de Vidas's life other than that he was a disciple and friend of the great Palestinian kabbalist Moses Cordovero. See Scholem, "Vidas, Elijah ben Moses de"; Fine, *Safed Spirituality*, 81–156.

[38] See Steinschneider, *Catalogus librorum Hebraeorum*, 950, no. 4973.

in a plain and engaging style, the manual combined ethical and moral instruction with mystical teachings and relied heavily on Talmudic and zoharic literature. Chapters 12 and 13 of the section titled *Sha'ar ha-yir'ah* (The Gate of Fear) were organized as a florilegium of Jewish sources pertaining to death and the destiny of the wicked in the afterlife.[39] There, alongside the same passages from the *Zohar* and the *Midrash ha-ne'elam* upon which Zacuto based his own depiction of hell, the reader found incorporated the complete texts of *Massekhet gehinnom* and *Massekhet ḥibbuṭ ha-qever*.[40] Both hitherto unpublished, these two marginal, little-known midrashic works were thus squarely placed at the centre of kabbalistic traditions concerning hell and the punishment of the wicked in the afterlife, for the benefit of the pious and the devout. In all likelihood, it was through perusing de Vidas's manual that Zacuto became aware of these two texts and gained direct access to them.

In fact, it seems that de Vidas's compilation exerted an influence on Zacuto that went far beyond the mere role of sourcebook. The ideology that, as discussed, informs *Tofteh 'arukh*—namely the idea that, by sinning, men prepare their future damnation while still in this world—is explicitly stated in *Reshit ḥokhmah* too. Notably, its scriptural justification is traced back by de Vidas to that same verse from the book of Isaiah that Zacuto chose for the title of his poem:

> A further question concerning Gehenna has been revealed by the prophet Isaiah, where he says: *The pyre is arrayed of old, etc.* (Is. 30:33). [...] And our sages of blessed memory have explained this verse in the *Midrash aggadat Shemu'el* [an ancient midrash on the book of Samuel, first printed in 1517 in Constantinople and then reprinted in Venice in 1546], as follows: Thus said Rabbi Pinchas and Rabbi Huniah: "Indeed, the wicked say: How many myriads can ever Gehenna hold? Two hundred? Three hundred? And how many sinners for each generation? In truth, the Holy One blessed be He, has said: The more you are in the world, the more Gehenna is expanding day by day, both in width and depth, for it is written: *The pyre is arrayed of old, etc.*"[41]

Several elements thus seem to indicate that de Vidas's compilation played a direct role in fuelling the imagination of the Mantuan rabbi. Further

[39] See *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fols. 40^{v}–54^{r}.

[40] See *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fols. 45^{r}–48^{v}.

[41] *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 46^{r}.

commonalities between *Tofteh ʿarukh* and *Reshit ḥokhmah* can be found in the didactic and edifying intent of both works, and in what seems to have been their authors' intense preoccupation with sin and its theosophical and doctrinal implications. Evoking terrifying visions of the hereafter served to inculcate a salutary fear of sin in the reader, thus hopefully also inspiring a desire for repentance and atonement. It was also meant to reiterate the theological reality of a reckoning in the afterlife and function as an admonition directed towards all those who entertained doubts about it.[42] The fate awaiting those who spent their life oblivious to the hereafter and whose conduct, as a consequence, was sinful and debauched was exemplified by the one endured by the miserable protagonist of *Tofteh ʿarukh*: unable to comprehend his real condition, he helplessly faces the demon in charge of the Beating of the Grave, displaying a level of obtuseness that is equal only to his own depravity. Zacuto thus reminds the reader that disputing the existence of the hereafter and the torments there awaiting sinners is itself a sin, and that, moreover, such a crime is of the most serious nature. Indeed, according to *Tofteh ʿarukh*, those who harbour or disseminate skepticism about retribution in the hereafter will be condemned to languish forever in hell.[43]

A Moralizing Poem

Some of the concerns that dictated the composition of *Tofteh ʿarukh* were not, in fact, unique to Zacuto. Rather, they aligned with contemporary debates surrounding the immortality of the soul and corollary doctrinal questions, such as the existence and essential quality of an afterlife consisting of hell for the wicked and heaven for the righteous. After the scandalous and tragic affair of Uriel da Costa, a new controversy inflamed the Amsterdam Jewish community in the 1630s. The dispute revolved around the theological truth of eternal damnation and opposed Isaac Aboab da Fonseca (1605–1693)[44] to Saul Levi Morteira. Both were prominent figures in the Dutch community, and the latter, as noted above, had been Zacuto's teacher. Born into a family of former *conversos* and a follower of Kabbalah, da Fonseca denied the eternal punishment of the wicked, asserting that

[42] See *Tofteh ʿarukh*, vv. 346–370.

[43] See *Tofteh ʿarukh*, vv. 656–660.

[44] Born in Portugal but educated in Amsterdam, da Fonseca is famous for having been the first rabbi of the Americas (he served the Jewish community of Pernambuco between 1642 and 1654) and one of the signatories of the ban of excommunication issued against Baruch Spinoza in 1656. On da Fonseca, see Orfali Levi, "Observaciones"; Oravetz Albert, "The Rabbi and the Rebels," and its bibliographical references.

even apostasy and idolatry could not prevent the soul of a Jewish individual from partaking of the world to come. Salvation could be still achieved on condition that the soul first expiated all its sins by going through a series of transmigrations, according to a belief that was then current within some Lurianic circles. Morteira, whose intellectual personality inclined towards rationalism, held a different opinion. He supported the traditional position expressed especially in the Talmud (but also in part of kabbalistic literature), according to which the confinement of reprobates in hell was only temporary, spanning a maximum of twelve months, except for some categories of sinners—among them heretics, apostates, and skeptics—to whom eternal punishment applied.[45] The question was of the greatest relevance given the composition of the Amsterdam community, a sizeable portion of which consisted of former Iberian *conversos* and their descendants. da Fonseca's assertions demonstrated not only sensitivity to the difficult existential condition of so many members of his community, but also a less conservative attitude in matters of doctrine. As it happened, despite a family background similar to da Fonseca's, on the issue of eternal damnation Zacuto took the side of his teacher Morteira.[46] The theological implications of that debate seem to reverberate in *Tofteh 'arukh*, where the idea of eternal punishment is raised not only for the case of sinners condemned to be punished at the bottom of hell, but also for some of the reprobates occupying higher compartments.[47] Zacuto's adherence to the idea of eternal damnation casts light on the symbolical meaning of the poem's conclusion as well. Indeed, although *Tofteh 'arukh* closes with the image of the bliss bestowed on the righteous in heaven, rather than implying the hope of salvation for the damned too, as some interpreters have suggested,[48] the paradisiacal sight thus evoked seems to serve to affirm acceptance of God's judgement and to function as a further admonishment addressed to the readers, who once more are urged to repent and mend their ways.

Whereas doctrinal concerns did play a role in the composition of *Tofteh 'arukh*, it is at the level of moral instruction that Zacuto seems to have invested the greatest effort. In this respect, *Tofteh 'arukh* configures itself as a *meditatio mortis*,

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[45] See TB *Rosh ha-shanah*, fol. 17^{r}; *Zohar* 1:fols. 62^{v}; 77^{v}; 2:fol. 150^{v}; 3:fols. 285^{v}–286^{r}. On the twelve months as maximum length of stay in hell, see also TB *Shabbat*, fols. 33^{v} and 152^{v}–153^{r}; TB *Sanhedrin*, fol. 90^{r}; *Zohar*, 1:fol. 225^{r}; 2:fol. 263^{r}. On da Fonseca's and Morteira's debate, see Altmann, "Eternality of Punishment"; Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy*, 157–165.

[46] See Benayahu "The Role of Rabbi Moses Zacuto."

[47] See *Tofteh 'arukh*, v. 874. Cf. Meroz, "Moses Zacuto's Allusions in *Tofteh 'arukh*," 113–114.

[48] See Bregman, "Dimness and Clarity," 47–51.

a spiritual exercise in which the thoughts and emotions of the reader are focused on the idea of death, with the goal of turning the prospect of the end into the element capable of moderating and regulating human conduct. Thus, in taking the readers on a journey through the afterlife of sinners, Zacuto chose to offer them a mimetic recreation of the experience of dying and a re-enactment of the physical and spiritual torments inflicted upon the wicked as retribution for their depravity. By evoking the putrescence of the decomposing corpse in details that are both scientific and morbid (only partly alleviated by the recourse to irony), he aimed to deliver instruction on the abysmal misery of death. Likewise, when the poem indulges in the depiction of the gruesome punishments that the demons inflict upon those condemned to hell, Zacuto is warning us—this time in all seriousness—against the dire consequences of sin.

Yet, in order to not sin and thus reach the end prepared, it is necessary that individuals be made aware of their own sinful nature and cautioned against the power that the evil instinct exerts on them. Hence the poem's long sequence in which the past intemperance and crimes of the dead protagonist are juxtaposed with the misery of his afterlife fate.[49] Holding a central position in the poem's structure, as mentioned, the list performs a double function. On the one hand, it castigates human *vanitas*, reminding the reader of the ephemeral nature of life; on the other, it is also meant as a ready-made examination of conscience, a sample confession of sins in which all the flaws and vices of human nature are reviewed. Its hyperbolic prolixity aims to shake the pride of readers and stir their feelings, priming them for the admission of their own iniquity. According to this interpretation, the dead protagonist, against whom the scourging fury of the demon is directed, typifies all the possible crimes and abominations of which mortals are capable, rather than embodying a specific character or figure. He functions as a paradigmatic example of depraved life and ignoble behaviour, and as such he is pointed out to the reader as a scabrous *memento*.[50]

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[49] See *Tofteh 'arukh*, vv. 346–670.

[50] Attempts to identify specific figures behind the character of the dead protagonist have resulted in various conjectures. One suggestion is that he represents the biblical Ahab. This identification with the wicked and idolatrous king, whom the rabbis singled out as being excluded from the bliss of the afterlife (see TB *Sanhedrin*, fol. 90^{r}), could be supported by the fact that the dead protagonist's wife is called Jezebel (*Tofteh 'arukh*, v. 100) (Meroz, *Moses Zacuto's Allusions*, 109–110). However, rather than indicating a specific person or character, in the poem the name of the evil and corrupted wife of Ahab seems to be used as a pejorative, as are the other names that the dead protagonist mentions when calling for his children and servants, all of whom he inanely blames for having deserted him (see my commentary to the translation). According to another interpretation, Zacuto's figure of the unrepentant sinner alludes to the false

Besides aiming to impart doctrinal and moral teachings, *Tofteh ʿarukh* was also meant to advance kabbalistic tenets and beliefs, starting with the one pertaining to the preliminary judgment of the Beating of the Grave. In this respect, the composition of the poem was a facet of the vast cultural operation that had started more than a century before in the mystical centres of Ottoman Palestine, and that had brought about the convergence of Halakhah, or Jewish law, with Kabbalah, with the consequent penetration of mysticism into ritual and the crystallization of kabbalistic customs. This cultural transfer, in which religious observance had been imbued with theosophical significance, also meant that beliefs and practices whose mystical value had been sanctioned by the *Zohar* and subsequently by Lurianic writings gained further credit in view of their rabbinic (midrashic or Talmudic) substratum. de Vidas's insertion of *Massekhet gehinnom* and *Massekhet ḥibbuṭ ha-qever* in his *Reshit ḥokhmah* and his placing them into dialectic relation not only with scriptural but also with kabbalistic sources amounted to endorsing mystical theories about the afterlife with rabbinical authority. Zacuto accomplished a similar task in *Tofteh ʿarukh* by referring, in his introductory note, to the Talmud and the midrash when illustrating the subject of the poem. We may suppose that Zacuto's 'selective' attribution was dictated by expediency, as it allowed the author to preserve the esoteric character of the teachings on which the poem was based while producing a work that could appeal to a variety of audiences, both the initiated practitioners of Kabbalah and those less familiar with (or less enthused by) the mystical tradition. As a matter of fact, while failing to acknowledge his debt towards mystical literature for much of his own depiction of hell, with *Tofteh ʿarukh* Zacuto was, at the same time, consciously recasting kabbalistic beliefs surrounding the afterworld as normative, an operation partly rendered possible by the absence in Judaism of a codified model for the representation of the hereafter.

By placing the Beating of the Grave at the centre of *Tofteh ʿarukh*, Zacuto affirmed the normativity of a minor, subsidiary belief whose relatively recent introduction into Jewish popular religiosity, although pervasive, was still unsanctioned. His attempt was neither unique nor unprecedented. In the period when Zacuto penned his poem, Italian culture was permeated by educational values promoted by the Counter-Reformation. The Catholic Church was conducting a vast project towards the re-Christianization of the masses, in which the rituals

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messiah Sabbatai Zevi, as the infernal journey ends in the seventh pit, the last and lowest one, in which, among other crimes, idolatry is punished (Meroz, *Moses Zacuto's Allusions*, 109–110). It is worth noting, though, that the didactic and moralizing nature of the poem entailed the completion of the afterlife itinerary and that, viewed in this way, an anonymous main character epitomizing sin in all its forms better fits the poem's agenda.

pertaining to death as well as the beliefs surrounding the afterlife and the destiny of the soul in the otherworld played a key role.[51] As a consequence, starting at the end of the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth, the Italian book market was flooded with moralistic literature, including countless publications whose content and nature belonged to what Jean Delumeau has dubbed the "pastoral of fear."[52] This production included works in various genres intended to teach believers how to prepare themselves for the final departure and, hence, how to conduct a more Christian life while still on earth. While in theory these works aimed to demolish superstitious beliefs and practices surrounding death, several of them indulged in macabre imagery and evoked terrifying infernal visions. Intended as an efficacious deterrent against sin, the "pastoral of fear" also informed contemporary sacred oratory, as attested by collections of sermons printed in this period.[53] An example is provided by the Jesuit Daniello Bartoli (1608–1685),[54] a prolific and eclectic writer and one of the most prominent interpreters of the Italian baroque in prose, who authored the popular collection *L'uomo al punto* (*The Man on the Brink [of Death]*). First printed in Rome in 1667 and then reprinted in Venice in the subsequent year, Bartoli's work was conceived as a long sacred oration on the theme of death, each of its twenty chapters proposing a different meditation on dying and the afterlife. At the beginning of his preface, in which the contents and scope of the work are summarized, Bartoli remarked that the purpose of the compilation was "to demonstrate that thinking about death ahead of time is unpalatable but salutary for the heart."[55] In this spirit, the sixth chapter of *L'uomo al punto* focused on the image of the sepulchre. The tomb, which Bartoli vividly renamed "the school of death" (*scuola della morte*), with its filth and misery, could efficaciously teach men about the reality of human life and its limits, as in it "one sees the original of man, that is man himself reduced to his first origin, and turned to dust and mud exuding a revolting stench, so that one can say: 'This is not work of fiction, rather depiction of nature'."[56]

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[51] See Vovelle, *La mort et l'occident*, 290–314; Ariès, *Western Attitudes towards Death*, 27–52.

[52] See Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur*, 389–446.

[53] See Buccini, *Sentimento della morte*, 20, and its bibliographic references.

[54] On Bartoli, see Asor-Rosa, "Daniello Bartoli"; Anceschi, *Del Barocco ed altre prove*, 3–48; Raimondi, *Letteratura barocca*, 248–326; Angelini and Asor-Rosa, *Daniello Bartoli*, 4–28.

[55] "(...) Mostrando la Morte antipensata riuscir dispiacevole al gusto, ma salutifera al cuore" (Bartoli, *L'uomo al punto*, 1:3).

[56] "Veder quivi l'originale dell'uomo, cioè esso medesimo ridotto alla sua prima origine, e divenuto polvere e fango intriso di stomachevole puzza, è il dire: Questo non è lavoro di fantasia, ma ritratto del naturale" (Bartoli, *L'uomo al punto*, 1:108).

The sermons of another member of the Jesuit order, the famous preacher Paolo Segneri (1624–1694),[57] similarly displayed a morbid insistence on the physical details of the process of putrefaction that awaited the sinner in the grave (whose destiny was contrasted with the incorruptibility of the body of the saints, as corroborated by relics), and the torments, both spiritual and material, inflicted upon the wicked in hell. In order to persuade his audience, Segneri did not refrain from using motifs drawn from popular beliefs, such as the one according to which most of the burials in churches and cemeteries would be in fact empty, for the devil himself took hold of the corpses of the wicked, transporting them directly down to hell.[58] Segneri's resort to popular beliefs that lacked doctrinal sanction was a rhetorical device that reinforced the pedagogic mission pursued by the Counter-Reformation Church. With his poem on the destiny of the wicked in the afterlife, Zacuto performed a similar task. He took a traditional belief, the one pertaining to the Beating of the Grave—a belief devoid of halakhic sanction but that, thanks to the spread of kabbalistic customs, had gained the acceptance of popular religiosity—and used it as the basis for a moralizing and didactic treatment of the punishments awaiting sinners in the hereafter. In so doing, Zacuto managed to retain the poem's grounding in mystical studies—despite not acknowledging it—while at the same time feeding on popular religiosity. Like de Vidas before him, he thus resolved the dichotomy between learned culture and popular beliefs and practices, showing how these elements could aptly intersect on the terrain of moralistic literature.

This unified culture, in which the erudite and the popular coexisted, underlies the recourse in *Tofteh 'arukh* to a variety of rhetorical devices such as repeated rhetorical questions, hyperbole, and a clever and imaginative use of language aimed at involving the reader emotionally—all techniques that were also commonly used in contemporary sermons, religious hymns, and devotional compilations among both Jews and Christians. Marked by a clear didactic agenda, *Tofteh 'arukh* was in fact devised as a sort of 'staged sermon,' and as such presented a creative fusion of dramatic and moralizing modes. Moreover, like Bartoli's "pastoral of fear," Zacuto's poem too was purposely designed to trigger the reader's empathic identification with the text, an attitude that was deemed conducive to repentance and moral mending. Thus, while ostensibly the intended purpose of

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[57] On Segneri, see Raimondi, *Trattatisti e narratori del Seicento*, 653–656; Scotti, ed., *Prose scelte di Daniello Bartoli e Paolo Segneri*, 453–494.

[58] *Quaresimale del padre Paolo Segneri*, 168 (on this passage, see also Buccini, *Sentimento della morte*, 42, n. 94). The *editio princeps* of Segneri's *Quaresimale* appeared in Florence in 1679.

the vivid, hyper-realistic, and synesthetic description of hell and its torments was to teach readers how to avoid them,[59] in practice, such a didactic and essentially edifying aim translated into the uncensored recreation on the page of the material experience of dying and the gruesome reality of the afterlife. In fact, there is no doubt that the morbid subject of *Tofteh 'arukh* and the vicarious experiential dimension afforded by its reading partly explain the overwhelming success of the poem within confraternal circles.

[59] One more example of the specific funerary subgenre of Counter-Reformation devotional literature to which Bartoli's and Segneri's compilations belonged is provided by the popular manual *Inferno aperto al Cristiano perché non v'entri* (Hell Revealed to the Christian so that He Does Not Enter It) by Giovanni Pietro Pinamonti (1632–1703). The author was a member of the Jesuit order who had been a disciple of Bartoli and would later work alongside Segneri as an itinerant preacher and confessor. First published in 1688, the book contained meditations on the theme of infernal punishments, organized according to the days of the week. On Pinamonti, see Negruzzo, "Pinamonti, Giovanni Pietro"; Malena, *L'eresia dei perfetti*, 74–79.

CHAPTER 3

HELL ON STAGE*

Performing Affects

It was an August night in the ghetto of Ferrara, in 1720. The hour was past midnight and a mixed crowd of men and women, elderly and young had started to gather. The communal event that was drawing them out of their homes at such a late hour was occasioned by the penitential period known as "within the straits" (*ben ha-metzarim*), marking the three weeks that intervene between the fast days of the seventeenth of Tammuz and the ninth of Av. This was a time charged with special significance, during which the local *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* observed the Midnight Vigil, performing the nocturnal ritual according to the custom that had been established by Zacuto.[1] That year, the confraternity of watchers proposed to celebrate the period of sombre solemnity and reckoning by hosting public readings of Zacuto's *Tofteh 'arukh* at the time when the vigil was usually held. A vivid account of the Ferrara readings and of the impact that they exerted on the crowd in attendance has been provided, in the flowery and allusive style then cultivated by Italian Hebrew writers, by Jacob Daniel Olmo. One of the *massari* of the Ferrara *Ḥadashim la-beqarim*, Olmo was the man who initiated the public readings and who plausibly also designed their performative aspects:

> This is the book *Hell Arrayed* [...] which in the year 5480 [1720], the leaders of the holy nation, a holy congregation of most pious men in the holy city of Ferrara gathered in the confraternity *Ḥadashim la-beqarim*—arranged for it to be performed in public for the purpose of the *tiqqun* during the Midnight Vigil, each day of *ben ha-metzarim*

* This chapter partly draws upon two previous publications of mine, Andreatta, "The Baroque World of Moses Zacuto's *Tofteh 'arukh*," and Andreatta, "Piety on Stage."

[1] In the Jewish calendar, these two fasting holidays commemorate respectively the day when the walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Roman army in the year 70 CE (besides other calamities in Jewish history that, according to tradition, happened on the same day) and the one in which the Second Temple was eventually destroyed. During the intervening stretch of time, the midnight rite mourning the Temple's destruction and entreating its restoration was imbued with a special significance and the devotees were encouraged to perform the ritual every day, in a group or by themselves. On Zacuto's compilation for the vigil, see above, Introduction, n. 33.

> after midnight. In time, people from the community started to come, joining the assembly, and attending with regularity. To mourn over the destruction of Zion, I read from the poem, illustrating the punishments inflicted in Gehenna, from the mildest ones to the harshest, and contextually *explaining their meaning* (Dan 5:16), so to move and fortify the hearts of the ordinary people. All along, a vocal ensemble with *a consort of musical instruments* (Dan. 3:5)[2] interspersed the reading with the singing of chants.[3]

Olmo's account allows us to form a rather accurate idea of how the performances were conducted. It also contains hints for reconstructing, at least approximately, the audience's actual experience. A single reader, Olmo himself, filled the two roles featured in the poem (i.e., the dead protagonist and his antagonist the demon), lending his voice to both characters. He also interspersed the recitation with explanations—most likely delivered in Italian—of the meaning of the passages that he was reciting. The chanting of hymns with the accompaniment of instrumental music (which, as was often the case in confraternal events, might have featured the members of the group itself), must have amplified the auditory effect of the performance while also actualizing its liturgical purpose. In auditory terms, the alternation between monophonic reading and choral singing, combined with music interludes, must have afforded an experience reminiscent of that offered by a cantata, with its characteristic alternation of solo recitatives and arias sung by a choir.[4] At the level of the audience's perception, the performance must have been the mental equivalent of a *tableau vivant*, a theatrical display projected onto the audience's imagination and fuelled not by stage action but rather by the sense of hearing. The nocturnal setting, whose atmosphere can be assumed to have been intensified by the flickering light of torches and candles, and the dark and morbid overtones of the poem certainly contributed to enhance the experience. Night after night, the spectators gathered in the Ferrara ghetto were destined for an immersive and transportive experience, in which the familiar space of the Jewish neighbourhood yielded to the transcendent world of sin, punishment, and

[2] Literally, "the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, psaltery." On the use of Dan. 3:5 (analogous formulas are repeated in Dan. 3:7, 3:10, and 3:15) to indicate instrumental music and musical ensembles, see Harrán, *Three Early Modern Hebrew Scholars on the Mysteries of Songs*, 208.

[3] *Tofteh 'arukh* 1743, fol. 3r. The theatrical and musical nature of the public readings held by the Ferrara *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* was first pointed out by Schirmann, *Studies in the History of Hebrew Poetry and Drama*, 2:71.

[4] On the fortune of the form of the cantata among Italian Jews, see Adler, "Cantatas and Choral Works, Hebrew."

damnation conjured up by the reading. As the poem's potent narration unfolded, the audience was transported into the tenebrous world of Zacuto's poem: they stood at the deathbed of the unfortunate protagonist witnessing the fatal moment of his demise, felt the claustrophobic enclosure of the grave and the rotting and consumption of the decaying flesh; they contemplated the aberrant landscape of hell, in which an indistinct mass of men, women, and children endured gruesome physical torments at the hands of a horde of monstrous demons. Like the poem's dead protagonist, they were put on trial and pronounced guilty, and in view of their own crimes, taken upon a hallucinatory descent through the seven chambers of hell, until they reached the floor of the lowest one—a dark and filthy receptacle into which all the uncleanness of the upper pits trickled down. From the cursed abyss of hell, looking up, they could catch a brief glimpse of the divine light radiating from heaven. Admonished to recognize the theological truth of hell, they were eventually exhorted to repent before their earthly existence reached its end.

With their mix of ritual, theatre, and musical entertainment, the Ferrara 'productions' of *Tofteh 'arukh* evidence a deep understanding of the polyvalent nature of Zacuto's poem and its inherent potentialities. A hybrid of moralistic and dramatic literature, *Tofteh 'arukh* was designed to provide the reader with an inward experience in the form of a penitential itinerary, whose motive was not the quest for spiritual transcendence that characterized a sizeable portion of Spanish theatre of the seventeenth century,[5] but rather a deep moral preoccupation with the pervasiveness of sin and transgression in human life, and the consequent yearning for conversion and reparation. As for the members of the local *Ḥadashim la-beqarim*, the ceremonial setting chosen for the readings afforded them the opportunity to exert their agency by producing an event in which both the group's individual voice was heard and the community's collective identity displayed. The hosting of the performances offered the confraternity a flexible, simultaneously approachable and solemn platform from which to popularize its rituals and the mystical culture that had produced them. Moreover, by staging a series of dramatized readings of *Tofteh 'arukh* that were open to the entire community, they materially shifted Zacuto's work from performance on the "paper stage" to presentation in a public space.[6]

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[5] Shimon Levy is of a different opinion, stressing the dimension of the spiritual journey in Zacuto's poem (see Levy, "Hellish Hebrew Theatre"). On the centrality of the spiritual element in Spanish religious drama, see Delgado Morales, "The Quest for Spiritual Transcendence."

[6] On the dialectics between theatre on the page and on the stage in the early modern period, see Mullaney, "What's Hamlet to Habermas?," and Willie, "Viewing the Paper Stage."

In fact, the members of the Mantuan *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* had already perceived the intrinsic affinity between *Tofteh ʿarukh*, with its underlying penitential ideology, and the rituals that they performed daily. After all, the watchers' devotions channelled much more than messianic expectations: they also provided a frame for the expression of the devotees' sentiment of culpability for sins committed, their feeling of physical and spiritual impurity, and the consequent urge to expiate. By shifting confraternal devotions from the semi-private space of the group's rituals to the public sphere of a communal ceremony, the members of the Ferrara confraternity took this process a step further, thus marking a new level in confraternal outreach. In fact, by leveraging collective fears and sense of guilt, the public readings extended the confraternal agenda to include the entire community by staging what was *de facto* a collective rite of atonement.

The agency displayed by the confraternity in placing *Tofteh ʿarukh* at the centre of a public ritual relied in great measure on the emotional receptiveness of the audience. In his overview of Zacuto's poetic production, the above-mentioned grammarian Anania Coen commented on the author's ability to arouse the reader's emotions, or affects, a task that, in his opinion, the Mantuan rabbi had best achieved, besides in his elegies, in the dramatic poem *Tofteh ʿarukh*. This, observes Coen, despite Zacuto's pious lifestyle preventing him from going to theatres or reading plays, so that he was unfamiliar with the basic rules governing dramatic compositions.[7] Coen's observation was blatantly oblivious to the richness and complexity of theatrical practice in Zacuto's age, as well as to the prominent role played by dramatic writing in seventeenth-century education and literary production. Yet his observations on the ability of Zacuto's poetry to stir his readership's emotions pinpoint an essential element of the rabbi's writing and, in broader terms, of contemporary sensitivity. Indeed, the artistic and literary representation of passions was a commonplace of early modern aesthetics, which believed in the importance of exciting emotions in the audience. During the period when Zacuto composed *Tofteh ʿArukh*, Jesuit theories concerning affects were largely conditioning the pedagogic project advanced by the Counter-Reformation Church, shaping in particular its communication strategies in the fields of the letters and the arts. Steeped in the Aristotelian-Scholastic tradition, these theories eventually affirmed the primacy of the dimension of *movere* (to move) over that, originally posed by Aristotelian rhetoric, of *delectare* (to delight), thus establishing the need to arouse an emotional response in the targeted audience for moral and religious

[7] "E si può aggiugnere che il di lui metodo di vivere devoto, non li permetteva nè di andare ai Teatri, nè di leggere opere Drammatiche, per cui certamente non ne conosceva le leggi. Nel suo *Inferno* però ha saputo ben muovere gli affetti, ed anche nelle sue *qinot*" (Coen, *Saggio di eloquenza ebrea*, 38).

teaching to be effectively imparted.[8] Therefore, literature, music, and also theatre and the visual arts performed their pedagogic and catechistic functions by depicting themes, characters, and situations susceptible to stir the public's affects. Opportunely channelled, emotions were also considered able to overcome the limits of reason and attain meta-sensorial levels, thus leading the audience—be this the onlooker, the reader, or the listener—to a moral catharsis. The dramatic depiction of strong feelings was instrumental in provoking an analogous, sympathetic experience in the audience in which the meta-pleasures procured by the emotions thus aroused were expected to be proportional to the suffering evoked.

There was also an epistemological side to emotions. In their analysis of the cultural impact of the seventeenth-century scientific revolution, Ofer Gal and Raz Chen-Morris have proposed interpreting the baroque enthrallment with passions not as a flight from reason, but rather as a reflection on the mind's limits.[9] Accordingly, if reason failed, then knowledge appeared to rely on the mind's creative, poetic engagement with reality, or, in other words, on emotions and the imagination. Moreover, contemporary theories concerning passions tended to regard them as containing information and having an intentional structure.[10] For seventeenth-century philosophers, the way in which human beings experienced the world was not just empirical. It also possessed a fundamental affective dimension in which passions were indispensable in order to understand reality. From this, a paradoxical reversal in the process of knowledge followed, according to which emotions somehow preceded and guided intellectual apprehension.

One of the emotions that most partook of the epistemological quality attached to passions was wonder. A key concept of baroque aesthetics, wonder was understood as the intellect's surprised admiration when confronted with concepts, figures, or motifs seldom used or unexpected. The epistemological function of wonder was to provide a new, unanticipated perspective on a concept or situation, and its application encompassed not just content but also formal elements.[11] The traditional Aristotelian view of wonder as useful for stirring emotions but also for their subsequent containment—once the epistemological incongruence that generated it was resolved—was substituted in the baroque period by the idea

[8] This reorientation had its most influential elaboration in the *Discorso attorno alle immagini sacre e profane* (Bologna, 1582) by Cardinal and Archbishop of Bologna Gabriele Paleotti (1522–1597), on which see Prodi, "*Introduction*," in Paleotti, *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, 1–42; Levy, *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque*, 48–50.

[9] See Gal and Chen-Morris, *Baroque Science*, 7–9.

[10] On this aspect, and in general on the philosophical implications of early modern theories of emotions, see Schmitter, "17th and 18th Century Theories of Emotions," online.

[11] See Battistini, *Il barocco*, 54–55.

of the marvellous as an unresolved challenge to epistemological certainties and aesthetic wholeness. As such, wonder had the power to push the limits of the intellectual and aesthetic experience, thus allowing the mind to access deeper levels of understanding and affective involvement.[12]

If we look at the text of *Tofteh ʿarukh*, we see that the sensorial accumulation that characterizes the first part of the poem is indeed matched by the effusive description of the interiority of the dead protagonist in its tumult of strong, contrasting feelings. These 'mechanics of passions' include fear, horror, and terror, but also melancholy, pity, compassion, and, above all, wonder.[13] In fact, the wondrous, extraordinary character of the experience narrated in *Tofteh ʿarukh* is reiterated several times in the poem, and the wonder it provokes in the protagonist—and by sympathetic reaction also in the reader—involves both the heart and the mind. A crucial element in the kaleidoscope of contrasting moods depicted in the poem, wonder was instrumental for the moral tasks pursued by Zacuto: purging his readership of doubts concerning the afterlife, issuing a warning against the grim consequences of sinning, and exhorting his audience to repentance.

The emotional quality of Zacuto's poem, its ability to move the affects, probably lay behind the success that the public readings of *Tofteh ʿarukh* apparently enjoyed with the audience. Carefully choreographed and collectively produced, the readings staged a 'drama of piety' that allowed the crowd in attendance to release religious feelings such as fear, contrition, and repentance, while channelling their aesthetic impulses into a public ritual of devotion. We may expect that the cognitive and intellectual response of the audience varied according to differing levels of Hebrew literacy and exposure to Kabbalah and related literature. Nonetheless, even those among the participants who had no background in mysticism or only a flimsy grasp of the theological implications of denying the existence of hell could nevertheless relate to the universal idea of death in its more lugubrious and morbid aspects and thus still go through an emotional process of moral growth. Everybody, moreover, could partake of the entertainment provided by the musical display and the dramatized performances of Zacuto's text.

Theatre of the Mind

Mantua held an unmatched place in the history of Jewish theatrical practice as home to the extraordinary career of Leone de' Sommi (Judah Sommo;

[12] See Platt, "Introduction," in Platt, ed., *Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters*, 15–16 (and 22, n. 6 for an exhaustive list of studies on the role played by wonder in the different areas of the early modern experience).

[13] See *Tofteh ʿarukh*, vv. 186–190, 236–237.

1527–1592), one of the greatest playwrights, producers, and theatre theoreticians of the sixteenth century.[14] During Zacuto's lifetime, the town was still under the rule of the Gonzaga family. The court, though, was no longer the designated arena for Jewish theatrical entertainments, while dramatic literature was yet to be confined to performance in public theatres. Although scant, there is evidence that Mantuan Jews were still engaging in theatrical activities, but much had changed in terms of the nature of such productions, reflecting general changes in the cultural and intellectual atmosphere permeating the Jewish quarter.[15] On the one hand, the growing legal restrictions imposed on the Jewish community had curbed opportunities for Jewish theatre professionals to engage with a Christian audience.[16] On the other hand, a more religiously inclined climate within the Jewish quarter, partly fostered by the diffusion of Kabbalah and related devotional customs, was giving rise to new forms of intra-Jewish entertainments and spectacles, mostly of a religious nature, whose natural backdrops, besides communal settings, were educational institutions and confraternal circles.[17] This rechannelling of creative impulses into religiosity and devotion compelled the Jewish community to carve new opportunities out of the liturgical calendar for theatre or music making, or for performances combining both practices. At the same time, Jewish literati, following the example of what was happening outside the ghetto walls, were increasingly turning to religious and biblical subjects in search of inspiration.

Despite a cultural atmosphere intensely preoccupied with the sphere of the sacred, and notwithstanding the popularity of religious drama in the surrounding Christian culture and among fellow Jewish writers, Zacuto's dramatic works had a limited circulation during their author's lifetime. This is a remarkable circumstance if we take into consideration that Zacuto did circulate a sizeable portion

[14] On Leone de' Sommi, see Beecher, "Leone de' Sommi and Jewish Theatre"; Belkin, ed., *Leone de' Sommi and the Performing Arts*; Scola, *Interdiscorsività nell'opera di Leone de' Sommi*, and its rich bibliography. Inspired by the Italian vernacular comedy of the sixteenth century (*commedia erudita*), de' Sommi's *Tzaḥut bediḥuta de-kiddushin* (A Brilliant Comedy of Betrothal) is considered the first play ever written in Hebrew. The Hebrew text was first identified and edited by Hayyim Schirmann in 1946 (De' Sommi, *The Comedy of Betrothal*). An English translation has been made by Alfred Golding (De' Sommi, *A Comedy of Betrothal*).

[15] See Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua*, 667–669.

[16] See Jaffe-Berg, *Commedia dell'Arte and the Mediterranean*, 121–144; Jaffe-Berg, "Drama as Disputation," 677–679.

[17] On theatrical activity within Jewish confraternities, see Schirmann, *Studies in the History of Hebrew Poetry and Drama*, 2:63–80; Andreatta, "Piety on Stage," online. A remarkable example of dramatic works produced and staged in the environment of eighteenth-century Italian Jewish communal schools can be found in those penned by Matityahu (Donato) Nissim Terni (1745–1810), on which see Bregman, ed. *The Glory of Sinai*; Dobos, "Shimi the Sceptical."

of his religious and occasional verse while still alive. There are, though, hints that might help to explain his reluctance. A descendant of former Iberian *conversos*, Zacuto was endowed with a personality marked by austere religiosity. Moreover, as a rabbi and a legal scholar, he was aware of the negative reputation attached to theatre in Jewish tradition since Talmudic times.[18] Likewise, he must have been familiar with the harsh opinions expressed by some of his fellow rabbis on the moral appropriateness of Jews attending theatrical spectacles—let alone engaging in theatrical production—outside of the few occasions in which such diversions were allowed, such as during Purim.[19] Besides, Zacuto's two dramatic poems were not, strictly speaking, meant for stage production. As we have seen, the composition of *Yesod 'olam* seems to have been a scholastic exercise. This supposition seems to be confirmed by the fact that, while the poem has the outward form of a play, it is marked by a prevalence of speech over action and displays a clear tendency towards theological and moral argumentation.[20] Yet the typically theatrical elements, such as dialogues and transitional formulae functioning as stage directions, still retain their function in *Yesod 'olam*. On the other hand, they became scanty in *Tofteh 'arukh*, where the entire poem's structure is in fact comprised of two long monologues. In any event, the impression is that both of Zacuto's dramatic poems were composed with playreaders, rather than playgoers, in mind and that they belonged, in fact, to the genre of closet drama.

In Italy, closet drama had its roots in the humanistic tragedies inspired by Roman history produced within university and erudite circles, a phenomenon

[18] Rabbinical opposition to spectacles originally also included the circus which, together with theatre, was perceived as epitomizing the pernicious effects of Hellenization. Eventually, the Talmudic expression *bate tarteya'ot u-vate kirkesayot* became a technical formula indicating all kinds of unsuitable entertainments. Rabbinical hostility towards all Roman and Greek public spectacles had a counterpart in the Patristic tradition, best exemplified by Isidore of Seville's influential *Ethymologiae*, in which theatre was analogously grouped with the circus and similar entertainments. See Jones, "Isidore and the Theater."

[19] See, for example, the *responsum* by Zacuto's colleague and friend Samuel Aboab, himself, as already noted, of *converso* descent, vehemently opposing the presence in the Venetian ghetto of places designated for theatrical representations in which, in his words, "men, women, children, modest daughters of Israel and trollops as well, all gather" (Aboab, *Devar Shemu'el*, no. 4; Schirmann *Studies in the History of Hebrew Poetry and Drama*, 2:56). It is worth noting that, while theatres continued to be condemned by rabbis as promiscuous and morally corrupting, the writing of dramatic literature was never under attack and, in fact, this period saw the largest number of rabbis and Jewish scholars who engaged in it. See Lelli, "Italian Jews and Theatre," online.

[20] On Zacuto's familiarity with theatrical conventions, see Levy, *The Altar and the Stage*, 158.

that is associated by scholars with the revival of the classical Latin tradition. The label generally designates a variety of dramatic compositions meant for silent reading or for being read aloud by one person (or several persons) in front of a selected audience, instead of being performed on stage by professional actors.[21] It is worth noting that in comparison with other contemporary national experiences, seventeenth-century Italian drama was still burdened with the tradition of Renaissance theatre, and consequently was distinctively text-oriented, even among authors who adhered to Jesuit theories. As a result, a vast number of the plays that were written in this period were meant to be printed, rather than performed.[22] Moreover, during the Counter-Reformation period, partly in response to the vast project of Christianization of the masses undertaken by the Catholic church, closet drama had morphed into a variety of subgenres. One of these was the moralistic and edifying tragedy, whose target audience was ample and stratified. In Italy, this kind of dramatic writing found one of its foremost representatives in Benedetto Cinquanta (d. after 1635), a preacher affiliated with the Order of Friars Minor. Inspired by parables from the Gospel and the lives of saints, or by historical events, his plays presented typical features, such as a scanty and linear plot, a preference for long monologues, no classical division of the action, and frequent departures from the Aristotelian principles dictating unity of place and time. Cinquanta's tragedies were in fact reminiscent of sermons: they displayed a similar meandering structure, build by addition and conceptual repetitiveness, and an analogous preference for lashing tones and terrifying images whose task was to compensate for the limited dramatic action.[23] As was probably the case with Zacuto's two dramatic poems, Cinquanta's tragedies were not intended to be performed by actors during spectacles open to a general public, but rather to be read aloud in restricted gatherings, or simply read silently for individual consumption. The incorporation of basic stage directions was aimed at dramatizing the text, thus assisting the reader in their task of creating a vivid mental representation of the situation portrayed. More than a theatre of action, this was a 'theatre of the mind,' whose purpose was to elicit an inward experience that, nonetheless, was expected to be as gripping and emotionally impactful as the actual viewing of a live performance on stage.

The approach to dramatic literature delineated above relied primarily on the ability of the text to fuel the reader's imagination. Ultimately, it aligned with the principles of performative spirituality championed by the Jesuits, whose cultural

[21] For a definition of this genre, see Straznicky, "Closet Drama."

[22] See Muneroni, *Hermenegildo and the Jesuits*, 165–229.

[23] See Angelini, Asor Rosa, and Nigro, eds. *La letteratura italiana storia e testi*, 5.2:203–211.

applications were manifold in this period, but whose first theorization went back to the order's founder Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556). In his *Exercitia spiritualia* (Spiritual Exercises), first published in Rome in 1548, Loyola had stressed the role of the senses, memory, and imagination in prayer and meditation, as tools enabling the inner recreation of a specific context or scene (a device called *compositio loci*) in such a vivid form as to give the individual the impression of being there. The main purpose of Loyola's practice of re-enactment was to sharpen the instrument of self-examination, thus arousing contrition for sins committed and instilling fortitude in the face of the temptations of evil. As such, his spiritual program could not but include death and the afterlife too. Thus, the fifth exercise of the first week of meditations involves imagining, by way of inner viewing and sensing, the experience of being in hell—in fact, representing it on the soul's stage:[24]

> The prelude consists of, first, representing to myself through the eyes of the imagination the length, breadth, and depth of hell; and second, in seeking the innermost apprehension of the pains that the dammed suffer, so that whenever I am oblivious to God's love, at least the fear of punishment will prevent me from sinning.
>
> The first point consists of contemplating through the imagination the vast fires of Hell, and the souls trapped in fiery bodies, as in so many prisons.
>
> The second [point] is to hear in an imaginary way the lamentations, moans, outcries, and blasphemies against Christ and his Saints that burst out from that place.
>
> The third [point] is to perceive in the imagination the smell of smoke and brimstone, and the stench of sink, that is of excrement and fetid corruption.
>
> The fourth [point] is to similarly taste the most bitter things, such as tears, rancour, and the worm of conscience.
>
> The fifth [point] is to touch, somehow, those flames by whose touch the very souls are burnt.[25]

Loyola's inner vision constituted a paradoxical form of seeing that was focused more on internal scrutiny than outward sight; hence the need to stimulate

[24] Indeed, scholars have stressed the affinities between Loyola's empathic techniques of self-identification and the ways in which theatrical performance impacts both the performer and the viewer. See, for example, Max Harris's definition of "theatrical hermeneutics" as applied to Loyola's contemplative approach (Harris, *Theatre and Incarnation*, 26–27).

[25] Ignatius of Loyola, *Exercitia spiritualia*, [fol. 33^{r-v}].

the senses by resorting to memory and imagination. This practice was sustained by a spiritual attitude that matched abstraction with the constant stimulation of visual, auditive, olfactive, and tactile sensations. Bartoli, mentioned above, appealed to these same faculties in his *L'uomo al punto* when he invited the reader to follow him into the sepulchre for a first-hand appreciation of the abhorrent reality of death. Senses and the sensory experience similarly play a central role in *Tofteh 'arukh*. Stimulated by verbal evocation, they help the recreation of the poem's setting and the enactment of its *actio* on the mental stage of the reader's imagination.

Indeed, from the opening of *Tofteh 'arukh* until its end, the reader is immersed in an invasive sensory experience. The chilly and claustrophobic dimension of the grave, the process of decomposition, and the erosion of the rotting flesh are conjured up as physically sensible, even palpable realities when the wretched protagonist unknowingly describes the experience of dying and the post-mortem physical modifications undergone by his body. The poem's engagement with the sensory continues in the following strophes as well. After the grave sinks into the depths of the earth down to the netherworld, the bewildered protagonist becomes gradually aware of his unusual surroundings. His hearing is the first sense to be engaged: a terrifying tumult of loud cries, agonized groans, terrorized yells, and frantic beating suddenly distracts him from his delusional self-pity and scares him [...] to death. Gradually, the sense of hearing is replaced by sight and the visual domain becomes predominant. To the befuddled eye of the onlooker, the turbulent infernal landscape appears in its spectacular, monstrous conformation made up of steep ravines, icy boulders, and fiery rivers. In the second part of the poem, in which the compartments of hell are described, once again no sense is spared. The seven infernal departments are portrayed as "crowded human containers,"[26] in which the impious are subjected to collective oppression in a convulsive cacophony of weeping, groaning, and cries of affliction. In these filth-dripping chambers, the flesh of the damned is being scorched, boiled, chewed, or left to rot in foul secretions. Pervaded by mephitic stenches, polluted by pestilential illnesses, Zacuto's hell climaxes in a dark, narrow, and claustrophobic hole in which all the putrid refuse of the above pits is collected as if in a subterranean latrine. As in Loyola's *Exercises*, Zacuto's hyper-realistic depiction was meant to stimulate the reader's inner sight and facilitate a sort of 'sensory meditation.' In this process, the reader was expected to experience sympathetic feelings of intolerable oppression, anguish, and revulsion associated with the situation evoked, be that the stifling narrowness of the grave, with its enforced immobility and slimy humours of putrefaction, or the chaotic, gruesome, and foul-smelling density of hell.

[26] Camporesi, *The Fear of Death*, 73.

Empirical Ambiguity

Zacuto's attention to the facts of biological death and decay betrays his fascination with the experience of dying, its timing, and its manifestations. In this regard, scholars have highlighted the author's debt to the legacy of medieval engagement with death, one of whose lasting contributions was the popularity—especially in funerary arts—of the hyper-realistic representation of the decaying corpse known as *transi*.[27] Although cultural continuity can be detected, the morbid tones of *Tofteh 'arukh* also display Zacuto's quintessentially baroque sensitivity and his embracing of the sensualism typical of the age. Like many other authors of the time, he too adhered to that peculiar taste that seemed to revel in the repugnant and repellent.[28] Due to endless wars and plagues, Zacuto's contemporaries suffered what nowadays would be diagnosed as over-exposure to death. The ubiquitous presence of illness made them perceive death not only as inescapable, but also as proximate. On the other hand, the rise of experimental and observational medicine had sharpened interest in the borderlands of death. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that the long, bitter soliloquy that occupies the opening strophes of *Tofteh 'arukh* constitutes, in fact, an 'illness narrative.' The protagonist describes the symptoms of his sickness (or what he construes as such) and lists the varieties of painful treatments and remedies that inept doctors have applied, to no avail, to his wretched body. In the narrator's perception, his own body has become an external object, as if the self were now both inside and outside of it, or as if it were contemplating the body from above. While the described perception of a fragmented body and the idea of a discrepancy between the self and its physical embodiment are the consequence of the temporary return of the senses to the dead body (as Zacuto's introductory note to the poem clarifies), it is enticing to also see in them the impact of contemporary medical discourse arising from the surgical table and the anatomical theatre.[29] Still conscious but in fact already dead, the protagonist also provides, albeit involuntarily, a report on the moment of dying: the sinking heart and the loss of sight that he describes were conventional medical indicators of imminent death. Enacted on paper, they reminded the reader that biological death was by no means instantaneous and that

[27] See Meroz, "Rabbi Moses Zacuto's Allusions," 116. On the iconography of the *transi*, see Cohen, *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol*; Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture*, 56–81. For more on the *transi* motif in *Tofteh 'arukh*, see my commentary to v. 250 in the translation.

[28] See Buccini, *Sentimento della morte*, 18–43.

[29] For an example of the impact of contemporary medical discourse on early modern poetry, see Roychoudhury, "Fever."

the borders separating life from death were in fact porous. Although the knowing reader could laugh at the protagonist's misconstruction of his real condition, the re-enactment of the moments of passing probably still magnified their own discomfort at the awareness—a new and distinctive feature of early modern experience—of the shadowiness and vagueness that marked the process of dying.[30]

While in *Tofteh 'arukh* senses, as we have seen, play a key role, nevertheless their narrative deployment contextually questions the limits of the sensory experience. Indeed, whereas contemporary epistemological theories posed the sensory appreciation of reality as a *conditio sine qua non* for its apprehension, scientific discoveries were instilling a disconcerting awareness that traditional forms of perception (and hence their authority) were being undermined. In this new world, senses not only did not help individuals to correctly decode reality, they even added further ambiguity to its already unclear nature. Indeed, in *Tofteh 'arukh* the dimension of materiality, which can be experienced and known through the senses, continuously blurs into that of immateriality and intangibility, overlapping or even substituting for it.[31] The inversion between these two levels is already postulated at the beginning of the poem, as the protagonist, despite being dead, is nevertheless still in possession of his senses and faculties and, as such, reasons, feels, and speaks as if he were alive. The oxymoron of the 'living dead' is in itself loaded with conceptual ambiguity. The situation depicted here, though, is further complicated by a misunderstanding of an epistemological nature: the protagonist is ignorant of his real status of being dead and thus behaves as if he were still alive. The confusion between the two levels, the sensorial and the meta-sensorial, is thus absolute, as the protagonist continues to perceive and understand his own condition by measuring it against his earthly experiences in a spiral of both pitiful and comic self-deception.

Anchored, as noted above, in the traditional belief according to which the soul of the deceased re-enters the body in order to undergo the Beating of the Grave, the situation portrayed is not just a brilliant dramatic expedient designed to engage and amuse the reader; rather, with its insistence on senses and sensoriality, the first part of the poem also reverberates with some of the general concerns of Zacuto's age. Indeed, while grappling with the intellectual anxieties occasioned by geographical discoveries and new scientific methods, Zacuto's contemporaries were yet somehow confident they could still find order in the chaotic appearance of phenomenal reality by intersecting sensory experience and universal epistemological principles. Thus, while the text plays, sarcastically, with

[30] See Sugg, *Mummies, Cannibals, and Vampires*, 218–219.

[31] See Bregman, "Dimness and Clarity," 36–42.

the ambiguity engendered by the situation of the deceased who does not know he is such, the knowing reader contemplates the unfolding of the inadequate cognitive process through which the protagonist pathetically tries to make sense of the world around him, which he now perceives as unknown, disorderly, and senseless. Deceived by his own fallacious interpretation of the circumstantial evidence provided by his senses, the empirical method that the narrator putatively applies falters. His inquiry is doomed to failure because instead of pursuing an *a posteriori* investigation, he reverts to his *a priori* opinion, according to which he is still lying in his sick-bed. Incapable of forming an objective judgment because of his faulty reasoning, he thus shows not just a lack of intellectual discipline, but also a flawed morality. Failing to acknowledge the reality, he assumes the role of the doctors whose competence and skills he previously dismissed mockingly and, basing himself on what he mistakenly interprets as symptoms, pronounces his own incorrect diagnosis. He invokes death, but only in an apotropaic way, since his attachment to life is as obdurate as it is futile.

Zacuto's particular engagement with the sense of sight in the poem similarly acquires a more complex significance if framed against the startling insights of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and the fabric of intellectual challenges that it engendered. Scholarship has illustrated in various ways how vision and observation came to play a pivotal role in contemporary culture, mainly as a consequence of the new investigative practices enabled by optical instruments, such as the telescope and the microscope.[32] Privileged over other sensorial functions, which were traditionally considered as less objective and therefore unreliable, sight was now expected to answer fundamental questions and resolve cosmological riddles thanks to the newly expanded methods of observation into the celestial and the miniscule. As the limits of the visible world were quickly shifting, leaving a trail of unsettling implications, the use of optical instruments meant that the visual experience for the first time coincided with the cognitive experience.[33] Paradoxically, early modern proponents of observational empiricism had to justify the mediation of instruments by rejecting the immediacy of the senses themselves and the misleading information they procured. In the end, the enhanced vision of optics had also revealed that human apprehension of the world

[32] See, for example, Battistini, *Galileo e i Gesuiti*, 15–60; Tuzet, *Le cosmos et l'imagination*, 291–296; Gal and Chen-Morris, *Baroque Science*, 53–113.

[33] This has been argued by Ezio Raimondi with reference to Galileo and his telescope, the use of which, according to the scholar, conferred to sight and observation an essentially classifying function. See Raimondi, "La nuova scienza e la visione degli oggetti," 267, 269, 280.

was nothing but figments of the imagination, in fact coinciding with a perpetual state of misunderstanding.[34]

The fundamental role played by the act of seeing in the epistemological process and, at the same time, the ambivalence it generated are conveyed in *Tofteh 'arukh*. Verbs referring to the sense of sight appear frequently in the poem, rendering Zacuto's insistence on vision, observation, and ocular apprehension explicit. For example, they play a prominent role in the section in which the unfortunate protagonist provides his eyewitness description of the underworld landscape.[35] This insistence is meant to empirically substantiate the truth and reality of what is being described and, as such, serves the didactic aims of the poem: to proclaim that hell *does* exist. Yet, by emphasizing the faculty of vision in the meta-realistic experience narrated in *Tofteh 'arukh*, Zacuto contextually gives expression to the perceived contradictions attached to this faculty by his contemporaries. Such observational ambivalence is evident in Zacuto's depiction of the underworld landforms, which are not amorphous but rather reproduce a familiar sublunary morphology, with formations that are construed as mountains, valleys, rivers, and caves. In fact, his characterization of the physical nature of hell establishes a series of analogies with terrestrial phenomena whose narrative task is to translate what is beyond natural human reach and perception into experiences familiar to the reader's mind. It also demonstrates, if not competence, at least clear sensitivity to the allied fields of mineralogy and geography: the four elements are listed in their various states and reciprocal combinations, demonstrating attention to the processes of association and dissociation of matter and bodies. Chemical elements, like salt and sulphur, and substances commonly used in alchemic experiments, such as resin and mineral oil, are also mentioned. Nevertheless, for Zacuto, behind the misleading appearance of the external, 'real' world lies what is in fact the 'alternate' vision of the underworld, according to which the Other Side is nothing but a distorted, monstrous reflection of the sublunary world. This upside-down world, specular and opposed to the divinely devised order of nature and heaven, constitutes a meta-nature that is ruled by the principles of chaos rather than harmony, by incoherence rather than rationality, and by annihilation rather than regeneration. Because the laws of existence are subverted and inverted in it, the human mind is at loss. Opposed to and parallel to the natural world, this

[34] It is worth noting that, according to some scholars, in this age in which scientists were grappling with the challenges of proving the existence of what could not be seen, new importance was lent to the role of imagination, even though the new instruments were in fact implying a crisis for its role. See Lambert, *Imagining the Unimaginable*, 1.

[35] See *Tofteh 'arukh*, vv. 131–185.

'anti-nature' would baffle—according to Zacuto—even the scores of philosophers whose wisdom resides in the exploration of the secrets of the natural world and of earthly and heavenly wonders.[36] Yet the reality of this meta-nature is, for Zacuto, not less factual and objective than the earthly material world. Like the "great book of nature," this other world too can be known through the senses and similarly needs to be looked at, read, and interpreted literally. The instruments for doing so are provided by Kabbalah.

Baroque Kabbalah

By indirectly appealing to ideas typical of his age—such as the epistemological role of the senses and the pre-eminence of vision—and by applying them to Jewish beliefs surrounding death and the afterlife, Zacuto intended to underscore the intellectual relevance of Jewish lore. In this respect, *Tofteh 'arukh* can be interpreted as a sort of empirical study of meta-nature, whose purpose was reconfirming the essential truth of Judaism. This being the case, what role, then, does Kabbalah play in the poem?

As might be expected, Zacuto firmly believed in the authenticity of the kabbalistic tradition. As a result, his poem on the afterlife of sinners is marked by an assertion of factual accuracy and bears a promise of certainty. Such a stance not only went in the opposite direction from allegory and the traditional dialectic between *mashal* (parable) and *nimshal* (the parable's moral),[37] but also superseded the Aristotelian theory of verisimilitude. Moreover, while Zacuto is demonstrably aware of previous narratives that staged embodied journeys in the underworld, starting with Dante's *Inferno*,[38] the protagonist of *Tofteh 'arukh* is not a living person, nor a projection of the author himself, but rather an unnamed character who personifies obdurate sinning and its terrifying afterlife consequences.[39] Accordingly, the protagonist's awakening in the netherworld, the punishment of the Beating of the Grave that he undergoes, and the subsequent journey through the seven compartments of hell are not intended as a *visio per somnium* or dream, as in Dante, but rather as a demon-ridden, factual pilgrimage through the material horrors of death and evil. Having said that, the moral task with which the poem

[36] See *Tofteh 'arukh*, vv. 181–186.

[37] For a discussion of the literary implications of such dynamics with reference to midrashic tradition, see Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 48–53.

[38] On the relation of *Tofteh 'Arukh* to previous literary traditions of heavenly and infernal journeys in Hebrew, see Zacuto, *L'inferno allestito*, 35–42.

[39] For alternate hypotheses concerning the identification of the protagonist, see above, Chapter 2, n. 50.

was entrusted was pursued as much through its language as through its content. Indeed, Zacuto's skilful use of Hebrew is possibly the most distinctive aspect of *Tofteh 'arukh*. Meant to studiously match the terrifying coarseness of the topic treated and purposely enhance the sense of fear, confusion, and uncertainty in the reader, Zacuto's language here reached unmatched levels of opulence, sophistication, and obscurity. What Zacuto achieved is, in fact, a sort of verbal acrobatics, whose primary tool is an insistent search for paronomasia, alliteration, and assonance. Hence the resort to rare words, biblical *hapax*, uncommon semantic connotations, and even the creation of a few neologisms. Rhetorical devices of this kind were the hallmark of contemporary Italian and Spanish poetry, and their use proves not only Zacuto's exceptional mastery of Hebrew in its different historical layers, but also his supremely modern sensibility.

The semantic richness and linguistic complexity of *Tofteh 'arukh*, though, are not just rhetorical devices. Rather, they are at the service of what I propose to term Zacuto's 'imaginative verbalism,' that is, his ability to not only represent reality, but also create and shape it through his poetic use of language. This feature of Zacuto's poetics permeates the entire poem but is perhaps best exemplified in its long central section.[40] This is where the demon lists the expansive catalogue of the deceased's sins, contrasting the reckless conduct that characterized his earthly life with the misery of his present state. In a brilliant adaptation of the classic motif of *ubi sunt*,[41] this section of the poem showcases a dazzling series of antitheses, a device meant to contribute dramatic tension and that constituted one of the favourite figures of speech of baroque rhetoric. According to this construction, the power, vices, and pleasures pursued in life "yesterday," are replaced by the suffering, torments, and consumption that constitute the protagonist's "today." Marked by a fast rhythm, a closed, repetitive verse structure, and a verbal complexity pushed to paroxysm, in its hammering phonetic repetitiveness this section is also meant to mimic, if not auditorily reproduce, the demon's relentless beating. More importantly, the conceptual contraposition between past and present is achieved through the resort to homographic and homonymic paronomasias, resulting in an unremitting series of wordplays. As I argue, the aim is to stage a sort of 'verbal *contrapasso*,'[42] by virtue of which the overturning of the initial image is

[40] See *Tofteh 'arukh*, vv. 346–670.

[41] Traditionally used to emphasize the transient nature of life, the motif of *ubi sunt* (literally, "where are ...") was still popular in early modern European literatures. See Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur*, 399–415.

[42] Zacuto's resort to this semantic and conceptual device in *Tofteh 'arukh* well exemplifies his implicit indebtedness to Dante's *Inferno*, in which the term *contrapasso* defines the punishment of the damned souls by a process either bearing a resemblance to or contrasting with the sin in

attained through the inversion (by phonetic alteration or substitution, or simply by homophonic repetition) of the first term. The following are some examples:

> Your heart (*libbatekha*) kindled the blaze (*labbatekha*) that scorches you, / Your hope (*kislatekha*) was your folly (*kislatekha*), / Your lust (*awwatekha*) has made your ruin (*hawwatekha*) greater, / Your repose (*hanḥatekha*) is now a storm of sighs (*anḥatekha*), / Your rebellion (*saratekha*) has aroused your sorrow (*tzaratekha*).[43]

> From riches (*me-hon*) to sorrows (*le-on*), from nectar (*mi-tzuf*) to the reed and thorn-bush (*le-suf wa-shayit*), / From a throne (*mi-kes*) to the headstone (*le-qetz*), from splendour (*mi-ziz*) to squalor (*le-ziz ha-bayit*).[44]

> Yesterday, monies and properties (*kesafim gam nekhasim*) were ample, / As were their shrewd charms and incantations (*keshafim gam neḥashim*). / Today, wrath is here like a swarm of snakes (*qetzafim ka-neḥashim*) / Hurling darts inside your bones.[45]

The 'verbal *contrapasso*' device is also deployed in the subsequent description of the seven compartments of hell and the related typologies of sin punished in each of them. Thus, for example, in the fourth chamber, in which bribers, swearers, perjurers, and a variety of other sinners are trapped in thick mud, the pleasure (*'oneg*) they pursued on earth turns into affliction (*nega'*).[46] Another example is provided by the punishment inflicted upon sinners in the sixth chamber, which is called *Tzalmawet* (Shade of Death). Here, among others, are those whose crime in life was vanity: "Tarnished fellows lacking all wisdom, / Those who deck themselves out with finery, / Seduced by appearance (*tzelem*) or the reflected image,"[47] and who, as a result, are now thrown into the shade of darkness (*tzalmon*). Like the echo structure deployed in the dialogue between the dead protagonist and

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question. At the same time, it signals the deep cultural distance that separates Dante's poem from Zacuto's distinctive Jewish (and baroque) sensitivity. On the relation between *Tofteh 'arukh* and the *Divine Comedy*, see Zacuto, *L'inferno allestito*, 40–42.

[43] *Tofteh 'arukh*, vv. 376–380.

[44] *Tofteh 'arukh*, vv. 397–398.

[45] *Tofteh 'arukh*, vv. 456–457.

[46] *Tofteh 'arukh*, v. 786.

[47] *Tofteh 'arukh*, vv. 857–859.

the demon, the 'verbal *contrapasso*' is similarly a "figure of excess"[48] in which the doubling of the language, instead of creating sameness of meaning, disrupts it by introducing difference. In an age enthralled with ciphers, emblems, and enigmas, these devices provided Zacuto with an apt arena in which to prove his mastery of baroque artifice.[49] On the other hand, such a use of language, which relies as much on sound as on the evocation of conceptual reconfigurations, goes beyond a mere exercise in the art of wordplay. Rather, it reveals the author's belief that words have a protean and magmatic nature and that they are in a dynamic bond with reality, which they can transform by constantly changing.

Zacuto's attitude towards the verbal medium reflects the conceptual horizon of Kabbalah. According to it, words are not only deeply significant but also susceptible to ceaseless combinations, thus creating endless chains of semantic associations that also possess an ontological quality and that, as such, are endowed with performative, magic power. At the same time, Zacuto's approach to language also aligned with one of the fundamental tenets of baroque poetics, namely the one establishing that the medium, that is, the language, is identical with the poetic object, thus advancing the idea that poetic style and subject (that is, the verbalized object of poetry) are one and the same thing.[50] Indeed, this same principle also supports some of the techniques that Zacuto implemented to 'visually' translate onto the page the contents of the poem. As mentioned above, *Tofteh 'arukh* envisions the physical structure of hell as a system of encased compartments, the upper ones larger than the lower, that funnel downward into the earth. To make the reader perceive the progressive narrowing of the infernal chambers, Zacuto resorted to a solution that is as simple as brilliant: he gradually reduced the number of strophes allocated to their description. Thus, if the first and the second compartments both occupy seven strophes, and the third and fourth eight strophes each (thus in fact signifying an intermediate spatial expansion),[51] only five strophes are allocated to the fifth chamber, four to the sixth, and three to the

[48] See Burgard, *Baroque*, 340–344.

[49] On verbal and conceptual overturning as a staple of Zacuto's poetry, see Rathaus, "Disputa teologica," 8–10, online.

[50] For a discussion of this concept in relation to baroque rhetorical theories, see Morpurgo-Tagliabue, *Anatomia del Barocco*, 41–42.

[51] The larger dimensions of the third and fourth compartments might be due to the fact that the latter is the seat of the "writhing snake" (based on Is. 27:1), which in zoharic literature symbolizes the demonic realm. According to the *Zohar*, when aroused by an evil tongue on earth, the snake undergoes a sort of physical expansion: stirring its scales, it raises its body from its head to its feet, thus reaching into the upper compartments (see *Zohar* 2:fol. 265^{r}). I thank Tchiya Fruman for suggesting this possible reading of Zacuto's text. In *Tofteh 'arukh*, the

seventh.[52] Zacuto's ability to narratively transpose the precipitous physicality of hell onto the paper is further exemplified in two places in the poem, at vv. 705 and 784. In both cases, the transition from one compartment to the next is marked by images evoking the idea of falling, thus metaphorically reproducing the actual movement downward of the demon and the dead protagonist in their descent to the bottom of hell.[53]

The prosodic techniques that Zacuto deployed in *Tofteh 'arukh* similarly convey the author's careful reflection on the relation between the poem's stylistic features and its subject. The idea of physical constriction and inescapability, the vociferous crowdedness associated with the reality of hell, are not only verbally described, but also transposed into the strophic structure of the poem. Whereas in *Yesod 'olam* Zacuto had resorted to a variety of different solutions, in *Tofteh 'arukh* he used a single prosodic form. Thus, each of the 185 strophes comprising the poem is composed of five verses internally organized according to the rhyme pattern ABBAA. In line with the quantitative-syllabic system characteristic of Hebrew poetry written in Italy since the Middle Ages, the verse metre is the hendecasyllable. Furthermore, all its verses have a feminine ending. This peculiar prosodic structure, which Zacuto also used elsewhere in his compositions, reproduced in Hebrew the *quintilla en verso italiano* of the Spanish poetic tradition.[54] The five-verse structure of the *quintilla*, in which the last verse both expands and seals the familiar four-verse pattern ABBA of the *redondillas* (a Spanish form typically written in eight-syllable lines), afforded those elements of asymmetry and displacement that could help Zacuto convey, through the uneven rhythmical texture of the poem, the perturbing subject of the text and its distinctive atmosphere, thus also intensifying its emotional impact. The rigid rhyme pattern of the *quintilla*, and in even larger measure the constraints imposed by the use of feminine rhymes (which are a minority in Hebrew, where most words have a masculine ending), forced Zacuto to resort to a limited range of nominal and verbal patterns. Far from resulting in simple repetition, which would have reduced the lexical gamut with deleterious consequences in terms of style, this limitation becomes, in Zacuto's masterful treatment, a tool for exploring the semantic potentialities of the Hebrew language, sometimes even pushing this process to extremes. In the central section, the one constructed on the anaphoric opposition between "yesterday"

writhing snake is indeed mentioned at v. 800, in correspondence with the description of the fourth compartment.

[52] See Levy, "Hellish Hebrew Theatre," 54.

[53] I thank Aaron Henne for first pointing out this detail to me with reference to v. 705.

[54] See Pagis, *A Secret Sealed*, 232; Bregman, ed., *"I Raise my Heart"*, 221.

and "today," the rhyme pattern becomes even more complex, based as it is now on entire words, with the creation of identical and equivocal rhymes based on paronomasia, often in combination with abundant assonances within the verse, in a tour de force that is not just prosodic, but also semantic.

Given Zacuto's involvement with both speculative and practical Kabbalah, the writing of a poem revolving around kabbalistic concepts was, by definition, invested with a performative value, and the reading of such a poem was meant as a performative act as well. Moreover, as a kabbalist, Zacuto was steeped in numerology. It is not surprising, then, that the overall structure and internal organization of *Tofteh 'arukh* are governed by numerical patterns. In this respect, the poem was not unique. In most of Zacuto's other compositions, from *Yesod 'olam* to his occasional poems, the structure serves the message the poet aims to convey. Functioning as a sort of cipher, it allows the decoding of the composition and consequently is invariably endowed with symbolic connotations. Although *Tofteh 'arukh* can be divided into several subsections,[55] the poem, as mentioned, is essentially comprised of two main monologues: the first is spoken by the deceased (strophes one through fifty-one), while the second is pronounced by the demon in charge of the Beating of the Grave (strophes seventy through one-hundred-and-eighty-five). The short dialogue in the form of echo between the deceased and the demon (strophes fifty-two through sixty-seven) simultaneously functions as caesura and link between these two monologues. The first and the last strophe of the poem both have general content and could also be interpreted as being pronounced by an external narrator (perhaps the author himself). Within this overall symmetrical structure, the text is organized according to internal segments based on the numerals five and seven.[56] Accordingly, several thematic sub-sections can be identified in the first part of the poem, each of them occupying ten strophes (five plus five). As there are seven infernal chambers, this number and its multiples

[55] For example: 1) tirade against the medical profession (strophes 1–7); 2) awakening of the dead protagonist in the tomb (8–13); 3) the protagonist laments his illness and the neglect of family members and servants (14–22); 4) the tomb sinks down to hell (23–26); 5) description of the infernal landscape (27–37); 6) the protagonist observes the Beating of the Grave being inflicted upon the throng of the dead (38–48); 7) encounter with the demon in charge of the Beating of the Grave (49–59); 8) the protagonist begs to be spared and offers to pay the demon a ramson (60–69); 9) the demon admonishes the deceased and reveals the truth to him (70–81); 10) "yesterday ... today ..." (82–128); 11) introduction to hell (129–133); 12) the seven infernal pits (134–177); 13) brief vision of heaven and acceptance of the divine decree (178–185).

[56] Numerology seems to have played a role in Zacuto's poetry from its inception, as these two numbers also dictate the internal organization of *Yesod 'olam*. See Bregman, *The Golden Way*, 263–264.

create numerological patterns associated with evil and sin. Thus, for example, the demon's monologue starts at strophe seventy, while the endless list of sins and crimes committed by the dead enumerated in the "yesterday [...] today [...]" section occupies forty-nine strophes (seven times seven). It is worth noting that forty-nine is also the number of Gates of Impurity (*Sha'are ha-ṭum'ah*) mentioned in kabbalistic literature, where they symbolize the levels of defilement that an individual can fall to while still being able to arise and amend his soul through repentance.[57]

As mentioned above, Zacuto's depiction of the seven infernal pits is based on a variety of pre-existing materials, which were efficaciously reworked by the author to fit into his conception of hell and his vivid imagination. In fact, full comprehension of the poem assumed the reader's familiarity with the sources upon which the author drew; this feature, combined with the challenges posed by Zacuto's language, soon rendered necessary, as we have seen, an explanatory apparatus to supplement the text.[58] Zacuto must have been aware of the text's unintelligibility, and we may assume that this is how he preserved the esoteric nature of its contents. In this respect, Zacuto's language, with its relentless resort to plays on words, assonances, and homophones, is an example of rhetorical esotericism. By leaving his readership the task of extracting meaning from the poems' polysemous language, the author was not only able to intellectually engage them, but also to reach a balance between secrecy and disclosure. At the same time, the abstruse images and the exotic and menacing nomenclature that Zacuto borrowed from Kabbalah could nonetheless arouse fear of infernal torments even in readers unacquainted with the *Zohar* and related literature, thus still contributing to the didactic purposes of the poem.

In fact, the poetic transposition of images drawn from the kabbalistic representation of the reign of evil and impurity served well the contemporary predilection for enigmatic analogies and emblematic symbolism, as well as the baroque tendency towards hyperbole and bold metaphors. In a similar vein, both the rhetorical sophistication of the language deployed in *Tofteh 'arukh* and the resort to kabbalistic elements not only contributed to the poem's arcaneness and complexity, but also responded to the taste for conceptual wittiness that was another distinctive feature of baroque literature and, more generally, of the

[57] According to the *Zohar*, the children of Israel reached the forty-ninth level of spiritual impurity during their time in Egypt, where they also fell into idolatry. Only God's intervention prevented them from sinking to the fiftieth level and thus to certain spiritual oblivion. See *Zohar ḥadash*, f. 49^{v}.

[58] On this, see above, Chapter 2.

baroque mentality. Insofar as they both are meant as instruments for achieving meta-sensorial levels of impact, language and Kabbalah in *Tofteh ʿarukh* give full expression to the essence of the baroque as a system of sensorial abstractions. It is worth noting, in this regard, that the resort to kabbalistic imagery and nomenclature is more frequent in the section of the poem in which the seven compartments of hell are described. This is the place where the abstruseness of the images evoked matches the material darkness pervading the abyss of hell, as well as the confusion reigning in it. Conversely, in the last two strophes of the poem, in which a brief vision of paradise is evoked, semantic obscurity yields to plain and unambiguous discourse, thus transposing in words the luminous and peaceful condition of the righteous.[59]

Epilogue

The public readings of *Tofteh ʿarukh* staged by the *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* that opened this chapter demonstrate well the gamut of possibilities inherent in Zacuto's remarkable work and, at the same time, the challenges it posed. On the one hand, the Ferrara watchers understood that the dramatization of extreme feelings enacted in the poem, and Zacuto's masterful wrapping of a religious and moralizing topic in the cloak of secular poetic forms, could serve them well in their attempt to reach wider and more varied audiences—among both the erudite and the uncultivated—outside the confraternal circle. On the other hand, the members of the confraternity seem to have been aware of the poem's unsuitability for a conventional representation on stage: indeed, how to overcome the challenges posed by a theatrical representation of the afterlife and hell? How to reproduce on the stage the decaying body of the protagonist, or the horrific torments inflicted upon the throng of the dead, or the frightful appearance of the demons? A dramatized reading could obviate the difficulties embedded in re-enacting on stage the more graphic parts of the poem, while at the same time it could prompt the audience to conjure up a vivid representation in their own mind by using the spoken word to guide their affects and imagination.

As we have seen, the unique opportunities for both moral improvement and aesthetic pleasure afforded by *Tofteh ʿarukh* had been already mentioned in the preface to the first printing of the poem, in which an account of how the members of the Mantua *Ḥadashim la-beqarim* had discovered the poem was provided. There, the newly found work had been described as having "no equal" among the late teacher's writings and being as suitable for the edification of the lettered as of

[59] See Bregman, "Dimness and Clarity," 49.

the less educated. It is worth noting, as a conclusion, that both Zacuto's *Tofteh 'arukh* and Olmo's paradisiacal sequel fulfilled a similar didactic purpose: the gruesome depiction of the punishment of sin was meant to teach the readership what is morally bad, just as the representation of the blissful afterlife of the virtuous was expected to give instruction about what is morally good. In fact, Olmo's poem never achieved the popularity of its infernal prequel, nor, as far as we know, was it the object of public performances or dramatized readings involving the use of music. Even within devotional confraternities, it would appear, sin sold better than virtue, and the strong emotions promised by 'a night in hell' could count on a larger turnout than heavenly eternity.

PART TWO

HELL ARRAYED

AN ANNOTATED TRANSLATION OF *TOFTEH ʿARUKH*

Note on the Translation

In the translation, the numbers at the beginning of each strophe of the poem indicate, respectively, the strophe number followed by the verse numbers, the first reflecting the numbering adopted in the 1715 print edition. The passages in italics are authorial notes, that is, either introductory notes or 'stage directions' that appear in the original. The parts in square brackets are my insertions and do not belong to Zacuto's or Basilea's texts. In the commentary, citations of Zacuto's main sources, namely *Massekhet ḥibbuṭ ha-qever*, *Massekhet gehinnom*, the *Zohar*, and *Midrash Rut ha-ne'elam*, include a reference to the corresponding location in Elijah de Vidas's compilation *Reshit ḥokhmah*.

Hell Arrayed[1]

The foundations [of this poem] rest on the holy teachings of the rabbis, as veritably expounded in the Treatise of Gehinnom.[2] *According to those, as soon as the undertakers leave the grave—once it has been opportunely covered—the [preliminary] judgement called Beating of the Grave promptly commences. To this end, the soul [of the departed] re-enters the body, as the rabbis have explained with reference to the [biblical] verse:* He shall call to the heavens above and to the earth, that He may judge his people *(Ps. 50:4), and as based on the [Talmudic] tale of the lame and the blind.*[3] *Indeed, according to the agreed-upon interpretation, as soon as the soul has re-entered the body, the senses are restored too—albeit perturbed and confused; therefore, the departed will at first talk to himself with utterances such as follows:*

[I:1–5]
If the foundations are rotten and smashed into bits,
The masons will labour in vain to mend the cracks.[4]
If the crier[5] has proclaimed the irrevocable decree,
Men will not succeed, no matter how zealous;
In fact, in their alacrity, they will bring doom.

[II:6–10]
The doctors behave like fools,
Fumbling like blind men in the dark.[6]
They claim to lead the feverish[7]
From ailment to a healing harbour,
But they strain in vain and to no avail.

[III:11–15]
On the day when criminal sentences are passed,
If the doctors were known or their names recalled,
Then capital punishments need not be issued nor ratified:

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[1] Cf. Is. 30:34. For a discussion of Zacuto's choice of title, see Chapter 2.

[2] On this specific work, and more generally on Zacuto's sources, see Chapter 2.

[3] Cf. TB *Sanhedrin*, fol. 91^{r-v}. For the full text of this passage, see Chapter 2.

[4] Cf. Is. 58:12.

[5] A metaphor, taken from the judicial world, for the Angel of Death.

[6] Cf. Is. 59:10.

[7] Cf. Deut. 32:24.

When the criminals are being readied to hang,
It should rather be ordered: "Place them in the physicians' hands!"

[IV:16–20]
The Law[8] might allow them to practice,
But only to dress a wound with a plaster.
Internal maladies will not benefit from their art
And can only be cured by God's wondrous hand.
Hence, my soul is weary of their stupidity!

[V:21–25]
With new trickeries they now arrive
To waste, ruin, kill, and slay!
They're doctors only in name: your strength they will sap,
As they only come to purge and bleed;
After, they will drain your substance too.

[VI:26–30]
My body they have tortured at length
With bloodlettings and cures that made me sore,
Vesicants[9] and purgatives, and all to no avail.
I should think they are done, but here they start again!
All their labour is hopeless and futile, nonetheless.

[VII:31–35]
The blow that they dealt me, last night!
I swallowed concoctions and bitter draughts.

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[8] In the original, Torah, that is the Jewish Law. Cf. the discussion of doctors' liability in TB *Bava kamma*, fol. 85^{v}: "As the school of Rabbi Ishmael taught: *He shall cause him to be thoroughly healed* [we-rappo yerappe] (Ex. 21:19), from which it follows that permission is granted to a doctor to heal. If so, let the line read: *And a doctor shall heal* [we-rofe yerappe]. From this you learn that [the one who caused the injury is liable] to give compensation for medical costs."

[9] Literally, 'firebrands,' on the basis of Is. 50:11. My translation is based on the explication of this strophe provided by Aviad Sar-Shalom Basilea in his commentary: "By resorting to poetic artifice the author is here depicting the deceased, who holds he is still alive, lying on his sickbed and saying: 'For quite a while the doctors have tortured my body with bloodlettings and painful remedies, as well as 'firebrands' (which in the vernacular are called *vesicanti* [vesicants]) and even purgatives, but to no advantage!" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 3^{v}).

Drop by drop I sipped a slop that tasted like gall,[10]
Until a mortal slumber came over me:
It was no doze or nap, but rather sound sleep.[11]

[VIII:36–40]
Indeed, till now I have slept, and yet
Pain and anguish give me no respite.
I am like a man thrown into slimy mud.[12]
O, were I dwelling in the grave like a corpse,
There I would be quiet and at rest!

[IX:41–45]
My featherbed has been freshly refilled, as has the straw
In my pillow, and yet they feel as hard as stones...
I wish my bones were lowered to the netherworld:
There they would lie peacefully,
Whereas on this pallet they are coming apart.[13]

[X:46–50]
Warmth has abandoned my crumbling body,
In vain I wrap myself in my clothes.
I have no wishes, hope is gone; were I buried

[10] Literally, 'like bitterness from the bucket,' based on Is. 40:15. Although unknowingly, the narrator is here describing the moment of his death. The text in fact alludes to the three bitter drops that trickle down from the sword of the Angel of Death, thus inducing in human beings a mortal sleep. This motif, to which Zacuto also refers in the following strophes (vv. 288, 603, 712–713), was already attested in the Talmud (see *ʿAvodah zarah*, fol. 20^{v}, although in that place just one drop is mentioned). It was later expanded in the midrash and appears in *Massekhet ḥibbuṭ ha-qever* (see Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrasch*, 1:150; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 45^{r}). Eventually, the motif of the drops found its final elaboration in subsequent mystical literature, such as in the *Zohar* (see, for example, *Zohar* 3:fol. 126^{v}).

[11] Cf. TB *Megillah*, fol. 18^{v}; TB *Pesaḥim*, fol. 120^{v}; TB *Taʾanit*, fol. 12^{v}.

[12] Cf. Is. 57:20.

[13] Zacuto is alluding to the lugubrious image of the disarticulated skeleton in the tomb, a commonplace of the western imaginary related to death since the Middle Ages. This section of the poem, through verse 65, is meant as a hyper-realistic evocation of the physical modifications that the corpse undergoes in the grave, the morbid character of which is only slightly mitigated by the humorous situation, depicting the deceased who is oblivious to his real situation. For an analysis of this section of the poem, see Chapter 3.

In the chasm of the abyss,[14] I would feel warm and mellow,[15]
Whereas here I am chilled to the marrow.

[XI:51–55]
Even the choicest balms and fragrances,
The myrrh and aloe that used to scent my bed[16]
Now stink with the stench of dung.[17]
If I escaped to the underworld, amidst the dead,
The smell of their carcasses would please me, whereas here it reeks.

[XII:56–60]
My body has shrunk, and yet it feels confined.
My limbs are lying on a bed lined with damask,[18]
And yet they feel locked in between two planks...[19]
Were my body stuck between the narrow sides of the grave,
It would have plenty of room, while here it is trapped.

[XIII:61–65]
To my sufferings, a fierce disease is added,
For my flesh is being torn unrelentingly:
Lice, bedbugs, and fleas eat me alive!
It would not be so below, in the pit of the grave,
Even though worms and maggots still prick like needles.[20]

[XIV:66–70]
Now that my eyes are dimmed,
My servants have abandoned me.

[14] In other words, in the netherworld. One more stroke of black humour: the protagonist is unaware that what awaits him is indeed a journey through that same abyss that he is now invoking so passionately.

[15] According to both Talmudic and Jewish mystical tradition, hell is swamped by fire, and is so represented by Zacuto. See also below, vv. 166–185 for Zacuto's immediate source.

[16] Cf. Prov. 7:17.

[17] An allusion to the stench given off by the decaying corpse.

[18] Cf. Amos 3:12.

[19] The planks are in fact those of the coffin in which the protagonist lies, unaware.

[20] Cf. TB *Shabbat*, fol. 152^{r}: "Rabbi Isaac said: The maggots that devour the flesh of the deceased are as painful to the dead as a needle in the flesh of the living, as it is stated with regard to the dead: 'But his flesh is in pain for him, and his soul mourns over him' (Job 14:22)."

They snuck to their beds and have not been back.
I am deserted even by my beloved:
Adults and children, all have decamped.

[XV:71–75]
I detest life already,[21] my soul is weary.
I have seen incessant misfortunes,
I am tired of carrying their burden.[22]
Ah, calamities are coming one after the other;
Death, death, I invoke you![23]

[XVI:76–80]
Come soon, O remedy to my torments, do hasten!
Come, come, why are you lingering, O death?
Better that I walk in the valley of doom,[24]
For the furious pain that I feel indeed
Shatters my heart: because of it I am in despair.[25]

[XVII:81–85]
Please, God, consent to take my soul,
And collect my spirit at last.
Then, suffering and turmoil will cease;
Once I descend into the well of the grave[26]
I will find quiet: in the dust I shall have rest.

[XVIII:86–90]
There is no gain in living longer,
Nor in sitting quietly instead of crying out.
Neither hope nor restraint will be of any help,

[21] Cf. Gen. 27:46.

[22] Cf. Isa. 1:14.

[23] Still oblivious to his being dead, the protagonist now invokes death, persuaded it will put an end to torments that he mistakenly attributes to his illness. Zacuto's repeated cues for dark comedy rely, here like earlier in the text, on the knowledge, shared with the reader, of the protagonist's real situation.

[24] Cf. Ps. 23:24.

[25] Cf. Ps. 69:21.

[26] Literally, 'the pit of destruction,' based on Ps. 55:24.

Afflicted as I am by a cruel and deadly illness.
Why do I linger and hold on to my hopes, still?

[XIX:91–95]
None of my limbs can I move [...]
Hurry up, servants, come quick to my aid!
Make haste, I pray you! Have mercy
On one who has turned into a dying man!
You pretend—I know not why—not to hear me.

[XX:96–100]
Where are my ample progeny and all the others?
Where have Eber, Buz, and Hepher gone?
Where are Hazarmaveth and Epher?
Why are you dawdling, Abel, my servant?
And you my wife, Jezebel, can you not hear my wails?[27]

[XXI:101–105]
O me, how miserable I am in my own house!
They plotted the most abject treason against me:
They have all escaped, each to a featherbed,

[27] All the names invoked in this strophe bear a negative connotation, and some of them are related to the idea of death. Eber (*'Ever*) is the progenitor of the Jews mentioned in Gen. 10: 24–25; the literal meaning of his name is 'the one who lives across the river [Euphrates],' which in the poems' context creates a humorous pun alluding to the otherworldly situation here depicted. The name Buz is mentioned in several places in the Bible in relation to both individuals and nations, and its literal meaning is 'scorn, contempt.' Hepher (*Ḥefer*) is both a proper name for a person and a toponym and is related to a Hebrew root that means 'to dig, to excavate,' with obvious allusion to the grave. In the Bible, Hazarmaveth is the name of one of the sons of Joktan, the purported ancestor of the South Arabian peoples (see Gen. 10:26 and 1 Chr. 1:20); the literal meaning of the Hebrew is 'vestibule of death.' Epher (*'Efer*) is mentioned in the Bible among the children of one of Abraham's concubines (see Gen. 25:4); this name is linked to the Hebrew word *'afar* (earth; dust) and often appears in combination with the homophone *afar* (ashes). *Hevel* is the Hebrew form of the name Abel, who, according to the Bible, was the first victim of murder in the history of humanity; literally, it means 'breath' and, by extension, 'vanity, futility.' Jezebel is the wicked wife of impious King Ahab, according to 1 Kings. Rather than having any real narrative function, these names seem to bear a symbolic connotation as slanderous epithets with which the protagonist rails at the neglect of wife and children, for the sole amusement of the reader.

While here I am sinking like a man falling into a ditch.[28]
Never did I imagine or expect such a thing.

[XXII:106–110]
Dear me! I am in the utmost agony of spirit,
Whereas they're all peaceful, quiet, and content.
Lulled by the waves of sleep they slumber,
While at the door I hear a noise that is no human sound,
Rather a tempestuous rumble.[29]

[XXIII:111–115]
What is this ruckus that I hear?
It sounds more like a bellowing sea than a stream,
Like the roar of a lion or the cry of a beast of prey.
Now I am distraught, for I cannot tell
If the moment of my demise is nigh.

[XXIV:116–120]
My heart quivers with fear and anguish.
Truly, I am terrified by what I hear
And petrified by what I see.[30]
In fright at such a vision, I want to flee;
Far from here (and soon!), I want to be.

[XXV:121–125]
In truth, this is a most narrow place...
Dear me, I cannot escape!

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[28] The protagonist is, in fact, sinking in reality, for his grave is now plunging through the earth down to the netherworld, as will soon be made explicit by an authorial note.

[29] The image of the storm, evoked here in its auditory aspects, is used to create a contrast between the blissful and oblivious sleep of relatives and servants and the tumult that the protagonist can hear more and more distinctly, which anticipates, here and in the next strophe, the cries and wails of the dead undergoing the Beating of the Grave. Although in a different narrative context, Zacuto's approach recalls the one used by Dante in *Inferno* III, 22–69, when he describes his and Virgil's arrival at the vestibule of hell, where he is first struck by the sound of loud cries, sighs, and utterances coming from the crowd of the pusillanimous.

[30] From sound, Zacuto now switches to sight, thus expanding the variety of sensorial allusions by way of accumulation and anticipating the centrality that sight will hold in the following strophes. On the role of the senses in *Tofteh ʿarukh*, see Chapter 3.

Indeed, I feel crushed and weak:
My legs are feeble and my knees buckle,[31]
My loins are racked by shudders and tremors.[32]

[XXVI:126–130]
When did my comrades[33] escort me here?
Why was I taken to such a tight space?
How was I cast (like a wretched corpse!) into this place?[34]
My heart is affrighted, my eyes are dimmed
At this strange sight that I now behold.

The reference is to the sinking of the grave down to Gehenna for the Beating of the Grave, according to the teachings of the rabbis.[35]

[XXVII:131–135]
I see ravines plunging into the abyss,
I see valleys as deep as the netherworld,
I see burrows and abysmal caves,
I see caverns blazing with flames,
I see crevices carved by splintering sparks.[36]

[XXVIII:136–140]
I look at their surface, whose soil is made
Of brimstone and salt mixed with pitch,

[31] Cf. Nah. 2:11.

[32] Cf. Nah. 2:11.

[33] While the Hebrew word *ḥaveray* in the original could simply be translated with "my friends," it is possible that Zacuto intentionally used here a term associated with membership in charity and devotional confraternities. In this period, in several Italian communities, groups of watchers such as the *Shomerim la-boqer* were also active in assisting the sick and the dying by performing the communal service called *Biqqur ḥolim* (Visiting the Sick).

[34] Cf. Isa. 14:19.

[35] On the motif of the sinking of the grave and its meaning, see Chapter 2.

[36] The hammering verbal repetition with which Zacuto opens the description of the monstrous landscape of hell cannot but recall the anaphora in the first tercet of Canto III of Dante's *Inferno*, in which the first part of the warning inscription engraved on the entrance to hell is spelled out as solemnly as it is ominous. In *Tofteh ʿarukh*, the repetition is meant to mark the transition to the netherworld and, at the same time, to confirm the reality of what the dead protagonist is now contemplating, for which he is offering ocular proof. For a discussion of the role of sight in *Tofteh ʿarukh*, see Chapter 3.

Mud, lime, and dung. If you step on it,
You will sink, unable to lift your foot:
The mire will reach up to your head.

[XXIX:141–145]
I behold the walls around each compartment:
Like fiery furnaces, fanned by a blowing wind,
There are ovens and stoves. They are set ablaze—
Inside and out—by thistles and thorns
Saturated with resin and oil.

[XXX:146–150]
I watch the depths of sea and gushing waters,[37]
Floods frozen like walls[38] carried in the stream
Surrounded by towering banks of snow,
Freezing mist, hailstones, and frost
The like of which were unseen even in Egypt.[39]

[XXXI:151–155]
My heart is shaken with great fear,
As I see creatures strange to behold,
Such as could not be imagined nor conceived.
My spirit and soul are frightened by their look,
For to no evil demon could they be compared.[40]

[XXXII:156–160]
They are like the giants of Astarot-Karnaim,[41]

[37] Cf. Job 38:16.

[38] Cf. Exod. 15:8.

[39] A reference to the ten plagues that, according to the account in Exod. 7:8–12:34, struck Egypt, the seventh of which was hail. The strophe exemplifies well the taste for semantic accumulation typical of baroque sensitivity as well as its fascination with natural elements.

[40] Zacuto keeps adding touches of black comedy at the expenses of the miserable protagonist: the horrendous creatures standing in front of him indeed *are* demons, and they are responsible for inflicting the Beating of the Grave upon the dead.

[41] The text alludes to the Rephaim, a legendary people populating Transjordan, whose exceptional stature is mentioned in the Bible (see, for example, Ex. 2:20). According to Gen. 14:5, the Rephaim were defeated by the Elamites at Astarot-Karnaim, a place named after the goddess Astarte. The reference to idolatry, which a reader acquainted with the Bible could easily detect

As high in stature as a ship's mast. Instead of nails,
At the tip of their fingers, a razor is fixed.
From their foreheads jut two sharp horns,
And their body is covered over with eyes.[42]

[XXXIII:161–165]
Their face is a blaze that burns and incinerates.
Armoured like archers[43] or swordsmen,
They are clothed in scales laced into a mesh.
Bursting with arrogance and contempt,
Each of them stands at his assigned spot.

[XXXIV:166–170]
I see a river of fire[44] whose waves
And billows surge in a flooding tide.
As rapacious as the whelps of predators,
They set ablaze, they swamp and sweep,
They rumble, they bellow and roar.

[XXXV:171–175]
There I see a snake and frightening dragons

embedded into the comparison, is probably made purposefully, as according to Jewish tradition idolaters are condemned to hell. For a second reference to the Rephaim, see below, v. 500. On gigantic size as one of the attributes of the Angel of Death, see Chapter 2.

[42] The physical depiction of the demons in charge of the Beating of the Grave partly draws on the traditional representation of the Angel of Death, with whom Zacuto's creatures share features such as the gigantic stature and a body covered with eyes (on which see Chapter 2). Details such as the horns and claws, on the other hand, seem to have been borrowed from the traditional Christian representation of devils.

[43] Cf. Jer. 4:29.

[44] In Aramaic, *nehar di-nur*. According to the Talmud, this is the river of fire that originates from the sweat of the angelic beasts surrounding the divine throne. It then flows down into the depths of hell where it enfolds the wicked in its flames, scalding them. See TB *Ḥagigah*, fol. 13^{v}. *Massekhet Gehinnom* includes the following description of the fire in Gehenna, from which Zacuto seems to have drawn some of the details that make up his own poetic depiction of the underworld: "There are five types of fire in hell: there is fire that devours and swallows and fire that swallows but does not devour, and fire that devours but does not swallow, and fire that neither devours nor swallows, and finally there is also fire that devours fire. And in this blaze there are brands [as big] as mountains, and coals [as big] as hills, [...] and embers the size of huge rocks; and there are in it rivers of sulphur and pitch sweeping along burning thistles and thorns" (Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-midrasch*, 1:147; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 47^{r}).

Swarming amidst the burning abyss.
On all sides from amidst the flames,
Beasts burst out, large and small together,
Their fangs and claws like sharp iron.[45]

[XXXVI:176–180]
From there they descend into the depths of the abyss
And there make a boiling foam surge and rise.
With furious rage and the fiercest wrath,
They there gather and assemble;
From there they then divide and depart.

[XXXVII:181–185]
There each stream of fire forks
Into cavernous corners or overflowing hollows.[46]
The force of the blaze and scorching fire
Would puzzle the philosophers of nature,[47]
For no thinker ever conceived[48] such a thing.

[XXXVIII:186–190]
At this sight both my heart and my eyes
Fill with wonder, marvel, and surprise:
A roaring crowd screams and wails,[49]

[45] Cf. Prov. 27:17.

[46] Literally, 'wells of seven' (*beʾerot sheva*ʿ), based on the toponym recurring in Gen. 21. According to the biblical story, a quarrel rose between Abraham and Abimelech, on whose land Abraham was sojourning, for a well that Abimelech's servants had seized. To prove that he had dug the well, Abraham offered Abimelech seven ewes from his flock (see Gen. 21:25–30). According to the midrashic interpretation of this passage, the quarrel was settled by divine intervention as the well's water rose at the approach of Abraham and his sheep and thus supposedly overflowed the well's edges. See *Bereshit rabbah* 54:5.

[47] On the identification of *baʿale ha-ṭeva*ʿ with natural philosophers, see Klatzkin, *Thesaurus philosophicus*, 1:92. Zacuto's reference is reminiscent of Hamlet's words: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (*Hamlet*, 1.5.187–8) and is similarly marked by ambivalence towards contemporary scientific knowledge.

[48] My English translation follows Basilea's explication: "*Sheʿarum*, i.e., 'they imagined it,' according to Deut. 32:17: *sheʿarum avotekhem* [i.e., your fathers imagined it]" (*Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 6ʳ).

[49] Here commences a graphic description of the torments inflicted upon the dead in the Beating of the Grave, the preliminary judgment executed upon all dead, regardless of their

Oppressed and furiously vexed, they are hurled
From cold to heat and from heat to cold.[50]

[XXXIX:191–195]
Like a stone fired from the pocket of a sling[51]
They are tossed, shoved from misfortune to calamity:
Battered by a shower of scourging[52] slaps,
Onto the clefts of the rocks they are smashed,
Each time ready to collapse.[53]

[XL:196–200]
Although they cry in their timeless pain,
There is no heed, none to hark or respond.[54]
Like a flock of sheep, they are dragged
To slaughter and carnage; like cumin in the pestle,
Thus their flesh is being there crushed.[55]

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conduct in life. Zacuto's description goes on until v. 234. Once more, the poet displays his skill in the use of conceptual accumulation: the series of gruesome images following each other reinforce their frightening quality, while the resort to anaphora conveys the idea of the ineluctability of the punishment. On Zacuto's immediate source for this passage, see Chapter 2.

[50] Basilea's marginal commentary seems to betray the impact of Christian imaginary surrounding afterlife, from the icy bottom of Dante's *Inferno* to the consumption by fire proposed by Counter-Reformation doctrine: "They wail because the devils oppress them by throwing them from a hell of snow to a hell of fire" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 6^{r}).

[51] Cf. 1 Sam. 25:29. Zacuto's comparison alludes to the so called '[punishment of] the sling' (in Hebrew, *kaf ha-qela'*) mentioned in TB *Shabbat*, fol. 152^{v}: "Says Rabbi Eliezer: The souls of the righteous are stored beneath the Throne of Glory, as it is stated: *And the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life* (I Sam. 25:29); on the contrary, [the souls] of the wicked are being fastened, and one angel stands at one end of the world and another angel stands at the other end of the world, and they sling the souls of the wicked [back and forth] to one another, as it is stated: *But the souls of thy enemies He shall fling as from the hollow of a sling* (I Sam. 25:29)." On the '[punishment of] the sling,' see Schauss, *The Lifetime of a Jew*, 283.

[52] Cf. Isa. 28:15 and 18.

[53] Cf. Ps. 38:18.

[54] Cf. I Kings 18:29. The empty supplications of the dead are described in analogous tones in *Midrash Rut ha-ne'elam*: "Flocks of demons run to and fro, getting ready to judge the wicked souls, and they make hell resonate so that their voices are heard above, in heaven, while the voices of the wicked are cries beseeching: 'Ahi! Ahi!' Yet, nobody shows mercy towards them" (*Midrash Rut ha-ne'elam*, fol. 11^{r}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 48^{r}).

[55] Cf. Isa. 28:27.

[XLI:201–205]
Their torturers pass their sentence
And at no time give them respite.
The poor wretches know neither rest nor peace;
As one tormentor goes, here comes another, implacably
Inflicting their cruel castigation until obliteration.[56]

[XLII:206–210]
This one they maul with fangs as sharp as flint,
In the flesh of the other, they make gashes[57] with a comb,
From this one they harshly yank out the hair,
They stamp on the other with their wolfish claws,
Trampling with their feet and beating with their hands.

[XLIII:211–215]
More barbarous and savage than wild beasts
Or animals of prey, they show no mercy.
There, those wretched ones suffer their tribulations,
Men, women, and the elderly along with the child,
Rich, poor, the fool, and the ignorant along with the wise.[58]

[XLIV:216–220]
These are ensnared like birds in a trap,
Those fall into a pit and crash.
These are shackled with convict's fetters,
Those are dropped into a dim ravine.
Others are trapped and enmeshed in snares.

[XLV:221–225]
These have their teeth crushed by gravel,

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[56] The idea according to which the demons take turns, each inflicting a different kind of punishment on the dead, is based on a passage in *Massekhet gehinnom*: "Thus says Rabbi Johanan: Each demon is in charge of inflicting a punishment for a specific transgression. [This means that] the first demons comes, he judges the wicked and then leaves, and similarly the second and the third demons, and the other in succession, until all the transgressions the dead committed are exhausted" (Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrasch*, 1:148; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 47ᵛ).

[57] Cf. Lev. 21:5.

[58] Cf. Ps. 49:11.

Those have their mouth crammed with gall and wine dregs.[59]
These have worms crawling on them,
Those are hanged by their feet,
Others by their tongue or breasts.

[XLVI:226–230]
These suckle their own gall like nurslings,
Those swallow and drink their own blood.
These gorge on their own stool and vomit,
Those are crushed and reduced to pieces,
Others are strewn like filthy dung.

[XLVII:231–235]
These gnaw and eat their own flesh,
Those partake of burning juniper coals.[60]
These are hanged by their nostrils,
Those other wretched ones are consumed by flames.
Harken, O mortals, and be horrified!

[XLVIII:236–240]
I am distraught over all that I see here,
My heart melts and becomes like water.[61]
Tremble, O earth![62] Be desolate, O heavens![63]
Although they draw near, these hosts
Upon which I have chanced, I know not.

One of the tormenting demons[64] *comes to him*

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[59] Cf. Is. 51:27 and 51:22. Wine dregs, like gall, are associated with the Angel of Death and the three poisonous drops he administers to human beings at the time of their passing. On this see below, vv. 711–713.

[60] Cf. Ps. 120:4.

[61] Cf. Josh. 7:5.

[62] Cf. Ps. 114:7.

[63] Cf. Jer. 2:12.

[64] In Hebrew, *mashḥit*. On the connotations of this term, see above, Chapter 1, n. 30. It is worth noting here that Mashḥit is also the name of one of the three demons that, according to *Midrash Rut ha-ne'elam*, preside over Gehenna and are directly subject to Dumah (see *Midrash Rut ha-ne'elam*, fol. 11^{r}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 48^{r}). On Dumah, see below, n. 225.

[XLIX:241–245]
This time I am certainly frightened and alarmed.
Indeed a tremor seizes me now, as a creature
Comes forward from amidst this crowd:
A demon whose voice is like thunder,
Like a flattening hammer pounding on an anvil.[65]

[L:246–250]
Here he stands: his semblance is that of a man,
But he is taller than any mortal (even Sheshai
And Talmai[66] would look like infants, if set beside!).
His face is the face of doom, the countenance of plague,
The cadaverous look of the dead lying in the grave.[67]

[LI:251–255]
O me, I am as amazed and astounded as a man can be!
A fever[68] is spreading through my bones,
My anguished soul abandons me and takes her leave,[69]

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[65] Cf. Isa. 41:7. The comparison anticipates the Beating of the Grave, which the demon is about to inflict on the protagonist.

[66] These are the names of two of the 'sons of Anak,' according to Num. 13:22. The mythical Anakim, mentioned in various places in the Bible as among the peoples who were living in the Land of Canaan before the arrival of the Israelites, were characterized, as their Hebrew name indicates, by their exceptional stature. See also above, n. 41.

[67] This macabre detail, whose morbid hyper-realism is apparently extraneous to Jewish tradition, calls to mind the Christian motif of *transi*, the visual representation of the decaying corpse so common in European Christian sepulchral art. In fact, cultural borrowings of this kind were not unusual among Zacuto's contemporaries. In the old Jewish cemetery of Venice on the Lido Island, a number of sarcophagi in stone dedicated to wealthy deceased (mostly members of Iberian families boasting hidalgo ancestry) are still extant, in whose abundant decoration life-size skeletons pop up amid a feast of putti and coats of arms. On Zacuto's resort to the *transi* iconography, see also Chapter 3.

[68] The Hebrew expression *esh shel 'atzamot*, meaning 'fever,' is Talmudic: "They asked in Babylonia: What is the disease that they called 'fire of the bones'? Abaye said that is a disease known in Babylonia as *eshta de-garmei*, which in Aramaic means 'fire of the bones'; in other words, a fever" (TB *Berakhot*, fol. 32^{r}). The expression is also included in the influential medieval lexicon *Sefer ha-'arukh* by Nathan ben Jehiel of Rome (1035–c. 1110). See *Sefer ha-'arukh ha-shalem*, 1:306, s.v. *esh*.

[69] The image of the soul that abandons the body derives from the *Zohar*: "As soon as he sees [the Angel of Death], his whole body and spirit tremble, and his heart is agitated because it

I suffer the blow of agony and pain;
What dream is this that I am dreaming?[70]

[LII:256–260]
Who will hold my hand and bring me back
To the abode I used to dwell in?
Who can raise me from the abyss into which I have sunk?
Who is so brave as to deliver my life
From foes much stronger than I shall ever be? *The demon [responds]:*
Not me![71]

[LIII:261–265]
If you are not my saviour, begone now.
Stop that! Do not shove your servant in anger![72]

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governs the whole body. His spirit moves through every limb of the body, asking leave of them, like someone asking leave of a friend to go to another place" (*Zohar*, 3:fol. 126^{v}).

[70] The protagonist's misunderstanding regarding his real situation persists and is now cleverly amplified by the introduction of a reference to the quintessential baroque idea of a confusing, overlapping, and constant struggle between the competing realms of dream and reality. Scholars have detected in this passage analogies with Pedro Calderón de la Barca's popular play *La vida es sueño* (1629–1635): in a sort of re-enactment of the fate of Prince Segismundo, Zacuto's protagonist feels that his life has been replaced by a dream (see Sierra, "Lo *Jessòd 'olàm*," 290–292). In fact, the articulation of the dialectics between real and imagined life is here ingeniously upended by Zacuto: far from instilling into the reader any doubt concerning the materiality of the scenes depicted, as beheld by the protagonist, the element of dreaming thus evoked ironically underscores their sensorial, and therefore real, quality.

[71] Here begins a surreal dialogue between the dead protagonist and the demon in which the latter answers the former's questions by echoing the last word he pronounced. On the dramatic function and suggested interpretations of the dialogue, see Chapters 1 and 3. By placing this echo-dialogue right at the beginning of the Beating of the Grave, Zacuto might also be alluding to the zoharic passage in which the phenomenon of the "voice that is never lost," that is the echo, is illustrated: "Three are the voices that are never lost, aside from voices of Torah and prayer—for these ascend on high and lacerate the heavens. In fact, there are other voices that do not ascend and yet are not lost, and they number three. The cry of the woman in labour when she is on the birthstool: that voice sweeps from one end of the world to the other; the cry of a human being when he departs from the world: that voice sweeps from one end of the world to the other; [and] the cry of the snake when it sheds its skin: that voice sweeps from one end of the world to the other" (*Zohar*, 3:fols. 168^{v}–169^{r}). It is worth noting that Zacuto resorted to the echo device in his funerary poems too, as a stylistic element poignantly giving voice to the ghastly resounding emptiness and solitude of the tomb. On this see Bregman, "Now a Stone Will be Placed over My Daughter."

[72] Literally, 'do not thrust aside your servant in anger,' on the basis of Ps. 27:9.

I beg you, sir, please hold back your hand,
As your fury—that I see is like that of a lion—
Burdens me with dread. *The demon, hitting him with a rod [says]:* Awaken![73]

[LIV:266–270]
O strange and cruel foe, now tell me:
What have you to do with me,[74] that you beat me so fiercely?
Why this wrath and anger that frighten me?
If from a devils' den[75] you emerged,
Who summoned you to come against me? *[The demon:]* You yourself!

[LV:271–275]
Then, where did I see you, if you indeed know me?
When did I summon you, O minister of wrath?
In truth, this is the first time I have set eyes on you.
Who has led me here from my lofty abode?[76]
Who is the one—and what kind of a man is he—who tricked me? *[The demon:]* That's me![77]

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[73] The rite of the Beating of the Grave commences. On the words pronounced by the demon cf. *Massekhet ḥibbuṭ ha-qever*: "When somebody dies, the Angel of Death comes from the other world, sits on the grave, and hits the deceased with his hand and says to him: 'Awaken and tell me thy name!' Answers [the deceased]: 'I guarantee and acknowledge before God that I do not know what my name is!' Thus, his soul and spirit promptly go back into his body, and the deceased undergoes judgment and is found guilty" (Jellinek, ed. *Bet ha-Midrasch*, 1:150; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 45ʳ).

[74] Cf. Jud. 11:12.

[75] One more stroke of black humour at the expenses of the wretched protagonist, who obviously does not know that the strange creature standing in front of him is indeed a devil. My translation follows the interpretation that Basilea provides in his commentary: "'From a devils' den,' on the basis of Isa. 11:8, [where it reads] *from a basilisks' den*" (*Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 7ʳ).

[76] Cf. Obad. 1:3.

[77] As will be made clear further on in the poem, the demons in charge of inflicting the Beating of the Grave upon the dead are not just instruments of human beings' punishment in the afterlife, but are also the cause of humans' sinful tendencies while on earth, for they identify with the evil instinct. The notion according to which human beings are preparing themselves a place in hell by sinning while still on earth is the underlying concept that sustains Zacuto's entire poem, on which see Chapter 2.

[LVI:276–280]
You? What among the wild beasts[78] would equal
Or compare with what you have done?
Your name you hide to disguise who you are,
And only brandish at me a flashing blade.[79]
What makes your power great and your force increase? *[The demon:]* Ensnaring![80]

[LVII:281–285]
Search south, north, west, and east,
A tyrant who speaks thus could not be found!
I find myself here (I do not know how);
My heart wastes away like a snail does on its trail.[81]
When did you assign me to be trodden under your foot?[82] *[The demon:]* Last night!

[LVIII:286–290]
Make your speech straightforward and true:
Is it you who wrecked me, yesterday,
Cramming my mouth with gall and wormwood,[83]
So that my flesh began wasting away,[84]
So that now I am turning into dung for the earth? *[The demon:]* Indeed!

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[78] Literally, 'wolves of the steppe' or wolves of the evening,' based on Zeph. 3:3. Zacuto again resorts to irony: the same expression will be used, later in the poem, to indicate the demons inhabiting the compartments of hell. See below, v. 439 and v. 839.

[79] Cf. Deut. 32:41. On the sword (sometimes a knife) as one of the traditional attributes of the Angel of Death, see above, n. 10.

[80] Setting snares for human beings to entice them into sinning, thus eventually causing their damnation in the afterlife, increases the power of the evil instinct. In kabbalistic terms, sin feeds and fortifies the evil forces that populate the Other Side. On this, see also Chapter 2.

[81] Cf. Ps. 58:9. A common feature of early modern still-life painting, particularly Flemish, snails and slugs held a special place in the baroque imagination because the silvery trail that they characteristically leave behind was constructed as a symbol of physical and emotional consumption.

[82] Cf. *Bereshit rabbah* 21:1, where the action of trampling is a characteristic of the Angel of Death.

[83] Cf. Lam. 3:15. The text is again alluding to the bitter drops trickling from the sword of the Angel of Death, to which the dead protagonist already referred, albeit obliviously, when describing his illness. The awareness of his real situation is now slowly dawning in him.

[84] Literally, 'until my flesh is scarce of fat.' Cf. Ps. 109:24; Is. 17:4.

[LIX:291–295]
If so, make my soul your servant.[85]
Look! She is devoted to you as a slave,
She will do your bidding and never stray.
But were you to command that I redeem her,
Where and when, pray, should I pay my ransom? *[The demon:]* Hither!

[LX:296–300]
If so, be so gracious to stand forth!
Why, sir, are you so enraged?
The amount of my ransom will appease your wrath,
For in my land, I hold a large property,
And the value and worth of my possessions is great. *[The demon:]* Give!

[LXI:301–305]
Please deliver me from suffering and pain,
And take sumptuous palaces and splendid mansions,
Homes full of immeasurable goods,
Fields, vineyards, and a country estate,
Such as are not to be found in the entire land! *[The demon:]* Vanity!

[LXII:306–310]
I pray you, accept my offering like Abel's,[86]
Take the first-born of my herds and their fat,[87]
And all that my cattle yield as well,
Exquisite oil and wine jars,
Even male and female singers[88] with harp and drums![89] *[The demon:]* Misery!

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[85] Literally, 'over my soul your hand will rule.' The expression is ironic since the protagonist's plea is uttered while the demon is inflicting the Beating of the Grave on him and hitting him with his rod.

[86] With reference to the story narrated in Gen. 4:1–16, according to which Abel offered God the firstborn of his flock and its fat, while his brother Cain brought the fruit of the soil. Zacuto keeps inserting biblical allusions to death into the text: God's preference for Abel's offer drove Cain to kill his brother.

[87] Cf. Gen. 4:4.

[88] Cf. Eccles. 2:8.

[89] The leap of logic that marks the transition from v. 309 to v. 310 is less apparent in the original, since the text revolves around a pun on the different denotations of the Hebrew word

[LXIII:311–315]
Should you wish to visit my home,
There you would find treasures[90] of opulent splendour:
Iron, copper, even tin and lead,[91]
Silver, Ofir's gold[92] in which every district delights,
The seven golds,[93] and coffers befitting a king! *[The demon:]* Transient things!

[LXIV:316–320]
Take all the stones listed in the Book:[94]
Turquoise and sapphire, diamond, emerald,
Opal and amethyst, the shiny agate,
Mother-of-pearl and onyx, jasper of copious splendour,[95]
Ruby and the Nubian topaz,[96] and ravishing treasures! *[The demon:]* Ashes!

[LXV:321–325]
Dear me! Then do pay heed to Cain's offering,[97]
The dainty fruit of all the trees that I planted,
The comely sprouts of the fields that I sowed,
Must and oil, honey mead and wine,
If you will not accept precious things. *[The demon:]* No!

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nevel, meaning 'jar,' 'pitcher,' but also 'harp,' 'lyre'. The passage conveys well, though, the despair of the protagonist who begins to be at loss in his attempts to bribe the demon in exchange for his life, thus coming up with impromptu proposals, some of them manifestly incongruous.

[90] Cf. Esther 1:4.

[91] Cf. Ezek. 27:12.

[92] An unidentified region, Ofir is mentioned in various places in the Bible as famous for the fine gold and luxury goods produced there.

[93] With reference to the seven different kinds of gold that, according to the Talmud, are mentioned in the Bible. See TB *Yoma*, fols. 44^{v}–45^{r}.

[94] The book in question is the Bible, with reference to the list of the different precious stones set in the sacerdotal breastplate according to Exod. 28:17–20 ff. and 39:10–13 ff. The biblical list is here referred to in full.

[95] My translation is based on Basilea's explanation of the Hebrew expression *hod yefer*: "That is, whose beauty grows and whose value increases according to the [biblical] verse: *He made* (wa-yyefer) *his people very fruitful* (Ps. 105:24)" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 8^{r}).

[96] Cf. Job 28:19.

[97] See above, n. 86.

[LXVI:326–330]
If all riches you deem mire and mud,[98]
What shall I offer that might please you?
Or what is the ransom and price you demand from me?
What should I do to regain my peace?
What should I find? For carefully I will seek! *[The demon:]* Nothing!

[LXVII:331–335]
Well, there is no tribunal, nor judge or magistrate
Who is as stern as you are: yours is a stony heart.
Indeed, you deem everything straw and stubble.
I know not what might suit you,
Or what you deem worth calling riches. *[The demon:]* Happiness![99]

[LXVIII:336–340]
I am weary of dealing with the echo of your voice,
For it hides itself shrouded in allusions:
Your soul is sealed in inscrutable mystery.
You speak in riddles that my mind cannot decipher;[100]
What your words allude to, I cannot tell.

[LXIX:341–345]
Do not hide your secret just to stir wonder.
Unriddle your words and tell me: who are you?
What is this abyss in which I now find myself?
Is this the netherworld, or a dungeon cell?[101]
Speak and tell me: what are these burning pyres?

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[98] Cf. Isa. 57:20.

[99] In his marginal commentary Basilea explains this verse as follows: "With his answer, the demon intends to say that what he calls 'happiness' are good deeds" (*Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 8ʳ). Zacuto's play on words (*ʿosher*, meaning 'wealth, riches,' and *osher*, meaning 'felicity, happiness,' are homophones in Hebrew) probably alludes to afterlife bliss and, by extension, to the conduct one needs to observe in life to achieve it. See Bregman, "Dimness and Clarity," 46, n. 30.

[100] Literally, 'and my heart will not come near to you,' based on Ps. 32:9.

[101] While probably alluding once more to the narrowness of the grave, the image of the dungeon also evokes the idea of the afterlife as a torture chamber, a hectic, chaotic, and acoustically deadly workshop of pain in which the demons are the indefatigable workers, as the Beating of the Grave already shows.

The demon's reply:

[LXX:346–350]
Man, born of woman, whose sight is dimmed!
The days of your mourning have come near.
Awake from your sleep and vain dreaming!
Do you still nourish your foolish hope
And dare rebel, when your power is naught?

[LXXI:351–355]
How long did your heart desire[102] to live,
And by what means? Did you earnestly believe that
You were nestled in the abode of seraphs?
Or that your shoot would stay green forever,
After you had cast the Lord behind your back?[103]

[LXXII:356–360]
O heartless rebel,[104] don't you see
Those younger than you perish and die?
The old and hoary like you also meet their end.
How can you imagine being spared, you fool,
When you impiously neglected your God?

[LXXIII:361–365]
Stand up! Prepare yourself to be judged and face your shame.
What makes you trust in the length of your life?
You yourself set the net into which you have fallen:
Terror and the trap of a pit[105] are the outcome of your vast iniquity,
Since there is no end to your impiety.

[LXXIV:366–370]
Hark, stony-hearted man![106] Don't you know that
You are consigned into the hands of death?

[102] Cf. Job 15:12.

[103] Cf. 1 Kings 14:9.

[104] Cf. Isa. 57:17.

[105] Cf. Isa. 24:17 and Jer. 48:44.

[106] Cf. Ez. 11:19 and 36:26.

Your proud heart will grieve in hell,[107]
Trodden upon in loathing and shame, you sink into mire;[108]
Despised, you submit to decay and to being consumed.

[LXXV:371–375]
From the hearth-stone[109] to the gravestone you are cast[110]
And fear has become your new home.
Your bed is reckoned the cause of your demise.[111]
From glow to gloom you are dragged,
From peak[112] to calamity you are led.

[LXXVI:376–380]
Your heart kindled the blaze that scorches you,[113]
Your hope was your folly,
Your lust has made your ruin greater,
Your repose is now a storm of sighs,
Your rebellion has aroused your sorrow.

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[107] Literally, 'in the valley of the shadow of death,' based on Ps. 23:4. See above, v. 78. The verse contains a play on words based on the homographs *ge* (proud) and *ge* (valley).

[108] Cf. Jer. 38:22.

[109] Literally, 'from your midst.'

[110] Cf. Isa. 14:19. Here begins the long central section containing the demon's indictment against the dead protagonist. The pomp, debauchery, and crimes that marked the deceased's earthly life are here contrasted with the punishments and torments that are now being inflicted on him as the Beating of the Grave unfolds and progresses. Each sin committed *yesterday* is met by retribution *today*. On content and formal features of this section, see Chapters 1 and 3.

[111] In his explicatory apparatus, Basilea inserts an allusion to supposed crimes of a sexual nature: "And the bed on which you used to lie is now deemed the cause of your death, perhaps in view of the abominations that you committed on it" (*Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 9^{r}).

[112] Literally, 'rock.'

[113] The verse alludes to the identification of the fire in Gehenna with the flame, fuelled by the evil instinct, of the human passion for sin. Cf. *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 46$^{r\text{-}v}$, where this identification is illustrated by referring to a passage from the *Zohar*: "In *Zohar* [2:fol. 150^{v}] the question is explained by stating that the fire of hell would not be burning were it not for the wicked who warm themselves by the flame of their instinct, as follows: 'Thus spoke Rabbi Judah: As for the judgement that the wicked is subjected to in hell, we know it is to punish their sins. But why by fire, if not because hell, which is fire burning day and night, is like the wicked who warm themselves by the flame of their instinct, by transgressing what is written in the Law? In fact, the more they fan the evil instinct, the more the fire in hell blazes. [...] In truth, hell is on fire only because of the strength of the passions and evil inclination of those who sin'."

[LXXVII:381–385]
Worms, instead of purple, are the garment that covers you,[114]
A verdict, instead of the fine gold that you coveted,
Oppression, instead of the trade that you did in the market,[115]
Ashes, instead of the fat that covered you,
Dearth, instead of your portion of glory.

[LXXVIII:386–390]
Tar rather than camphor will be your ransom,[116]
Grief and idle vanity,[117] as vain as Abel's life,[118]
Ensnarement and pain will be your only lot.
Black rather than bright will be the light of your dawn,
Ruin rather than grain will be your only hope.[119]

[LXXIX:391–395]
From coffers, to the coffin you are confined,[120]
From dignity, you flee like a startled deer,[121]
From freedom, you drift on swallow's wings.
From bequests, to blows[122] you are consigned,
From dignity, to affliction you are dragged.

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[114] Cf. Solomon ibn Gabirol, *Keter malkhut*, 37:27: "And he shall remove his broidery and his scarlet / And clothe himself in worms and maggots." Cf. also Is. 14:11.

[115] In the original, Zacuto uses the word *'esheq*—a hapax and the name of a person in the Bible—as a synonym of *'osheq* (oppression, distress; robbery, extortion). This enables him to create a pun with *'eseq* (trade), while simultaneously alluding to the rapacious character of the protagonist's earthly activities.

[116] The verse is constructed on a series of puns revolving around the different denotations of the Hebrew word *kofer*, meaning 'pitch,' 'tar,' but also 'camphor,' as well as 'ransom,' 'indemnity'.

[117] Cf. Isa. 30:7.

[118] See above, v. 99 and v. 306.

[119] This verse contains a play on words based on the assonance between *shever* (ruin, calamity; grain, food) and *śever* (hope; expectation).

[120] Literally, 'from gold to locker you have been confined,' with a play on words based on the double meaning of the Hebrew *segor* (pure gold; fastener, locker) and the verb *sagar* (to close, shut, lock up).

[121] The verse revolves around a play on words based on the multiple connotations of the Hebrew word *tzevi*, meaning 'splendour,' 'glory,' 'dignity,' but also 'gazelle,' 'deer'.

[122] Cf. Jer. 14:17.

[LXXX:396–400]
From silk into a hole,[123] from cleanness into a pit you have sunk,
From riches to sorrows, from nectar to the reed and thorn-bush,
From a throne to the headstone,[124] from splendour to squalor,[125]
From songs to pangs, to thorns and to a steaming cauldron,[126]
From carnal company to scourging oppression you scurry.[127]

[LXXXI:401–405]
The cloud of your infamy has obscured the sun: like vapour,
The echo of your voice rises, exuding depravity.[128]
Your embittered rebellion makes the decree harsher;
Amidst embers, you are trampled over like a reptile.
Gaze at your present plight, for it proves who you were yesterday.

[LXXXII:406–410]
Yesterday, you gathered every good in excess,[129]

[123] Basilea's marginal commentary on this verse reads: 'That is, to the place inhabited by the demons' (*Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 10^{r}).

[124] Literally, 'end.'

[125] Literally, 'to the projection in a house [wall].' Zacuto is making a pun on the two meanings of the word *ziz*, which in biblical Hebrew means 'splendour,' while in rabbinical literature it also acquires the meaning of 'projection (in a wall).' Zacuto is probably alluding to the discussion included in the Mishnah on the application of rules governing impurity to projecting architectural elements, according to which "a projection brings uncleanness, whatever width it may be" (M *Oholot* 14:1–2).

[126] Cf. Jer. 1:13. In his commentary, Basilea explains this image as follows: "This being the steaming cauldron in which the wicked are being boiled" (*Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 9^{v}).

[127] Literally, 'from breast and company to oppression and the scourge,' with reference to the Beating of the Grave that the demon is inflicting upon the protagonist. In his commentary, Basilea explains the meaning of the Hebrew *mi-shod*, with which the verse opens, as follows: "*Mi-shod*, meaning 'breast,' like in [*That thou may suck, and be satisfied*] *with the breasts* [mi-shod] *of her consolations* (Is. 66:11)" (*Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 9^{v}). Although Basilea does not mention it, his explication depends on David Kimhi's commentary on the same passage from Isaiah: "*That thou may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts* [mi-shod] *of her consolations* (Is. 66:11): *mi-shod*, like in *Thou shalt suckle at royal breasts* (Is. 60:16), and its meaning is the same as in *shad* [breast], figuratively indicating 'delight'."

[128] In his commentary, Basilea adds to Zacuto's convoluted image an explanation that draws directly on the natural sciences: "The poet [...] compares the abjection of the protagonist to the mist of vapour that rises from the earth and turns into a cloud, from which rain will then fall in drops" (*Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 10^{r}).

[129] Cf. Exod. 26:12.

In your high tower you rested in joy.
Today, your skin is suddenly wrinkled,[130]
Your flesh and clothes reek with a foul smell,
And in your anguish, you howl against those who deceived you.

[LXXXIII:411–415]
Yesterday, amidst the pleasures you were accustomed to,
You donned garments studded with diamonds.
Today, the pain of blows benumbs you.
Here, dispossessed of the granaries that you amassed,
Your fine garment is scorched by the fire you yourself set.[131]

[LXXXIV:416–420]
Yesterday, there were profits and vigorous strength.
For you, all beauties were displayed and ornaments arrayed.
Today, you are taken captive and deprived of all glory;
Indeed, here you are a buck stripped of its antler.
The ray of light blackens, too, on your path.[132]

[LXXXV:421–425]
Yesterday, with the brashness of a whelp you amassed monies,
You exercised your power over all the merchants and traders.
Today, furious quarrels abound for you;
Your abode is among the unclean beasts,[133]
And, seized by fear, you shed tears.[134]

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[130] Cf. Job 7:5.

[131] In his commentary, Basilea expands as follows: "Your vest of fine linen is now scorched by the fire of hell, which you yourself set with your crimes" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 10^{v}). The identification between the fire of hell and the flame of sinful passions is reiterated in various places in the poem. See above, n. 113.

[132] The entire strophe is constructed around the polysemy of the Hebrew word *qeren*, meaning 'horn,' 'ray,' but also 'fund,' 'capital,' 'wealth' and 'strength'. At v. 419, for metrical reasons and possibly under the influence of Italian or Spanish, Zacuto treats the word *qeren*, which is feminine in Hebrew, as masculine. The same treatment is also attested at v. 159.

[133] That is, among the animals whose consumption or handling is forbidden by the Jewish law.

[134] Cf. Lam. 3:49.

[LXXXVI:426–430]
Yesterday, for your own delight you were prodigally grand,
Immoderately squandering money and possessions.
Today, you greatly fear the abundance of blows.
You shut your eyes and no longer crave;
Rather, you bitterly scream and cry.

[LXXXVII:431–435]
Yesterday, you entrusted your riches to your favoured broker:
Your mind revolved around him like a door on its hinges.[135]
Today, sorrows besiege you like arrows and waving swords;
Your money bag[136] gives you might and strength no more,
For only pebbles are left as you burst into wails of pain.

[LXXXVIII:436–440]
Yesterday, like a pharaoh[137] or a king of Arabia,
You revelled in bawdy songs[138] exciting harlotry.
Today, your mirth and gaiety are waning;
Nocturnal wolves[139] now collect on your debts,
And so do the crows that lurk at dusk.

[LXXXIX:441–445]
Yesterday, shrouded in valour, your cunning
Designs propagated their splendour.
Today, bare and stripped of their mantle,
They are covered with heaps of mud, wind, and fire,
Below, above, and on all sides.[140]

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[135] Cf. Prov. 26:14.

[136] Cf. Prov. 7:20.

[137] Literally, 'like the Egyptians.'

[138] Cf. Ezek. 33:32.

[139] Cf. Zeph. 3:3 and Hab. 1:8. Both the wolves and the crows, mentioned in the following verse, are metaphors for the tormenting demons.

[140] The reference to the four elements—mud is a combination of earth and water, and wind also stands for the element of air—and to the four directions alludes to a passage in the *Zohar*: "On that terrible and cruel day when the time has come for the man to leave this world, the four winds undergo a harsh judgement and they rise, quarrelsome, from the four corners of the world, and the four elements also quarrel among themselves and fight against each other, each of them eager to part company" (*Zohar*, 1:fol. 218^{v}).

[XC:446–450]
Yesterday, there were wine flasks and wheat measures,
Your mind was fixed on your cup of must.
Today, yours is the lot of the tawny owl:
Trapped in the net of the material world, you are scorched,[141]
And like a beast[142] you fall into the mire.

[XCI:451–455]
Yesterday, in majesty you resembled a cedar tree,
Respected in the land as a leader for your distinctions.
Today, filled with poison, you bitterly cry;
Utterly dejected, you bow down and perish.
You talk no more; rather, you are silent.

[XCII:456–460]
Yesterday, monies and properties were ample,
As were their shrewd charms and incantations.
Today, wrath[143] is here like a swarm of snakes
Hurling darts inside your bones:
They are many, for many are your faults![144]

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[141] That is, of the senses and the sensible world. In his commentary, Basilea explains the meaning of vv. 448–449, as follows: "Today your fate is similar to that of a bird of the wilderness that cries out incessantly, as you heated yourself at the flame of the evil inclination and have become soiled in the net of your corporeity" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 11^{v}). It is worth mentioning the special place held by owls in the early modern imagination as a long-standing symbol of wisdom and prophecy (often ominous) and, at the same time, as pitiable. The latter attribute is related to the fact that they are often attacked by groups of other, usually smaller, birds. The representation of the owl being mobbed by other birds had special currency in contemporary emblematic literature as a symbol of the ability to bear ill-treatment with patience.

[142] Literally, 'like roebuck or donkey.' Vv. 449–450 are constructed on the polysemous value of the root *ḥ.m.r.* (to become strict, aggravate; burn) in combination with words bearing an assonance with it, such as *ḥomer* (matter, material; clay; severity, strictness), *ḥamor* (donkey), and *yaḥmur* (roebuck).

[143] In Hebrew, *qetzef*, which is also the name of one of the angels of destruction mentioned in rabbinical literature. See TB *Shabbat*, fol. 55^{r}.

[144] In his commentary, Basilea explains this strophe as follows: "Yesterday, you owned monies and possessions (which are like spells that bewitch men, thus inducing them to do what they should not do), while today, you own nothing but the rage and fury of demons who are gnawing at you like snakes, while your many crimes, which have accumulated as much as your riches, are now like darts hurled into your bones" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 12^{r}).

[XCIII:461–465]
Yesterday, you walked with stately stride,
Known for ruling over your brethren with authority.
Today, amidst the flames, you trudge nameless
In a furrow[145] towards piles of dung, now suffering
From the hissing arrow[146] and the pounding hammer.[147]

[XCIV:466–470]
Yesterday, you treated with contempt the poor
Who cried like a nurseling while you sang.
Today, your breath[148] is as fetid as the snort of a beast;[149]
This is the fruit of your evil deeds,
These are the best vine-shoots you harvest.

[XCV:471–475]
Yesterday, the sprouts of your pride spread about,
The land was too confined for you and your harvest.
Today, you reap your fruits and crops;
This is the abject abode that you have made for yourself,
Despised in the eyes of the people that you forsook.

[XCVI:476–480]
Yesterday, you hastened to comb town and region
To find what you craved and eagerly pursued.
Today, you squirm and struggle in the fire that you set;[150]

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[145] An allusion to the grave.

[146] Literally, 'quiver.'

[147] Cf. Is. 41:7.

[148] In his commentary, Basilea explains the meaning of the Hebrew *zemorah* in the following terms: "This being the emission of air from the bottom, on the basis of the verse: *And thrust the branch to their nostrils* [*as a sign of spite*] (Ez. 8:17)" (*Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 12ʳ). This entire strophe is constructed on the multiple semantic connotations of the root *z.m.r.*, meaning 'to trim,' 'prune,' but also 'to sing,' 'praise') in combination with a constellation of related terms.

[149] Cf. Deut. 14:5. Although the exact identification is dubious, the term *zemer* used in the original likely indicates one of the ruminant animals having cloven hooves whose consumption is permitted by Jewish dietary laws.

[150] See above, n. 113.

Your hope is like a tangled skein,[151]
You wander with no prop or crutch.

[XCVII:481–485]
Yesterday, to the sound of the ten-stringed harp and the lyre[152]
Your laughter rose to reach the sky.
Today, your mouth is full of gall and dust;
You shed tears like the cloud drops rain.
Your name is tarnished like a cracked jug.[153]

[XCVIII:486–490]
Yesterday, you spread your wings like a hawk or vulture,
Princes and knights uttered your name.
Today, devils gnaw at you like the adder;[154]
With their hooves they crush you as is done at the graveyard,
And your abode is a place of ruin, shame, and filth.[155]

[XCIX:491–495]
Yesterday, sadness fled from you, and only
Evil and trivial thoughts did your mind consider.
Today, God's anger commands your oppressors[156]
To smash you with matching justice: "Hit and strike!"
No ransom worthy of a brother or friend[157] shall be paid.

[C:496–500]
Yesterday, you were appointed to lead a nation

[151] That is to say, none. Zacuto makes a pun based on the two meanings of the Hebrew word *tikwah*, that is 'hope' and 'thread.'

[152] Cf. Ps. 92:4.

[153] Cf. Isa. 30:14.

[154] Cf. Prov. 23:32 and Lev. Rabbah 12:1.

[155] Basilea's explication of vv. 488–490 reads as follows: "Today, devils are biting you like snakes and trample on you with their hooves. [You are] like the field in which the furrow of a tomb is being ploughed: all your bones are smashed, while your home is ruined, loathed, and filthy" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 13^{r}).

[156] An allusion to the tormenting demons. My translation is based on Basilea's marginal glossary: "*Ro'ekha*, that is your destroyers, on the basis of *Like a broken tooth* [shen ro'ah] *and an unsteady leg* (Pr. 25:19)" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 13^{r}).

[157] Cf. Ps. 35:14.

On which you imposed your orders like a prince or sultan.
Today, you are assigned to the enemy[158] and the grave;
Plucked from amidst the great[159] and mighty,
You are placed among the shades of the rebellious.

[CI:501–505]
Yesterday, your cloud was destined for the loftiest sky:
Wicked, you seized plunder[160] and donned looted finery.[161]
Today, in pain you arrive in the hollow of hell;
Wrapped in rags[162] on the day of your calamity,
As evidence against you, they will bring the racket of your cries.

[CII:506–510]
Yesterday, in your old age as in your youth,
Your soul was betrothed to the riches for which you scrabbled.
Today, gazing at your disgrace, you are ashamed;
The belligerent host[163] of your abusers nears with a rumble:
At the end of your summer, winter is coming.

[CIII:511–515]
Yesterday, you yearned to live and be bequeathed
The inheritance of your dead relatives.
Today, vilified in your death, you are put to shame,
For you have been banished here; deprived
Of all your riches, you have been dispossessed.

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[158] That is, the tormenting demons.

[159] In the original, *refa'im*, with reference to the mythical population of extinct giants, the Rephaim, mentioned in Deut. 2:11. The alternate meaning of this term, also attested in the Bible, is 'shadows of the dead' or 'dwellers of the underworld' (see Is. 26:14 and Pro. 21:16) which Zacuto uses in the following verse to create a pun.

[160] Cf. Is. 10:6 and Ez. 38:12. The entire strophe consists of a string of wordplays based on similar sounding words: *ed* (vapour, mist; misfortune, calamity), *ʿad* (until; booty, spoil), *ʿed* (witness; rag) and *hed* (echo).

[161] Cf. Ezek. 23:40.

[162] In his apparatus, Basilea provides the following explication: "Today, in your sufferings you go to the grave wrapped in tattered clothes (these being the crimes you committed [in life]) on the day of your ruin" (*Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 13^{v}).

[163] That is, the tormenting demons.

[CIV:516–520]
Yesterday, like a miser you clung to your chattels,
And in borrowing from your brother, you abstained from courtesies.
Today, the grave (O me!) is your share;
The blaze of your passions burns in your heart,
At the end of your days, you are consumed in hell.[164]

[CV:521–525]
Yesterday, as creator rather than creature,
You shook off the yoke of the Lord.
Today, you roar like a lion against your lot,
As passion incites your heart to be proud:
Indeed, that is the foe your soul faces![165]

[CVI:526–530]
Yesterday, like a foreigner your mouth uttered
Obscenities[166] and your lips pronounced lewd speech.
Today, the Lord's wrath destroys you;
Trapped in snares, your soul is disheartened,[167]
And your mouth groans from such great pain.

[CVII:531–535]
Yesterday, the constellations of heaven twinkled at you,
Lucifer and the Great Bear favoured your deeds.
Today, like a moth you have gnawed away at your spirit,
Abundance has dissolved like a cloud dropping rain,
And your buds wither as does arugula.

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[164] Literally, 'at the furthest limit.' My translation is based on Basilea's interpretation of this verse: "Today, [...] you die and are lost at the end of your days, or, in other words, in Gehenna, which is at the end of the world" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 14[r]).

[165] In other words, the demon in charge for the Beating of the Grave is the embodiment of the deceased's evil inclination. On this concept, often reiterated in *Tofteh 'arukh*, see above, Chapter 1.

[166] In his commentary, Basilea thus glosses: "That is to say, yesterday, your mouth uttered obscenities as if you were a gentile" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 14[r]).

[167] Cf. Num. Rabbah 20:20.

[CVIII:536–540]
Yesterday, to consolidate your wealth you purchased
The finest mansions and abodes[168] of your liking.
Today, like grass or flowers,[169] under your own scythe
You fall into the pit that you dug for yourself;
There you will serve as soil and food for worms.

[CIX:541–545]
Yesterday, your name was exalted and you were revered,
Your cronies kissed your mouth and hand.
Today, bellicose foes[170] are up in arms:
The flaming blades of their swords scald you;
Poisonous waters engulf and submerge you.

[CX:546–550]
Yesterday, your buds were in perpetual bloom,
And you rose above all your peers.
Today, you are brought down to the depths of poverty;
You sink under a mound and a heap of rubble,[171] while your
Belligerent adversaries grow like birds of prey.[172]

[CXI:551–555]
Yesterday, with careless spirit you lived in peace,
Immune from the accidents of fortune and fate.
Today, loathed, you are shamefully defiled.
You regret the many days in which you grew old;
You return as empty of merits as you are full of crimes.

[CXII:556–560]
Yesterday, your name travelled near and far,
People sought from you the produce of your land,

[168] Literally, 'courts.' My translation is based on Basilea's explication: "The term *ḥatzir* is here used with the meaning of *ḥatzer* (court; courtyard) on the basis of the [biblical] verse: *An abode* [ḥatzir] *of ostriches* (Is. 34:13)" (*Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 14^{v}).

[169] Cf. Isa. 40:7–8.

[170] These being the tormenting demons.

[171] Cf. 2 Kings 19:25 and Isa. 37:26. The text alludes to the grave.

[172] One more metaphor for the tormenting demons.

Your oxen were prolific,[173] as was the fruit of your bed.
Today, the stout-hearted one who flew like an eagle[174] plummets
On the day of wrath,[175] his rendered limbs falling one by one.[176]

[CXIII:561–565]
Yesterday, with tangles of falsehoods[177] and petty
Arguments, you diminished all your crimes
While defiling your soul with scandal.
Today, the demons that keep the gate
Are the rulers[178] who put you in a tumult of terror.

[CXIV:566–570]
Yesterday, as a man armed for war[179] and mighty in power[180]
You were the first to vigorously gird your loins:
As a victor and master,[181] pleasures made you stronger.
Today, stripped of all wealth and shackled,
You are as weak and weary as a lizard.[182]

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[173] Cf. Job 21:10.

[174] Cf. Isa. 40:31.

[175] Cf. Zeph. 1:15 and Prov. 11:4.

[176] An allusion to the ritual of the Beating of the Grave as described in *Massekhet ḥibbuṭ ha-qever*. See above, Chapter 2.

[177] Literally, 'strings of falsehood,' on the basis of Is. 5:18.

[178] Literally, 'youngsters.' In his commentary, Basilea explains Zacuto's choice of word as follows: "The term *tze'irim* means 'rulers,' and this is how [*Targum*] *Jonathan* translates the [biblical] verse: *Her young ones [tze'ureha] cry aloud* (Jer. 48:4)" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 15^{r}). This is one of the instances in which Basilea's interpretation draws upon the commentary *ad locum* of David Kimhi, although without acknowledging it. Indeed, Kimhi's explication of the biblical passage reads as follows: "*Tze'ureha*: It is written with a *waw*, but it needs to be read [as if it were written] with *yod*, which is what does *Targum Jonathan*. And it is possible that the text is calling the powerful 'young' as a pejorative."

[179] Cf. Num. 32:27.

[180] Cf. Is. 40:26 and Job 9:4.

[181] Cf. Isa. 14:12.

[182] This stanza is constructed on the multiple semantic connotations of the Hebrew *koaḥ*, meaning 'power,' 'strength,' but also 'wealth,' 'lizard') and the assonance of this term with the homophone *qoaḥ* (shackle). Beyond the constraints set by the prosodic pattern and Zacuto's specific treatment of language, the image of the lizard—a reptile and, like all reptiles and

[CXV:571–575]
Yesterday, you eschewed the fields of mercy[183]
And did not lend to the pauper for love of kindness;[184]
Rather, you met him with the vilest abuses.
Today, as the fruit that you ripened has withered,[185]
You reap your harvest and are shamed.

[CXVI:576–580]
Yesterday, you succeeded in raising your renown to glory:
With a wreath on your head, you flew on bird's wings,
As blissful as a blossom on the mountaintop.
Today, you are as bereft of your fruit as the trees in the desert,
For you have done foolishly[186] in provoking hostility.[187]

[CXVII:581–585]
Yesterday, you ruled like the proud and lofty,
People bowed to you, and to you they entreated.
Today, you are scorched by burning flames.
Yesterday, you sang at the 'vineyard meadow,'
Today, you contemplate the 'destruction meadow.'[188]

[CXVIII:586–590]
Yesterday, your loins were bulging with fat,[189]
Like a prince or lord, you added to your corpulence.

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amphibians, considered filthy and slimy—alludes to the state of abject bestiality to which sin has degraded the dead protagonist.

[183] That is, charity.

[184] Cf. Mich. 6:8.

[185] Meaning that death has demonstrated the senselessness and worthlessness of the protagonist's egotistical life.

[186] Cf. Gen. 31:28.

[187] In his commentary, Basilea explains this verse as follows: "Because you were so unwise to commit evil deeds, as an enemy of the Lord" (*Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 15^{v}).

[188] 'Vineyard meadow' (*avel keramim*, in Hebrew) is the name of an Ammonite village referred to in Judg. 11:33. The rhyming 'destruction meadow' (*avel ḥaramim*) is Zacuto's own invention. As Basilea notes in his marginal commentary, the alternate meaning of *avel*, i.e., 'mourner; lamenter,' transforms the play on words into an allusion to the fate of the ruined protagonist.

[189] Cf. Job 15:27.

Today, in your thinness, all strength is gone.
Yesterday, you harboured all kinds of unwise hopes,
Today, you are left with only a fistful of sand.[190]

[CXIX:591–595]
Yesterday, on the city walls you were anointed
As a leader, acknowledged by the ranks of your people.
Today, unmanned by pain, you are familiar with suffering.[191]
Yesterday, you offered libations from wine-skins,
Today, you weave yourself a garment made of spider's poison.[192]

[CXX:596–600]
Yesterday, like a jurist or legislator,[193]
You deemed yourself an accomplished teacher.
Today, like a defiant son,[194] you are met with wrath.
Yesterday, you vigorously shot the arrow from the string,[195]
Today, in your bitter plight,[196] nothing has been left.

[CXXI:601–605]
Yesterday, you let pleasure tempt you,
Content, you sat in the shade of your thresholds.

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[190] Literally, 'your confidence is wrecked, and you are covered by sand.' The strophe revolves on a series of puns based on the polysemic value of the Hebrew term *kesel*, meaning 'folly,' 'foolishness, but also 'loin,' 'flank,' and 'hope,' 'confidence').

[191] Cf. Isa. 53:3.

[192] Cf. Ps. 140:4. This stanza is constructed on the assonances between the Hebrew *ḥeil* (strength, courage) and *ḥoli* (illness, suffering), and between *ḥomah* (wall), *ḥemet* (skin-bottle; water-skin; goatskin), and *ḥemah* (anger; poison). Ḥemah is also the name of one of the demons that inhabit hell, to which Zacuto refers at v. 751.

[193] Literally, 'like Jethro's advice.' The text is referring to Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, who, according to Ex. 18:13–27 and Deut. 1:12–17, advised him to appoint magistrates who would flank him in the administration of the law. Both Jewish and Christian Bible commentators as well as political thinkers of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance referred to these passages in their discussions of the political system of the ancient Jewish state, thus contributing to the establishment of the traditional view of Jethro as the prototypical statesman. See Melamed, "Jethro's Advice."

[194] Cf. Deut. 21:18 and 21:20.

[195] Cf. Ps. 11:2.

[196] Cf. 2 Kings 14:26.

Today, poisonous bitterness fills your cup.
Yesterday, you hovered on clouds of lust,
Today, a blazing fire scorches you.[197]

[CXXII:606–610]
Yesterday, to hook the poor among the people[198]
Like fish with bait, your words were false and vain.
Today, you are stricken in thorny traps.
Yesterday, you oppressed the indigent in their misery,
Today, subjected, you cry and wail.

[CXXIII:611–615]
Yesterday, with mocking blather and tales
Your insincere flattery was as unctuous as oil.
Today, the clods of the earth are the hut that covers you.
Yesterday, your branches stretched wide,
Today, you are alone and clad in a shroud.

[CXXIV:616–620]
Yesterday, you frightened the hearts of thousands,
For you lent to them at interest on a pledge.
Today, you are forgotten like water under the bridge.
Yesterday, you led a company of the mighty,
Today, you are like a beast, a brute, or a bull.

[CXXV:621–625]
Yesterday, your waves billowed to the vault of heaven,
Today, like a blade of straw, you wander, exiled.
Yesterday, you flaunted a crown of precious stones,
The tiles of your fountains increased your joy and delight.
Today, your only companion[199] is a pile of ruins.

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[197] With reference to the fire of hell. My translation follows Basilea's interpretation of this verse: "And the third [occurrence of *niśśeʾta*] means 'you are burnt' based on *The Philistines abandoned their idols there, and David and his men burned them* [wa-yiśśaʾem] (2 Sam. 5:21)." In this case, too, Basilea's interpretation follows Kimhi's commentary *ad locum.*

[198] Cf. Ps. 72:4.

[199] Literally, 'coeval, peer.' Cf. TB *Megillah*, fol. 11ʳ.

[CXXVI:626–630]
Yesterday, Orion, the Pleiades[200] and the sun zealously
Bestowed their light upon you at your will.
Today, they are in a hurry to cast you in darkness.
Today, you are as silent as the deaf-mute,
Today, you are reckoned as worthy as a potsherd.[201]

[CXXVII:631–635]
Yesterday, you spurned earnest moral advice[202]
And rebelliously deserted all the paths of justice.
Today, you stink[203] with the stench of your deeds.
Today, heaven reveals your past sins,
Today, you settle the debt that you contracted.

[CXXVIII:636–640]
Yesterday, the foundations of your home were laid[204]
In mighty rock, as durable as iron.[205]
Today, you are shut inside an everlasting stone.[206]
Today, your bones know the straits of hard days,
Today, they are ground to fine dust and clods.

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[200] Cf. Amos 5:8.

[201] Literally, 'like an earthen pot;' cf. Lam. 4:2. As the variation in the anaphoric structure indicates, the dimension of "today" starts to become preeminent over the one of "yesterday," thus signifying that the terrifying *hic et nunc* of hell is replacing the now fading reality of earthly life.

[202] Cf. Prov. 13:18 and 15:32.

[203] My translation is based on Basilea's explanation of Zacuto's use of the verb *la-sur*: "[The Hebrew] *sarta* [literally, 'you turned aside'] here means 'to stink,' by analogy with *sar sov'am* ['their liquor turns against them,' i.e., 'they drink to excess,' Os. 4:18]" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 17^{r}). For Zacuto, sin and stench coincide, hence the reiterated references to the stench polluting the air in the abyss of hell. By contrast, the fragrant and sweet-smelling air of heaven will be referred to when briefly evoking the image of the paradise at the end of the poem. On the analogous role of stench and fragrance in Counter-Reformation representations of hell and heaven, see Camporesi, *The Fear of Hell*, 15–18.

[204] Cf. Job 22:16.

[205] My translation is based on Basilea's explication of the Hebrew '*shamir netzaḥ*': "In its first occurrence it means 'as strong as iron,' like in [*The guilt of David is inscribed with a stylus of iron, engraved*] *with an adamant point* [be-tzipporen shamir] (Jer. 17:1)" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 17^{r}). Although Basilea does not indicate it, his interpretation follows David Kimhi's explication of the biblical compound *be-tzipporen shamir* provided *ad locum* in his biblical commentary.

[206] That is to say, the grave.

[CXXIX:641–645]
Here you gaze at your wicked dealings and speech,[207]
Here you meet the fate that you procured yourself.
You do not run; rather, you trudge along, weary.
You are not at rest; rather, you only shout your bitter complaints.[208]
Besieged,[209] you are as forsaken as a fallow field.[210]

[CXXX:646–650]
Here, each one[211] will expose and reveal your sins,
Here no counsel will speak in your defence:
Your misfortune they will mock and deride.
Like a bear in the woods, each will arouse his anger;
Gall, rather than honey,[212] they will pour upon your head.

[CXXXI:651–655]
Here, here are the wicked who defied[213] all castigation,
For they savoured and ate the bread of folly.
They behaved proudly and fought against their chastisers,
And now they are plagued by every disease and illness;
For these there is no healing, neither bandage nor cure.[214]

[CXXXII:656–660]
Those inebriated by the wine of youth,
Who in their foolish minds ruled and said:
"Hell is nothing but a fairy tale!"—
See how now they here receive their just reward;
Here the gates of mercy are closed to them.[215]

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[207] Cf. 1 Kings 18:27.

[208] Cf. Job 23:2.

[209] By the tormenting demons.

[210] Literally, 'a fallow garden.'

[211] The text alludes to the turns that the demons in charge of the Beating of the Grave are taking in each inflicting a different punishment upon the dead so as to exhaust all the sins they committed in life. See above, n. 56.

[212] Literally, 'nectar of the wood.'

[213] Cf. Ps. 58:4.

[214] Cf. Isa. 1:6.

[215] Placed immediately before the description of the infernal compartments, this strophe reaffirms the reality and materiality of punishments in the afterlife and therefore also the

[CXXXIII:661–665]
Fire that devours fire[216] here blazes and flares,
In this fire[217] souls are scorched and crumple,[218]
In this fire bones are lit and burned.
Neither boiling tin nor the apothecary's sizzling
Concoction[219] can be compared to it.

[CXXXIV:666–670]
Amidst these flames are seven compartments,[220]
Whose sight gives man's heart a fright.
Myriads are the burrows that they contain:[221]
Reckoning them[222] would weary any mind
And fill it with stupefied wonder and astonished surprise.

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verisimilitude of their description as provided in the poem. It thus functions as Zacuto's moral introduction to the journey, which is about to start, through the torments inflicted upon the wicked, among whom are also those who, in life, denied the existence of hell.

[216] On the meaning of this image, see above, n. 44.

[217] The word *esh*, which is feminine in Hebrew, is treated as a masculine by Zacuto, probably under the influence of Italian or Spanish. See also above, n. 132.

[218] Cf. Job 6:17.

[219] Cf. Ex. 30:25 and 30:35.

[220] In the original, Zacuto makes a clever play on words based on the assonance between *mador* (pl. *medorim*) meaning 'compartment,' 'section,' but also 'dwelling,' and *medurah* (pl. *medurot*) meaning 'fire,' 'flame' and 'pyre,' thus reiterating the association of hell with fire. See also above, n. 44.

[221] The idea that inside each infernal compartments there are thousands of cavities derives from *Massekhet gehinnom*: "There are seven compartments in hell and each of these compartments is divided into six thousand houses, and each of these houses has six thousand windows, and in each of these windows there are six thousand jars filled with gall, all of them assigned to [angels serving as] judges and scribes" (Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrasch*, 1:149; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 47^{v}).

[222] In my translation I have followed Basilea's explications *ad locum*: "*Mi-seforam*, that is 'from their reckoning,' and it is found like that in 2 Chronicle 2[:16, where it is written]: *Solomon took a census of all the aliens who were in the land of Israel, besides the census* [seforam] *taken by his father David*."

[CXXXV:671–675]
The first among them is Pit:[223] empty of water,[224]
It is much deeper than a ditch or a dungeon.
In it Dumah[225] has his dwelling, in the darkness.
There swarms of snakes crawl,
Biting and gnashing their fangs.

[CXXXVI:676–680]
In this compartment are those who tempt men on earth:[226]
Eager to serve as procurers of impious deeds,
They show men the allurements of depravity.

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[223] The general characterization of the first compartment of hell as well as the categories of sins that are punished in it derive from *Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam*: "The first compartment is called Pit. This is the above compartment. In it there are legions of tormenting angels, like in a well *in which there is no water* (Gen. 37:24), but in which there are instead snakes and scorpions. Likewise, this compartment is also called 'Well' for in it there are hosts of tormenting angels that, like snakes and scorpions, are immune from spells. [...] In this compartment are punished those who *pluck the unripe fruit of bushes* (Job 30:4) by interrupting the reading of sacred texts with trivial discourses. [Here are also punished] those who disrespect their teachers, while those who abuse them are to be punished in the lower pit, called Miry Clay. In the first compartment are also punished those who hold in contempt the teachers and the wise men—while showing them respect in public—as well as those who curse the deaf, and similar cases. Similarly, those who happen to pass by a synagogue at the time of the public prayer [and do not enter], as well as those who praise somebody in front of their enemies [are all punished here] (*Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam*, fol. 11$^{r\text{-}v}$; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 48^{r}).

[224] Cf. Gen. 37:24.

[225] According to the *Zohar*, Dumah is the angel who has authority over the entirety of hell, which he governs by means of myriads and myriads of demonic attendants who inflict their punishment on the sinners (see *Zohar* 1:fols. 8$^{r\text{-}v}$; 62^{v}; 94^{r}; 102^{r}; 130^{v}; 218^{v}; 237^{v}; 2:fol. 150^{v}). His name, which literally means 'silence,' in the Bible indicates the netherworld (see Ps. 94:17 and 115:17). In the Talmud, Dumah is the angel in charge of the souls of the departed (see TB *Berakhot*, fol. 18^{v}; TB *Shabbat*, fol. 152^{v}; TB *Sanhedrin*, fol. 94^{r}).

[226] The idea according to which this compartment is the seat of evil powers whose task is to entice human beings into sinning derives from the description of the first Palace of Impurity included in the *Zohar*: "Under Dumah's authority is a second demon who, in his turn, oversees myriads of other demonic spirits. His name is Fattoti, for his task is to seduce [in Aramaic, *le-fatta'ah*] men. He hovers around the soul, making her contemplate what she should not, with great lasciviousness and spirit of fornication. All his demonic attendants precede him, and force men to contemplate what they should not" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 263^{r}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 49^{r}).

But on the ominous day, at the time of ruin,
They also pass sentence upon them.[227]

[CXXXVII:681–685]
Here the enemy rules, wrathful:
Sour, he is as red as a rose.[228]
He executes the sentence on the rebellious wicked:
Those who pray before the Lord of heaven
With only the breath of their mouth and their lips.

[CXXXVIII:686–690]
Those who defile their mouth with profanities[229]
(Even the holy words of the Law on their lips
Are tarnished by contact with such obscenities)—
There they roil, ravaged and wretched,
Like a sea that knows no rest nor quiet.

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[227] In his marginal commentary, Basilea summarizes the content of this strophe as follows: "In this compartment, which is the first one, are devils who show men the pleasurableness and sweetness of sin, and who zealously act as procurers for transgression. But then, in the hour of somebody's death, they are the ones who condemn them to destruction, as it is written: *He descends to mislead [into sinning], he ascends to level accusations [...] and [then] takes away the [sinner's] soul* (TB *Bava batra*, fol. 16^{r})" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 18^{r}).

[228] The characterization of the demon in charge of the first compartment is based on the *Zohar*: "Deeper inside, there is another spirit of impurity that rises above all the others. [...] His name is Gamgima, and he is as red as a rose and always ready to do evil. When somebody's prayer is rejected and God recognizes no merit in it, the spirit Gamgima ascends to unite with the greatest spirit of corruption, that is Satan. And then the latter levels accusations against that man from above, listing his sins in front of the Holy, may He be blessed" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 263^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 49^{r}).

[229] The content of this strophe draws on the continuation of the zoharic passage quoted in n. 228: "Under Gamgima's command there are several other demons in charge of levelling accusations against men. Their task is to collect any profanity uttered by men, as well as any holy word. Woe betide those men, for these demons rule over the holy places and ruin them. Woe to them, in this world as in the next one, for these impure spirits take hold of any obscenity uttered and then, whenever somebody utters any holy words, the evil spirit runs to take the obscene words and with them soils the holy ones. Thus, that individual becomes unworthy of holiness, which weakens [the Right Side]" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 263^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 49^{r}).

[CXXXIX:691–695]
There Shoreq[230] lists the counts of their indictment
With a thundering voice, like a pounding hammer.
He delights in objects that are hurled in a rage,
As an offer directed to him and a welcome oblation,
For with them he will kindle anger and wrath inflame.

[CXL:696–700]
Here the teachers who interrupted study with mundane talk,
And those who slighted the honour and prestige of scholars,
Those who shirk from public prayer, and despise their neighbour,
And the ones who curse at the deaf or those who are out of earshot—
Here they all weep and scream in great turmoil.[231]

[CXLI:701–705]
There dwells the one who emits a piercing shriek:
She is the woman of whoredom,[232] who violates the marital pact.[233]

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[230] Literally, 'the one who whistles.' Although Zacuto modified the name of the demon, the entire strophe is based on the description of the first Palace of Impurity included in the *Zohar*: "Above these demons [i.e., the demons who collect the profanities uttered by men] there is a spirit whose name is Safsirita. Together with the [other] demons in charge of levelling accusations against men, he takes hold of the curses uttered as well as of the objects hurled in a fit of rage. [...] Then he ascends [to the superior realms] and announces: 'This is the offer of so and so, who has made an offering to our side.' Indeed, as the side of forbearance corresponds to the Right Side, and therefore to the side of faith, thus the side of anger corresponds to the Other Side, that is the side of evil and impurity" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 263^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 49^{r-v}).

[231] On the contents of this strophe, see above, n. 223.

[232] Cf. Hos. 1:2.

[233] This is Lilith, the female partner of Samael, the king of demons, and the mother of all the demons populating the Other Side. In the *Zohar* the fatal seductions that Lilith exerts on men are described as follows: "She decks herself in fine garments like a sickening harlot and stands at the crossroads and on the streets to attract men. When a dupe approaches her, she embraces and kisses him, and then pours for him dregs of wine mixed with snake poison. Once he has drunk, he is lured into following her. As soon as she sees that he is straying from the path of truth, she removes all the fine garments she put on for that poor simpleton [...]. Thus, that dupe follows her, drinks from the cup of wine and lies with her, completely ensnared. And what does she do? She leaves him still asleep in bed, and ascends to the superior realms, and there she levels her accusations against him and obtains the power to take his life. Then she descends again. The wretched dupe wakes up, thinking he can fool around with her again, while she removes her fine clothes and turns into a fierce warrior and confronts him enshrouded in fire (such an horrendous vision, by which both the soul and the body are devastated!), all covered with eyes,

Her mouth is like a rough file[234] that digs a well.
This pit she places in a man's path;
If left open, into it he will plunge.[235]

[CXLII:706–710]
The name of the second compartment is Ruin:[236]
In it the soul is ravaged, for a torrent tosses[237]
Its dwellers, crushing their only hopes.
A crack is open on its three sides[238]
To seize the souls rejected from heaven.

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brandishing a sharp sword from which drops of poison are trickling down. Thus, she kills that poor simpleton and throws him into Gehenna" (*Zohar*, 1:fol. 148$^{r\text{-}v}$). On the zoharic characterization of Lilith, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 174.

[234] An allusion to Lilith's role as a seducer, whose enticing allure disguises a hard-bitten, cruel-mouthed female demon. My translation follows Basilea's commentary: "[The Hebrew *pesirat*] *pim* indicates an iron tool that in the vernacular is called *lima* (file)" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 18^{v}).

[235] This image, that for the modern reader has a Freudian flavour, eloquently conveys the idea of Lilith as the demonic embodiment of female sexuality and its construed insidiousness. The last verse is also a fine example of Zacuto's evocative use of language and imagery. Lilith's victims plunge into her snares and into hell, and the movement downward thus evoked is symbolically transposed onto the page by means of the transition—in itself a descent—from the first to the second compartment.

[236] Literally, 'pitfall.' The name of the second compartment is connected to the verbal root *sh.ḥ.t.*, meaning 'to waste, ruin, destroy' (from which the noun *mashḥit*, indicating the tormenting demons, is also derived). Zacuto uses the same root in the continuation of the strophe to create a clever pun. The different categories of sin punished in this compartment are derived from *Midrash Rut ha-ne'elam*: "The second compartment is called Ruin and consists of a fire whose colour is green. There is nothing over there but darkness, nor compassion for anybody. Here all those who slander the rabbis after their death, and those who shame their fellow student so that nobody will learn from him—they are all punished in this compartment. Here is also the arrogant whose deeds are not for the public benefit, and the one who profits from his comrade's misfortune. The one who foresees that his local fellow will fail in a legal matter and does not warn him, but on the contrary rejoices in his failure, as in others' [is also being punished here]. The one who, although there is a synagogue in town, does not enter for prayer, and the one who makes himself unavailable to his local companions in legal matters, as well as the one who helps himself at a table on which there is not enough food for [all] the guests [ends up here]; so does the one who raises his hands against his neighbour, even if the latter has not provoked him, as well as the one who insults his comrade with mockery thus causing him shame—all these are punished in this compartment" (*Midrash Rut ha-ne'elam*, fol. 11^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 48^{r}).

[237] Cf. Isa. 30:30.

[238] The idea according to which this compartment has three openings is derived from the description of the Second Palace of Impurity included in the *Zohar*: "The Second Palace is darker than the first. Its name is Ruin, or Impure. Indeed, the First Palace is called Pit corresponding

[CXLIII:711–715]
Its fire is greenish with thin[239] flames
From which drops of bitter gall spout forth:
Affliction, and deadly acridity, and a cup of wine dregs.[240]
There lie the remains of Balaam;[241] sorcerers,
Soothsayers, and enchanters there perish.

[CXLIV:716–720]
There is the leader who fails to rule in the public interest,
And the person who rejoices in his neighbour's failure,
Or the one who neglects to attend a synagogue.
There those who heartily partake of the pauper's meal
Will stay—and not for just one or two days.[242]

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to the name Satan, while this one is called Ruin corresponding to the name Impure. This Palace has three openings, each on one of its three sides" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 263^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 49^{v}).

[239] The Hebrew *kaḥash* means 'leanness,' but also 'deceit, lying.' Zacuto's word choice depends on the description of the Second Palace of Impurity included in the *Zohar*, according to which that palace is the seat of demons whose task is to pervert the truthful dreams that men receive from the side of holiness, turning them deceitful and illusory (see *Zohar*, 2:fol. 264^{r}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 49^{v}).

[240] Cf. Isa. 51:17 and 51:22. According to the *Zohar*, the Second Palace of Impurity governs crimes of a sexual nature. This is the place in which sinners who committed such crimes are administered a cup containing three poisonous drops: the first one is called Affliction (in the original, *Ḥatzatz*, which literally means 'gravel'), the second Deadly Acridity (*Mar ha-mawet*), and the third Wine Dregs (*Qubbaʿat*). From this same cup three drops drip onto the sword of the Angel of Death, who uses them to summon the living (see *Zohar*, 2:fol. 264^{r}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 49^{v}).

[241] As recounted in Num. 22:2–24:25, the diviner Balaam was summoned by the Moabites and commissioned by their king, Balak, to curse the Israelites. Zacuto is here following in the steps of the *Zohar*, according to which the Second Palace of Impurity also governs all acts of witchcraft, necromancy, and sorcery, in addition to crimes of sexual nature, which are here predominant (see *Zohar* 2:fol. 264^{r}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 49^{v}). The relationship between witchcraft and sexual defilement, reiterated in several places in zoharic literature, was already established in rabbinic sources, which attributed Balaam's magic powers to the sexual acts that he performed on his female ass (see TB *Sanhedrin*, fol. 105^{r-v}; TB *ʿAvodah zarah*, fol. 4^{v}). According to the Mishnah, Balaam and his followers forfeited the world to come and are condemned to be punished eternally in hell's nethermost chamber (see M *Avot* 5:19). For a general list of mystical sources on witchcraft and sexual crimes, see Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 140, n. 46.

[242] Cf. Eccl. 7:15.

[CXLV:721–725]
There the pot is set and the fire lit
To stir, like meat in a cauldron,[243]
Steeped in the filth of fetid boiling sperm,
Those who pervert their way in vain,
For their own progeny they murder and slay.[244]

[CXLVI:726–730]
There all rebels are being judged:
Those who engage in forbidden relations,[245]
The man who indulges in adulterous passions,
Those who defile themselves with unclean
Emissions so as not to branch out or yield fruit.

[243] Cf. TB *Bava batra*, fol. 74^{r}.

[244] The strophe refers to those who waste their semen during nocturnal pollution or by engaging in onanism, as Basilea explains in his marginal commentary: "Those [devils] put a cauldron on the fire and in it the wicked toss like meat in a pot, under a layer of boiling sperm. These are the ones who waste their semen, thus killing their own offspring" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 18^{v}). The biblical expression *hishḥit darko*, literally 'perverted his way' (Gen. 6:12) has been interpreted in rabbinical literature as an allusion to onanism, a sin that for the rabbis is equal to killing (see TB *Niddah*, fol. 13^{r}). According to zoharic theology, the wasting of one's own semen is a heinous crime (see *Zohar*, 1:fols. 56^{v}–57^{r}; 62^{r}; 69^{r}; 2:fol. 150^{v}; 3:fol. 158^{r}). Strophes 144 and 145 are based on the description of the second of the Seven Palaces of Impurity included in the *Zohar*, according to which this palace governs, among the crimes of sexual nature, all non-normative uses of male semen: "The first opening to the palace is ruled by a demon called 'Aṣṭiriyya, who has under him several thousands of other demons. He has power over all those who pervert their way by spilling their semen on the ground, or by emitting it in unnatural ways, or by masturbating, and who, in so doing, fail to contemplate the divine presence. When that happens, the demon from the side of impurity who rules here—the one we mentioned above—sets out together with the thousands and tens of thousands demons that accompany him. They all gather over that man to defile him in this world; the ruling demon and his orderlies seduce his soul, seize it, and take it with them for judgment. Such demons are called 'Layer of Boiling Sperm' [...]: they increase lust in men and take possession of it together with the semen spilled on the ground (which adds to their strength), and bring both to the superior realms [for judgement]" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 263^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 49^{v}). Although in this compartment several other categories of sins are also punished, beside those of sexual nature, it is worth noting that the retribution here assigned—being immersed in boiling sperm—actualizes a form of Dantesque *contrapasso* for those sinners whose crime was wasting their semen.

[245] With reference to the list of prohibited sexual relations contained in Lev. 18:6–23, including incest, adultery, bestiality, homosexuality, and lying with a menstruating woman. According to the *Zohar*, the Second Palace of Impurity also governs, besides the crimes connected with the improper use of male semen, bestiality and the other forbidden relations defined by Jewish law (see *Zohar*, 2:fol. 263^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 49^{v}).

[CXLVII:731–735]
The wicked who raised their hand against others
(Were it even only a gesture) here mourn,
As do those who despise the one by whom they are respected,
Or those who put to shame their friend in court,
Or cast reproach[246] on teachers upon their death.

[CXLVIII:736–740]
The uncleanness of this compartment is like the filth
Of the chamber-pot; the foul smell in it stinks like a corpse.
Those who are sunk into it scream bitterly,
As there they are held to woe—not gently!—
By the grasp of lions roaring for prey.[247]

[CXLIX:741–745]
The third compartment is a place of destruction
Whose name is Silence:[248] in it the reprobates'
Doom is sealed and there, like stones, they are still.[249]
In it there are gates on each of the pit's sides
To ambush and cut down men's steps.[250]

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[246] Cf. Job 4:18.

[247] Cf. Ps. 104:21. The image alludes to the tormenting demons. The Hebrew *kefir* (young lion) bears an assonance with the root *k.f.r* from which the verb *le-khapper* (to expiate, atone) is derived. Zacuto is thus alluding to the role played by demonic forces as instruments of the punishment of men's sins in the afterlife.

[248] Likewise in the case of the third compartment, the main characteristics as well as most of the categories of sins that are punished in it derive from *Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam*: "The third compartment is called Silence. This is the place in which the arrogant who engage in legal issues to show off in front of others (rather than for the public benefit) are punished. Similarly, the slanderous person, the student who acts impudently, the one who judges his neighbour too harshly, those who lend their friend money at interest, the one who does not interpret the Law correctly, as well as the one who does not reply 'amen' after a blessing—they all are punished here. Those who pray in bits and pieces, that is those who during the prayer stop to say something irrelevant and then resume praying, and then again interrupt themselves (which is what is called 'to pray in bits and pieces')—they are here too. The one who mocks his neighbour or the elderly for not remembering their lesson, as well as the one who spots in his friend something indecent, but does not tell him in private—all such sins and other similar to these are punished here as well" (*Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam*, fol. 11^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 48^{v}).

[249] Cf. Exod. 15:16.

[250] Cf. Ps. 37:23 and Pr. 20:24. According to the *Zohar*, the third of the Seven Palaces of Impurity has four openings, one on each side. At the first opening stands a demon whose task

[CL:746–750]
From there the destroyer is conferred his power
And sentences passed on high are executed.[251]
Those patrolling the higher pits here gather:
They spread their nets wide,[252] and with them
The evil and foolish souls they catch.

[CLI:751–755]
There Af and Ḥemah[253] furiously sentence
Those who mock the Law and scorn the rabbis' bans.
There the spirit of Mesakhsekh[254] is a gushing stream
That greatly oppresses informants and traitors,
And those whose slanderous tongue utters calumny.

[CLII:756–760]
There are the wrathful oppressors of the arrogant—

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is to lay traps for those who walk by themselves on the public way, making them stumble (see *Zohar*, 2:fol. 264^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 50^{r}).

[251] According to the *Zohar*, at the second opening of the Third Palace of Impurity stands a demon in charge of executing the sentences issued on high against mortals. To this end, he congregates together with the demons who govern the First and the Second Palace and, by means of their orderlies, inflicts their punishment upon the wicked (see *Zohar*, 2:fol. 264^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 50^{r}).

[252] Cf. Ezek. 47:10.

[253] The names of the two demons mean, respectively, 'anger' and 'fury.' Cf. the description of the Third Palace of Impurity included in the *Zohar*: "From this place two spirits, called Af and Ḥemah, spread out. They have power over those who are being reprimanded by someone who is intent on studying the Law [...], as well as over those who mock and scorn the teachings of the Law and of the rabbis. From Af and Ḥemah thousands and tens of thousands [of demons] propagate. They hover over those who are occupied in studying the Law, or intent on observing a commandment, and lead them astray by causing them to feel disgruntled, rather than content [in their observance]" (*Zohar*, 2: fol. 264^{v}) (*Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 50^{v}).

[254] Literally, 'the one who foments conflict.' Although the name of this spirit has been modified by Zacuto, his characterization still draws on the description of the Third Palace of Impurity included in the *Zohar*: "Under those two demons, Af and Ḥemah, there is a spirit who governs slander. [...] Indeed, whenever one calumniates [somebody], the evil spirit called Sakhsikhah, whose place is on high, is aroused and, inhabiting the calumny uttered by that man, he causes death, war, and murder on earth, because of the slander that was thus excited. Woe to those who arouse this evil side by not being able to control their tongue and lips, or who even do not bother to try. They ignore that the awakening on high depends on what happens on earth, for good as for bad" (*Zohar*, 2:fols. 264^{v}–265^{r}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 50^{v}).

Those whose heart is proud in legal matters.
There those who practice usury are bitten
By snakes and left to rot; those who interrupt
The prayer with their idle chatter there groan.

[CLIII:761–765]
There is found the one who in matters of religion perversely
Gives interpretations not conforming to truth.
There the one who does not bother answering "Amen!"
Turns into manure, as does the complicit witness
To indecency,[255] and the one who pronounces his comrade guilty.

[CLIV:766–770]
There a spirit stands and with smashing fury
Crushes the days of a youth at his dawn,[256]
So that in a perpetual winter[257] he will never bloom.
Thus, since, being a child, he was unwise,
He dies blameless rather than depraved.

[CLV:771–775]
There is the demon in charge of illness, infection,
Paralysis, fever, and consumption;[258] there is the plucking
Hand of diphtheria:[259] to the nurselings she looks like a nurse

[255] Cf. TB *Pesaḥim*, fol. 113^{v}.

[256] According to the *Zohar*, in the Third Palace of Impurity resides a spirit, called Agirison, who oversees premature deaths and is responsible, in particular, for the demise of those who die between the age of thirteen and twenty (see *Zohar*, 2:fol. 264^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 50^{v}).

[257] Cf. Job 29:4.

[258] Cf. Lev. 26:16 and Deut. 28:22.

[259] Cf. the description of the Third Palace of Impurity included in the *Zohar*: "On the third opening [of the palace] stands a spirit whose name is Angerayon. He is responsible of all illnesses and pains, shivers and fever. [...] On the fourth opening stands a spirit that was created with the waning moon. His name is Askara [Aramaic for 'diphtheria'], and he is responsible for infant deaths. He appears to children, and even plays with them, but eventually kills them. He appears to them disguised as a woman, as if he were their mother; he feeds them, plays with them, and then he grabs and kills them" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 264^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 50^{r-v}). Like other children's illnesses, diphtheria had been, since ancient times, particularly feared, as testified by the custom, referred to in the Talmud, of fasting on Wednesdays in order to avert it (see TB *Berakhot*, fol. 8r and *Taʿanit*, fol. 27^{v}). Similar customs were still in use and even flourishing in Zacuto's lifetime.

(Indeed, they mistake her for their mother),
But in fact she strangles them.

[CLVI:776–780]
Here the soul is full of grief:
With many sighs she surrenders all respite.[260]
Amidst blazing flames and scalding fire,
Surrounded on each side, she can only plunge
Through eddies of confusion to her station.[261]

[CLVII:781–785]
The fourth is a ditch in whose muck the wicked are trapped.
Indeed, this pit is like slimy clay,[262] sludge, and mud,
Thick mire and swampy bog in heaps and piles.[263]
Here are placed those whose soul is in debt,
Once their deeds have been thoroughly sifted through.[264]

[CLVIII:786–790]
There pleasure is overturned and becomes Affliction,

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[260] My translation is based on the interpretation provided by Basilea in his explication: "The meaning [of this verse] seems to allude to the soul, which is now heaving deep sighs, while before, in her [previous] place, she enjoyed great tranquillity" (*Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 21^{v}).

[261] With a narrative solution similar to the one enacted above at v. 705, the image of the soul plunging marks here the transition from the third to the fourth pit, which is lower, thus evoking both the visual conformation of hell and the actual movement downward.

[262] Cf. Ps. 40:3.

[263] The general characterization of this compartment is based on *Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam*: "The fourth compartment is called Miry Clay. Over there are punished all the bullies who treat the poor and the derelict with arrogance, like those who, despite seeing the troubles of the poor, do not lend them money, unless begged to do so. The one who does not pay workers their due wages, the one who wastes his semen or lies with a gentile or a menstruated women; the one who does not return the poor's pledge (despite that being the latter's only possession), as well as the one who perverts the course of justice and the one who is corrupted by money—all those are punished in this compartment" (*Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam*, fol. 11^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 48^{v}).

[264] According to the *Zohar*, the Fourth Palace of Impurity is also called Debt (*Ḥovah*), because this is the place in which all sins and crimes committed on earth are collected. This Palace stands opposite to the Fourth Palace of Holiness, located on the side of sanctity, whose name is Merit (*Zekhut*). Each year, on *Rosh ha-shanah*, the crimes and merits of human beings are collected in the two opposite palaces and then weighed to establish who is going to live and who is going to die (see *Zohar*, 2:fol. 265^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 51^{r}).

And from it another sprouts, whose name is Leprosy.[265]
Be on your guard, O men whose mind is clouded,
For there foes[266] rise against you every moment
To change your heart to rebellion and evil.

[CLIX:791–795]
Their tongue is zealous to curse the table
Laid sloppily on the day of rest.
(And how grievous their imprecation is!)
Thus, the good Angel is forced to bend
And wearily answer, "Amen!"[267]

[CLX:796–800]
There are the demons who curse the day and rouse grief:
To the root they extirpate and destroy
The man who swears and perjures,
And therefore is cursed. "So be it! So be it!",
Triumphantly shrieks the writhing snake.[268]

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[265] Strophes 158 and 159 draw upon the description of the Fourth Palace of Impurity included in the *Zohar*: "In the middle of the palace there is another spirit, whose name is Affliction (*Negaʿ*), from which another one proceeds whose name is Leprosy (*Negaʿ tzaraʿat*) and who is ready to snare slanderous people even more than what already happens in the Third Palace. This spirit has power over the Sabbath table, since when the Sabbath begins and the table is not set with all that is meant to honour that day, the Sabbath is degraded. It is this spirit that receives those faulty tables, and when that happens the demons who level accusations sit there and bray: '*He loved to curse—may a curse come upon him! He would not bless—may blessing be far from him!* (Ps. 109:17)' [...]. It is commanded that on the Sabbath's eve, when the [sloppily laid] tables are handed over to the side of evil, that same impure side gains strength and that the man [who committed this crime] be handed over to the Other Side. Woe that man for being plucked from the side of good and handed over to the side of impurity! The same applies to [all] the other festive tables" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 265^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 51^{r}).

[266] That is, the demons that inhabit the Other Side. See above, n. 80.

[267] Cf. TB *Shabbat*, fol. 119^{v}: "Rabbi Jose ben Rabbi Judah said: Two ministering angels accompany a man on the eve of the Sabbath from the synagogue to his home, one is a good [angel] and the other an evil [one]. And when he arrives home and finds the lamp burning, the table laid, and the bed made, the good angel exclaims, 'May it be thus even for another Sabbath,' to which the evil angel reluctantly responds 'amen.' But if not, the evil angel exclaims, 'May it be thus even for another Sabbath,' to which the good angel reluctantly responds 'amen'."

[268] Cf. Is. 27:1. The content of this strophe derives from the description of the Fourth Palace of Impurity included in the *Zohar*: "From here arises an impure spirit whose name is Arirya [connected to the root *ʾr.r.*, 'to curse'], together with thousands and tens of thousands of other

[CLXI:801–805]
The cry[269] of the rich there rises to heaven
(Instead of the impudent rejoinders they took pride in),
As does the bellow of those who pawned but failed to reclaim,
And of those who scorn the poor in time of hardship:
There they are like waste and scum.

[CLXII:806–810]
There those who corrupted with bribes—thus vexing
With their money like prickles and thorns—are being bled,[270]
As are those who twisted the customary path of justice:
There, iniquitous judges are being justly destroyed,
Until their soul is cut off and excised.

[CLXIII:811–815]
There the tempters to fornication lure
The hearts of foolish men like fish into nets.
They reveal themselves by the names of foreign gods[271]

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spirits called 'Those Who Curse the Day,' according to the [biblical] verse: *May those who cast spells upon the day damn it* (Job 3:8). [...] These spirits govern the hours and minutes of the day [...]; they seize the words with which a man curses himself, be it in a fit of rage or to make an oath, and with them they arouse the *writhing snake* (Is. 27:1), also called the Leviathan, so that it may undermine the world" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 266^{c}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 51^{r}). In Job 3, the protagonist famously curses the day of his birth, and a connection is thus being established between the Aramaic *lewatin* (curses) and the Hebrew *livyatan* (Leviathan). In the *Zohar*, the writhing snake symbolizes the realm of the demonic.

[269] In the original, "the echo." On the function and symbolism of echo in the poem, see above, n. 71.

[270] One more example of retribution taking the form of *contrapasso*. See also above, n. 244.

[271] The content of this strophe is based on the description of the Fourth Palace of Impurity included in the *Zohar*: "In this palace are spirits called Foreign Gods (*Elohim aḥerim*), for as such they reveal themselves. [Here are] also the demons that excite men to pursue material pleasures and engage in whoredom and fornication. Those are the ones who drive them to lust and adultery. In this palace resides a powerful spirit that governs all: his name is God (*El*), like the name of the one on the side of sanctity. Differently from that one, though, this one is a foreign god. He tempts the man intent on studying or praying in the synagogue [...] by saying to him: 'Why are you staying here? Would it not be better to keep company with the sinners, pursuing women and indulging in earthly pleasures?' Once that man is excited by the demon, all the other [spirits] start hovering over him and chasing him" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 265^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 51^{r}). The association between idolatry and prostitution has biblical roots.

And with the attire of a harlot[272] they disguise themselves,
Until they inflame men's hearts with lust.

[CLXIV:816–820]
There they pass sentence based on good and evil:
Those who persevered in doing good are saved,
While those who are judged for their evil deeds
Will not be able to flee or even take a step,
For soon fury will strike.

[CLXV:821–825]
The fifth habitation is called Hell.[273]
In it there are piercing shrieks and mournful sighs,
A ruinous path leading to a certain fate.
From this place the sowers of all discords rise;
Around a foe whose name is Evah[274] they gather.

[CLXVI:826–830]
Here are the hosts of Shoded that quarter
Burning men with fiery blades.[275]
Famine and starvation from tumult[276] here abound:
If the camps of Kafan and Shod clash,
Men will partake without being satisfied.[277]

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[272] Cf. Pr. 7:10.

[273] The nomenclature of this compartment is derived from *Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam*: "The fifth compartment is called Hell. That is the place in which disbelievers, apostates, and heretics are punished together with those who reject the Law and those who deny the resurrection of the dead. About these [categories of] sinners the Scriptures state: *As a cloud fades away, so whoever goes down to Sheol does not come up* (Job 7:9); while concerning all other sinners it is written: *The Lord deals death and gives life, casts down into Sheol and raises up* (1 Sam. 2:6)" (*Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam*, fol. 11^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 48^{v}).

[274] Evah, meaning 'enmity,' is the name of one of the impure spirits who, according to the *Zohar*, inhabit the Fifth Palace of Impurity: "In this palace there is only one opening and a demon oversees it. His task is to excite strife in the world. His name is Evah, after the name of that opening" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 266^{r}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 51^{r}).

[275] Cf. Gen. 3:24. An example of 'verbal contrapasso:' men who burn (*ha-lohaṭim*) because of the evil instinct are subjected to the demons' fiery blades (*lahaṭe ha-ḥerev*).

[276] Cf. M *Avot*, 5:8.

[277] Kafan and Shod are two spirits who, according to the *Zohar*, reside in the Fifth Palace of Impurity and are responsible for famine, hunger, and consequent riots and disorders on earth: "In

[CLXVII:831–835]
The Lord's people will lack no goods
Nor will they suffer as a reward for their charity.[278]
But they will be disgraced
Every time the gentiles cherish mercy,
For then the latter gain force, while the former starve.

[CLXVIII:836–840]
When the hips of the adulteress wither
And her womb swells, as they say in the Book,[279]
From here a hostile spirit called Efer is astir.[280]

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this palace there is a spirit who governs over everything. His name is Shoded (Marauder) and he is *destructiveness and injury* (Is. 59:7). This spirit inhabits mountains, rocks, and steep cliffs. From this palace all thieves as well as all those who corrupt and destroy receive their nourishment; from this place arise all those who kill with their sword and spear, pursuing *the fiery blade* (Gen. 3:24) to slay everybody. From this spirit a second one, whose name is Shod (Robbery), is generated. When a famine ravages the world, this spirit joins another spirit, whose name is Kafan (Hunger). They roam the world as enemies of men, as such is the meaning of the [biblical] verse: *Thou will laugh at violence and starvation* (Job 5:22). They level accusations against men and rob them of all their possessions. The one called Shod hunts in the high mountains, plundering, destroying, and ruining everything. Then he comes back to rob men, so that those starve to death. If men eat without filling themselves, it is because of him" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 266^{r}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 51^{r}).

[278] The content of this strophe also draws from the description of the Fifth Palace of Impurity included in the *Zohar*: "At that time [i.e. during a famine], whoever practices charity towards his neighbour, by giving him food or water, has the merit to fend off these two spirits [that is, Kafan and Shod], so that they would not have any power in the world. But whenever the children of Israel do not perform any deed of mercy towards others, while the gentiles do, then these two spirits give respite to the latter and attack the former; in fact, whenever this happens, the Other Side gains strength and the children of Israel are subdued. On the contrary, when the children of Israel are the ones who practice charity, the Other Side is subjugated and weakened, while the side of sanctity is made stronger. But every time the children of Israel are not practicing mercy, these two spirits rise to overpower them, while all the blessings that emanate from the Right Side, on high, are snatched by the gentiles" (*Zohar* 2:fol. 266^{r}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 51^{r}). According to the *Zohar*, the Fifth Palace is also called "Uncircumcised," hence its association with the gentiles.

[279] Zacuto is here referring to the trial by ordeal to which women suspected of adultery were subjected, as described in Num. 5:11–31. The rite consisted in forcing them to drink a special potion called Bitter Water, this being a mixture of water and dust (or ashes). Death, a swollen belly, or sterility after the rite were considered proof of actual infidelity. Rabbinical rules for the ritual are expounded in the Talmudic tractate *Sota*.

[280] According to the *Zohar*, the Fifth Palace of Impurity is also the abode of a spirit, called Afrira (from *efer*, meaning 'ash'), which inhabits the Bitter Water that a woman suspected of adultery

Here too, amidst these spirits, are a pack of nocturnal wolves,[281]
On the prowl in the morrow as after dark.

[CLXIX:841–845]
The entire soul there wails in anguish,
For after her descent to the underworld, she will not rise again.[282]
Indeed, odious to God on high,
She is like a useless tool[283] or the forgotten dead,
As full of sorrow as a forlorn wife.[284]

[CLXX:846–850]
The sixth pit[285] is the place of plague:
In it is the cup with the three mortal drops;
In this pit sorrows combine, and its name is Shadow of Death.[286]
In it four parties of destruction stand
That are called Discord in a Shared House.[287]

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is forced to drink (on which see above, n. 279). This spirit is sterile and gains his strength from the iniquities human beings commit on earth (see *Zohar*, 2:fol. 266^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 51^{v}).

[281] Cf. Zeph. 3:3. With reference to the demons that inhabit this compartment. See above, v. 276 and v. 439.

[282] Zacuto's statement, according to which sinners punished in this compartment are condemned to eternal suffering, is based on *Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam* (see above, n. 273). On the relation of *Tofteh ʿarukh* to the contemporary Jewish debate surrounding eternal damnation, see Chapter 2.

[283] Cf. Ps. 31:13.

[284] Cf. Isa. 54:6.

[285] In the original, *mahamor*. Probably derived from the biblical *mahamoret* (pit), the term is Zacuto's own neologism. The semantic connotation of this new word is particularly noteworthy. Indeed, an hapax in the Bible, *mahamoret* is used in Ps. 140:11, in a passage in which the writer invokes God's help against his enemies with the following words: *Let burning coals fall upon them; Let them be cast into [fire, Into] deep pits* [be-mahamorot], *that they rise not up again.* Among a readership familiar with the Hebrew text of the Bible, this term and the verse associated with it could thus suggest, for this compartment too, the idea of eternal punishment. See above, n. 282.

[286] The name of this compartment derives from *Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam*: "The sixth compartment is called Shadow of Death. Over there are punished all those who lay with their mother or with a menstruating woman" (*Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam*, fol. 11^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 48^{v}). According to the *Zohar*, in the Sixth Palace of Impurity reside lust, fornication, and all the pleasures of the flesh that men pursue, seduced by the kisses and caresses of the palace's presiding spirit, the female demon Lilith (see *Zohar*, 2:fol. 267^{r}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 51^{v}). On Lilith's role as a seducer, see also above, n. 233.

[287] Cf. Pr. 21:9. The content of the last two verses of this strophe draws upon the description of the Sixth Palace of Impurity included in the *Zohar*: "In this palace there are four openings:

[CLXXI:851–855]
From here rebellious powers rise
That trick the fool by luring him
Into the pleasures of food and drink.
They join company with the man as doting friends,
But, in fact, the foe's kisses are wanton.[288]

[CLXXII:856–860]
Thus other evil powers here reside that hunt
Tarnished fellows lacking all wisdom,[289]
Those who deck themselves out with finery,
Seduced by appearance or the reflected image.[290]
Hence, they are cast into darkness and there cut off.

[CLXXIII:861–865]
From there dejection comes for the arrogant,

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the first one is called Death (*Mawet*), the second Evil (*Ra'*), the third Shadow of Death (*Tzalmawet*) and the fourth Darkness (*Ofel*). The purpose of these four openings is to cause harm and they exert power over everything. As on the side of sanctity, there are four openings on its four sides, all of them connected one to the other and all of them pure and it is thus here below. When the openings in this palace are connected one to the other, then the palace is called Shared House, according to the [biblical] verse: *[It is better to live in a corner of the housetop] than in a house shared with a contentious wife* (Pr. 21:9)" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 266^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 51^{v}).

[288] Cf. Prov. 27:6.

[289] Cf. Prov. 7:7.

[290] In his commentary, Basilea explains this verse as follows: "*Niftim be-tzelem*, that is, they see their own image in the looking-glass when they curl their hair" (*Tofteh 'arukh*, fol. 20^{v}). According to the *Zohar*, the Sixth Palace of Impurity is also inhabited by the spirits who are responsible for vanity: "In this palace reside all the spirits who level accusations and the evil heralds who visit men, driving them to deck out and curl their hairs, to bathe and dress elegantly, so to attract looks. Here resides a spirit called Seqatufa, who oversees fine clothing and hairdos. Inside the palace is another presiding spirit, whose task is to excite men and other [evil spirits]: after a man has decked himself and combed his hair, the spirit puts a looking-glass in his hand; the man contemplates his own image in the looking-glass and, in so doing, he arouses another spirit called Asirṭa, from whom derive all the spirits that show men false visions in their dreams, as well as spirits that show men things that are not going to happen, just to confound them. [...] Once a man arouses the spirit Asirṭa, he is forever united to him. From then on, on each new moon, this evil spirit of the looking-glass is awakened together with Lilith. Sometimes it happens that they strike that poor wretch who then drops on the ground, unable to rise again, or dies. This happens because he contemplated himself in the looking-glass and at that very moment his heart's malice is displayed, thus further attracting the evil spirit" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 267^{r-v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fols. 51^{v}–52^{r}).

Incessant affliction will overtake him:
Calamities, injuries, or humiliation.
Wretched, the heart sinks and knees buckle,[291]
Shudders and tremors shake the loins.[292]

[CLXXIV:866–870]
The seventh compartment is at the bottom of the earth.[293]
Woe to those who are lowered and cast down to it,
As they are cut off and lost for ever.[294]
There they crawl, there they creep like swarming things,
There wrath is final and destruction complete.

[CLXXV:871–875]
Those who have intercourse with an impure woman,
Or with another's man wife,[295] as well as the wicked who instruct
Others in evil—there they all resemble meat in a cauldron.
There, there, the slimiest shower of boiling filth[296]
Is poured on their souls.

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[291] Cf. Nah. 2:11.

[292] Cf. Nah. 2:11.

[293] In Hebrew, *be-taḥtit ha-aretz*, which is also the name of the compartment. This compartment's nomenclature and the idea that those who are punished in it are condemned to eternal damnation derive from *Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam*: "The seventh compartment is called Underground. Those who are lowered down to it will not rise anymore. About them it is written: *Thou shalt trample the wicked so they will be ashes [under the soles of thy feet]* (Mal. 3:21)" (*Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam*, fol. 11^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 48^{v}). The idea of eternal damnation is reiterated below at v. 885. See also above, vv. 841–842 and n. 285.

[294] Cf. *Midrash Sifra*, *Emor* 14:4. Zacuto is alluding to rabbinical discussions around the equivalence between "cutting off" and "becoming lost" in the context of the punishment for sins committed. On these two concepts, cf. also Nahmanides, *Shaʿar ha-gemul*, 7.

[295] Cf. Lev. 20:10.

[296] The content of this and the next strophe draws upon the *Zohar*: "There is a place in Gehenna whose compartments are called Boiling Filth (*Tzoʾa rotaḥat*), in which the filth of the souls (who were defiled by all the uncleanness of this world) collects, once they have turned white and have ascended [to heaven], leaving all that dirt behind them. Indeed, these foul compartments called Boiling Filth preside over all that uncleanness, which is under the power of the fire of Gehenna. Down there are cast the wicked who sinned and caused others to sin, as well as those who persisted in their crimes, and never showed any contrition before their Lord—all these are condemned to that dirtiness and scorching filth, and from there they will never rise. Those who corrupted their way on earth and did not fear God in this world, all of them are eternally condemned to this place, and from there they will never rise" (*Zohar*, 2:fol. 150^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 48^{v}). It is worth noting that in the zoharic section devoted to the description

[CLXXVI:876–880]
Like into a brimming pot, the uncleanness
And dirt of the above compartments there drains.
There, in revolting filth, is scalded
The soul that turned her back on God,
And wandered relentless in her evil.

[CLXXVII:881–885]
Even there, though, some enjoy a little respite
When the fire halts on the holy Sabbath,
And on all the holidays and the New Moon.[297]
Only the wicked who transgressed these days have no relief,[298]
For there they are forever forgotten and forsaken.

[CLXXVIII:886–890]
These habitations of the impious and traitorous[299]
Are the Palaces of Permutations,[300] and they are thus called
Because opposite to them, in heaven, seven

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of the Seven Palaces of Impurity, the expression "boiling filth" also refers to the hordes of evil spirits associated with the Fourth Palace (see *Zohar* 2:fol. 265^{v}).

[297] Also known as *Yom kippur qaṭan* (Minor Day of Atonement), this was a penitential holiday whose origins are medieval. Revived by the kabbalists in Safed, it was invested with deep redemptive significance and between sixteenth and seventeenth century became particularly popular among devotional confraternities. See Goldschmidt, *On Jewish Liturgy*, 322–348, particularly 322–323; Hallamish, *Kabbalah*, 537–566; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, 151–153.

[298] The idea that afterlife torments inflicted upon those who violate the Sabbath and the holidays on earth never pause is based on the *Zohar*: "On the Sabbath, the New Moon, and the holidays, the fire in that place [that is, in Gehenna] halts and so do the torments. The lot of these, though, is unlike that of the other sinners who are granted a rest. Indeed, all those who desecrate the Sabbath and the holidays, thus not caring to honour the Lord through their observance, but rather violating them in public—as they do not observe the Sabbath and the holidays in this world, thus they do not observe them in the other world, and therefore have no rest" (*Zohar*, 2:fols. 150^{v}; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fols. 48^{v}–49^{r}).

[299] Cf. Jer. 12:1 and Is. 24:16.

[300] In Hebrew, *hekhale ha-temurot*. Cf. Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, 26, where the expression indicates the Seven Palaces of Impurity.

Sanctuaries of sweet delights[301] were forged;
There, at a distance, the virtuous reside.

[CLXXIX:891–895]
There a crown is placed on their head,
A wreath of bounteous majesty and sublime splendour.[302]
Stored in treasures of effulgent purity,
God's hand established and concealed there
A hidden light, as benefit for men's good deeds.[303]

[CLXXX:896–900]
Their souls are showered by a miraculous rain,
A luminous dew[304] that makes them shine.
Fragrant scents waft all around,[305] like the five hundred
Measures of myrrh and aromatic cinnamon,[306]
But their nature is immaterial.

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[301] These are the abode of the righteous in paradise, which Zacuto envisions as located in heaven, and opposed to and mirroring the seven compartments of hell. Following in the steps of *Reshit ḥokhmah*, Zacuto identifies them with the Seven Palaces of Sanctity described in the *Zohar*. According to zoharic theology, these palaces are located on the Right Side, or the side of holiness and purity, and are governed by the *sefirot*, the ten divine emanations, from which good emanates (see *Zohar*, 1:fols. 38^{r}–45^{v} and 2:fols. 243^{r}–262^{r}).

[302] Cf. TB *Berakhot*, fol. 17^{r}: "Rav was wont to say: 'The world to come is not like this world. In the world to come there is no eating, no drinking, no procreation, no business negotiations, no jealously, no hatred, and no competition. Rather, the righteous sit with their crowns upon their heads, enjoying the splendour of the Divine Presence, as it is stated: *And they beheld God, and they ate and drank* (Ex. 24:11)'."

[303] This is the primordial light that, according to the Talmud, God created on the first day of creation and then concealed from the Generation of the Flood to store it for the righteous in the world to come (see TB *Ḥagigah*, fol. 12^{r}). In his marginal commentary, Basilea makes the following remark: "This being the world to come, about which it is written: *[Such things had never been heard or noted,] nor eye has seen a God, but Thee, act for those who trust in him*" (Is. 64:3) (*Tofteh ʿarukh*, fol. 21^{r}).

[304] Cf. Is. 26:19.

[305] On scents and fragrances as attributes of the world to come, see, for example, *Midrash Ba-midbar rabbah* 13:2: "[It is written]: *I have gathered my myrrh with my spice* (Song of Sg. 5:1), [meaning] that they suffered grievously in the exile and were censing themselves by sanctifying the Holy Name. Therefore, in the world to come, the Holy One, blessed be He, will delight them in paradise and waft on them all perfumes."

[306] Cf. Exod. 30:23.

[CLXXXI:901–905]
Their splendour is increased to a marvellous degree
So that they rise above all heaven's cherubs.
And despite having been small on earth,
Truly, upon their leaving the confining prison,[307]
The Lord has wrought great deeds for them![308]

[CLXXXII:906–910]
How peaceful and content the souls are over there!
They gaze at the luminous glory of their creator's throne,[309]
Day after day, sated with joy and flourishing,
They proclaim: "Look how high He has made us rise!
Great things the Lord has done for us!"

[CLXXXIII:911–915]
The souls of those punished in hell's hollow
Glimpsing through holes in their dark dens
The bliss of the just standing above,
Weep with bitter sobs[310] and wail, because,
For their crimes, they were here cast down.[311]

[CLXXXIV:916–920]
"Judge of truth You are, and have judged well!"—

[307] That is, the body. The image is taken from the writings of thirteenth-century kabbalist (and one of the redactors of the *Zohar*) Moses de Leon (cf. Moses de Leon, *Sheqel ha-qodesh*, 5). According to zoharic theology, the soul, in its higher parts *ruaḥ* and *neshamah*, longs to return to the place from which it originated, that is, the realm of the *sefirot*, from its condition of exile or imprisonment inside the body.

[308] Cf. Joel 2:21 and Ps. 126:2–3.

[309] According to rabbinical tradition, the souls of the righteous are stored beneath the divine throne and they also return there after having expiated their sins (see TB *Shabbat*, fol. 152^{v}).

[310] Cf. Job 23:2.

[311] Cf. *Midrash Wa-yiqra rabbah* 32:1: "When the wicked go up inside hell and see the righteous seated in beatitude in heaven, their soul is vexed, as it is written: *The wicked will see and gnash his teeth in anger* (Ps. 112:10)." Zacuto reinterprets this traditional motif according to baroque imagery: the misery of the wicked condemned to the dark recesses of hell is contrasted with the luminous bliss of the righteous in heaven. The image indirectly evokes the idea of beams of light suddenly descending from above to illuminate for a moment the dark abyss of hell, thus transposing a pictorial chiaroscuro effect onto paper. See Bregman, "Dimness and Clarity," 49.

They say, accepting their Maker's verdict.[312]
Indeed, for those whose spirit adhered to You,
You established bliss as a lavish reward;
You kept ample the good that is in store for them!

[CLXXXV:921–925]
But those who strayed from You,
Solely pursuing evil, are sorrowful
And wretched, and far from being saved.[313]
Punish their spirit by the fury of Your anger,
Crush Your enemy in Your glory![314]

Praise God and give Him thanks:
Thus Hell Arrayed is accomplished and ends.

[312] The acceptance of the divine verdict by those condemned to Gehenna is mentioned in *Massekhet gehinnom*: "Every twelve months the souls [of the damned] are crushed into dust and strewed under the feet of the righteous, according to the [biblical] verse: *Thou shalt trample the wicked so they will be ashes under the soles of thy feet* (Mal. 3:21). Then their soul [*nishmatam*] is returned to their body and they leave hell with their faces as black as the rim of a pot, and they accept the verdict issued on them by saying: 'Well thou hast decreed about us, well thou hast judged us, *with thee, o Lord, is the right and the shame is on us to this very day* (Dan. 9:7)'" (Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrasch*, 1:149; *Reshit ḥokhmah*, fol. 47ᵛ).

[313] Cf. Job 5:11.

[314] Cf. Exod. 15:7.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BL =	British Library, London.
DBI =	*Dizionario biografico degli italiani*. Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–. 88 vols.
EJ =	Berenbaum, Michael and Skolnik, Fred, eds. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, 22 vols.
Iggerot ha-ReMeZ =	*Iggerot ha-ReMeZ [...] we-hugehu ʿal yede Yaʿaqov Nunes.* Livorno: Abraham Isaac Castello and Eliezer Saadun, 1780.
JCM =	Jewish Community, Mantua.
JTS =	Jewish Theological Seminary, New York.
LHAS =	Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest.
M =	*Mishnah.*
Midrash Rut ha-neʿelam =	Abrams, Daniel, ed. *Midrash ha-neʿelam ʿal megillat Rut*. Jerusalem: [s.n.], 1992 [reproduction of the edition Venice: Cristoforo Zanetti, 1566].
NLI =	National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.
Reshit ḥokhmah =	de Vidas, Elijah. *Sefer reshit ḥokhmah.* Venice: Giovanni di Gara, 1578.
RSL =	Russian State Library, Moscow.
TB =	*Talmud bavli* [Babylonian Talmud].
Tofteh ʿarukh =	Zacuto, Moses. *Tofteh ʿarukh.* Venice: Stamperia Bragadina, 1715.
Tofteh ʿarukh 1743 =	Zacuto, Moses and Olmo, Jacob Daniel, *Sefer tofteh ʿarukh... we-Sefer ʿeden ʿarukh.* Venice: Stamperia Bragadina, 1743.

* The list includes primary and secondary sources used and cited in this volume, except for biblical and rabbinical texts.

Zohar = *Sefer zohar ʻal ha-Torah*. 3 vols. Mantua: Meir of Padua and Jacob of Gazzuolo, 1558–1560.

Zohar ḥadash = *Zohar ḥadash u-Midrash neʻelam*. Venice: Gerolamo Bragadina, 1658.

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Ms. Kaufmann A 534.

Jerusalem, National Library of Israel (NLI)
Ms. Heb. 1960=8.

London, British Library (BL)
Add. MS 27082.

Mantua, Jewish Community (JCM)
Ms. ebr. 54.
Ms. ebr. 108.

Moscow, The Russian State Library (RSL)
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INDEX

Written at the height of the Italian Counter Reformation, *Tofteh 'arukh* (Hell Arrayed) by the Mantuan rabbi and scholar Moses Zacuto (c. 1610–97) is a 925-verse poem in Hebrew graphically depicting the hereafter of sinners according to the teachings of Kabbalah, or Jewish mysticism. Initially circulated within Zacuto's own devotional confraternity in Mantua, the poem was eventually printed in 1715 and was instantly transformed into an early modern 'cult book': explicated and annotated, later supplemented by a 'paradisiacal' sequel by a fellow poet, it went through several reprints and was even the object of public readings verging on theatrical performances. This translation, complete with introduction and notes, makes *Tofteh 'arukh* accessible for the first time to English readers. It also opens a window on the composite cultural backdrop that shaped the composition and immediate reception of a towering work of pre-modern Jewish literature and one of the greatest examples of baroque poetry in Hebrew.

Michela Andreatta's English translation and rigorous study of Moses Zacuto's seventeenth-century dramatic depiction of hell, a classic of Hebrew devotional literature and a kind of Jewish echo of Dante, is a stunning achievement. Her brilliant reconstruction of the social, intellectual, material, spiritual, and poetic dimensions of the work enable the modern reader to grasp its literary greatness and its enthusiastic reception. This work is essential reading for students of Jewish and Italian cultural history and literature of the early modern period.

David B. Ruderman, *University of Pennsylvania*

Michela Andreatta's elegant translation of Moses Zacuto's seventeenth-century dramatic poem *Hell Arrayed* (*Tofteh 'arukh*) introduces English readers for the first time to one of the gems of early modern Hebrew literature. As Andreatta shows in her monograph-length introduction, this feverish account of a soul's Dantesque tour of hell mirrors the singular features of the Italian Jewish culture in which it was produced, a world so multi-faceted and unfamiliar today that it will astonish readers. This volume is a significant contribution to the Jewish library.

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Michela Andreatta teaches Hebrew Language and Literature at the University of Rochester. A specialist of the intellectual and literary history of Italian Jewry in the early modern period, she has published widely in the field, including an annotated edition of Gersonides (Levi ben Gershon), *Commento al Cantico dei Cantici nella traduzione ebraico-latina di Flavio Mitridate* (Olschki, 2009).

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