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Middoth for Ezekiel and Solomon

Jacob Judah Leon-Templo's framing of Tractate Middoth as scriptural exegesis for a bibliocentric former
converso audience

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: זכור אותו האיש לטוב
וחנינא בן חזקיה שמו שאלמלא הוא נגנז ספר
יחזקאל שהיו דבריו סותרין דברי תורה. מה עשה?
העלה שלש מאות גרבי שמן וישב בעלייה ודרשו
— בבלי מנחות מה.

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Jacob Judah Leon's *Retrato del Templo de Selomoh* is often viewed as a polemical work designed to promote the Talmudic model of the Jerusalem Temple among Christian scholars¹. Whilst most contemporary theologians dismissed the Talmudic model as a rabbinic fabrication in favor of the Biblical temple descriptions in Kings, Chronicles, and (especially) Ezekiel², Leon asserts that the Talmudic model represents the authentic plan of the Temple as received by King Solomon from God³. However, as the eminent scholar of all things Templo, Adri K. Offenburg, astutely points out, the *Retrato* is not exclusively rabbinic⁴: Leon does cite scripture alongside rabbinic material in his written reconstruction of the Temple⁵. Nevertheless, a closer examination reveals that Leon's reconstructed Temple is not a hybrid of the apparently disparate Biblical and rabbinic models. Rather, Leon roots the Talmudic model in scripture by creatively reinterpreting the Biblical temple descriptions as conforming to the rabbinic tradition. Leon's methodology reveals another sector of the *Retrato*'s intended audience: Spanish & Portuguese Jewry⁶. Having been reared in a Catholic culture that emphasized the primacy of the Bible, some former *conversos* in the process of reverting to normative Judaism were understandably vexed by the apparent dissonance between scripture and rabbinic tradition⁷. Uriel da Costa undoubtedly

¹ See for example: Leibman, Laura A. *Messianism, Secrecy, and Mysticism: A New Interpretation of Early American Jewish Life*. Middlesex: Vallentine Mitchell, 2012. p. 62; Morrison, Tessa. *Isaac Newton and the Temple of Solomon: an Analysis of the Description and Drawings and a Reconstructed Model*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2016, p. 97.

² Goudeau, Jereon. "Ezekiel for Solomon The Temple of Jerusalem in Seventeenth-century Leiden and the Case of Cocceius," *The Imagined and Real Jerusalem in Art and Architecture*, ed. Jeroen Goudeau, Mariëtte Verhoeven and Wouter Weijerspp, Leiden: Brill, 2014, pp. 107-8; Morrison. *Isaac Newton and the Temple of Solomon*, 53-85; Calmet, Antoine Augustin. *An Historical, Critical, Geographical, Chronological, and Etymological Dictionary of the Holy Bible*. trans. Samuel D'oyly and John Colson, London: J.J. & P. Knapton, vol. III (1732), pp. 23-25.

³ Leon, Jacob Judah. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew], Amsterdam: Levi Marcus, 1650, 1.1

⁴ Offenberg, Adri K. "Jacob Judah Leon Templo's Broadsheet of his Model Temple," *Universiteit van Amsterdam Publicaties: Rosenthalia*, accessed 6 March 2021, <https://cf.uba.uva.nl/nl/publicaties/treasures/text/t14.html>.

⁵ Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew]. On edition consulted, c.f. n. 23

⁶ Leibman. *Messianism, Secrecy, and Mysticism*, p. 62.

⁷ Moreno-Goldschmidt, Aliza. "Menasseh ben Israel's Thesouro dos Dinim: Reeducating the New Jews," *Jewish History*, ed. Jay R. Berkovitz and Ephraim Kanarfogel, New York and Berlin: Springer Nature, vol. 33 (2020), pp. 334-5.



voiced the frustrations of many conversos when he challenged the supremacy of the rabbinic tradition in light of scripture⁸. In addressing these challenges, rabbins like Leon de Modena and Mannasseh ben Israel endeavored to demonstrate how the plain meaning of scripture in fact corresponds to rabbinic tradition. The similarity of their methodology to Leon's indicates that the *Retrato* is also at least partly concerned with addressing Costaesque critiques of rabbinic tradition. By rooting the Talmudic model of the Jerusalem Temple in scripture, Leon legitimizes the authority of the rabbinic tradition to a Biblically oriented Spanish & Portuguese audience.

According to the standard Christian and Jewish commentaries that preceded Leon, the Ezekielian temple narrative (Ez. 40-48) depicts a building that is very much unlike the Temple as described in Tractate Middoth⁹. Most notably, the standard Ezekielian model always features concentric precincts while the Talmudic model is composed of parallel precincts¹⁰. While rabbinic commentators struggled¹¹ to explain how two temple descriptions that ostensibly derived from the same divine source could contradict each other¹², the bibliocentric Christian commentaries who predated Leon simply ignored the Talmudic model, effectively denying the authenticity of the rabbinic tradition in favor of the Ezekielian narrative¹³. As for the scantier temple descriptions of I Kings, II Chronicles and (to a lesser extent) Josephus¹⁴, these were either

⁸ Proietti, Omero. *Uriel da Costa e l'Exemplar humanae vitae* [Italian]. Spinozana: Fonti e studi per la storia dello spinozismo, Macerata, 2005, pp. 145, 147-9.

⁹ To name a few: Shlomo Yitzhaki, David Kimchi, Yom-Tov Lipman Heller, Richard of St. Victor, Nicholas de Lyra, Bede, Joseph Mede, and Juan Bautista Villalpando. *see* Shafer, Shaul. *HaMikdash HaShlishi* [Hebrew]. Jerusalem: Yefe Nof, 1963; Morrison. *Isaac Newton and the Temple of Solomon*; Goudeau. *Ezekiel for Solomon*.

¹⁰ *See* n. 9; Tractate Middoth 2:5-6, 5:1. Although Villalpando's Outer Precinct is composed of seven atriums, Villalpando nonetheless labels it as one subdivided precinct concentric to the sacrificial precinct. The same is true regarding Nicholas de Lyra's plan (*see* figs. 3,4)

¹¹ e.g. *Maimonides*, Bet Habekhira I:II. Interestingly, Maimonides seems to resolve the issue by refuting the Talmud's assertion as to the divine origin of the Talmudic model (*see* n. 12).

¹² *See* Tractate Zebahim 62a; Tractate Sukkah 51b; Tractate Eruvin 104a; Tractate Pesahim 86a.

¹³ Morrison. *Isaac Newton and the Temple of Solomon*, 53-85; Goudeau. *Ezekiel for Solomon*, 107-8.

¹⁴ Although Josephus' descriptions of the Temple in *War* and *Antiquities* seem to contradict each other, they are ambiguous enough to be interpreted as conforming to the Biblical Temple models. *See* Calmet. *Dictionary of the Holy Bible*, pp. 24; Schiffman, Lawrence H. "Descriptions of the Jerusalem Temple in Josephus and the Temple



construed by Christian scholars as conforming to the Ezekielian model, or else as describing a distinct earlier iteration of the Temple¹⁵. Even as Hebraism took center stage in Early Modern Biblical scholarship, the Talmudic temple descriptions were either ignored, or else confined to self-contained studies of rabbinic culture (such as that of Constantijn L'Empereur)¹⁶. French Benedictine Antoine Augustin Calmet's *Dictionary of the Holy Bible*, although published decades after Leon's *Retrato*, sheds light on the traditional Christian attitude toward the historicity of the Talmudic temple model. Calmet highlights the disparate arrangement of the temple precincts in Ezekiel and the Talmud. Having noted the disparity, he concludes that the Talmudic model's authenticity is dubious at best as "neither the Talmudists nor the Rabbins are of antiquity or authority sufficient" to provide an accurate description of the Temple¹⁷. In this climate of seventeenth-century Talmudic skepticism, Leon's Talmudic reconstruction of the Temple would have been quite contentious. Thus, Laura Liebman categorizes the *Retrato* as "forming a corrective dialogue" with earlier Christian representations¹⁸.

However, as Offenburg points out, the *Retrato* is not exclusively rabbinic. Leon does cite scripture alongside rabbinic material in his written reconstruction of the Temple¹⁹. Furthermore, it would be a mistake to conclude that Leon's promotion of the Talmudic model means that he "rejected Ezekiel as a source for the temple"²⁰. Leon relied heavily on Ezekiel in his reconstruction of the temple. That much is clear from the Hebrew edition of the *Retrato, Tabnit*

Scroll," Historical Perspectives: From the Hasmoneans to Bar Kokhba in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls, ed. David Goodblatt, Avital Pinnick, and Daniel R. Schwartz, Leiden: Brill, vol. 37 (1999).

¹⁵ Goudeau. *Ezekiel for Solomon*, pp. 107-8.

¹⁶ *ibid*, 96.

¹⁷ Calmet. *Dictionary of the Holy Bible*, pp. 24.

¹⁸ Leibman. *Messianism, Secrecy, and Mysticism*, p. 62.

¹⁹ Offenburg. "Jacob Judah Leon Temple's Broadsheet."

²⁰ Morrison. *Isaac Newton and the Temple of Solomon*, p. 97.



Hekhal, excerpts of which derive word for word from the masoretic text of Ezekiel²¹. However, Leon's reconstructed Temple is not a hybrid of the apparently disparate Biblical and rabbinic models. In his introduction to the *Retrato*, Leon asserts that his work sets out to "prove from the authority of scripture" the authenticity of his clearly Talmudic reconstruction of the temple²². To accomplish this aim, Leon creatively reinterprets the Biblical temple descriptions as in fact describing the Talmudic model of the Temple and thus conforming to the rabbinic tradition. For example: in *Tabnit Hekhal*²³ Leon cites the "Outer Precinct" described in Ezekiel as the scriptural basis for the Talmudic model's "Womens' Precinct"²⁴. However, while in the Talmudic model the Womens' Precinct precedes the Sacrificial Precinct, the standard interpretation of Ezekiel indicates that the Outer Precinct is in fact concentric to the Sacrificial Precinct²⁵. Leon resolves this discrepancy by creatively reinterpreting the text of Ezekiel. He indicates that is in fact the plateau of the Temple Mount (what he and Villalpando call the Gentiles' Precinct²⁶) and *not* the Outer Precinct, that Ezekiel describes as enveloping the Sacrificial Precinct²⁷. Leon then repositions the Ezekielian Outer Precinct in front of the Sacrificial Precinct, establishing it as the

²¹ E.g. חצר הפנימי, חצר החיצונה, קטורות ארבעים וכו', כי אם בבוא הנשיא וכו', חלונות אטומות/ים, אילי השער. Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew], 2.6.34, 2.7.45, 2.6.36. 2.6.44, 2.22.187.

²² Translation, Shane, Al L. "Jacob Judah Leon (1602-1675) and His Models of the Temple of Solomon and the Tabernacle," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 96 (1983), p. 50.

²³ It should be noted that in the original Spanish edition of the *Retrato*, Leon does not cite his sources. However, as demonstrated above, in the Spanish edition, Leon generally asserts that his model is based in scripture and evokes the architectural terminology of the Bible throughout (Shane, "Jacob Judah"; Offenber, "Broadsheet"; Offenber. "Jacob Judah Leon," 100). Thus, the average former *converso* would be persuaded that Leon's Talmudic model derived from scripture. For the more sophisticated connoisseur of Scripture, the *Retrato*'s Hebrew edition, *Tabnit Hekhal*, provides detailed notes showing where and (as this paper will endeavor to demonstrate) how his model derived from Scripture. If the Hebrew proved too challenging to decipher, an individual could always consult their local rabbi. *Tabnit Hekhal* was directed in large part to rabbis tasked with the Jewish education of former *conversos* (as is evidenced by its dedicatory poems lauding Isaac Aboab, Mortera, and others).

²⁴ Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew], 2.6.34 and reference to Ezekiel 40 *ad loc.*

²⁵ See n. 10.

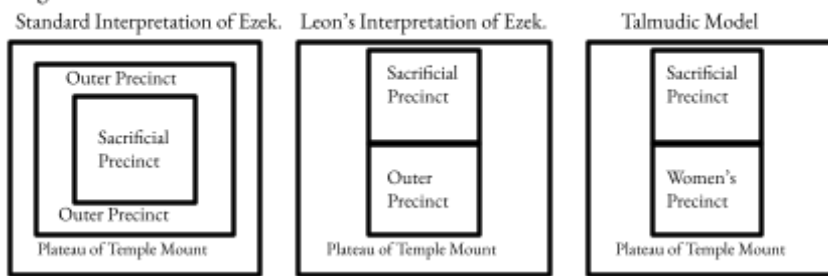
²⁶ See fig. 4 and Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew], 1.18

²⁷ See Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew], 3.3.18-20, and *not* references to Ezekiel 40:6-27 *ad loc.* Ezekiel 40:6-27 describes a series of gates as being concentric to the gates of the Sacrificial Precinct. These are usually interpreted as being the gates of the Outer Precinct, however, Leon construes them to be the gates of the Temple Mount, indicating that it is in fact the plateau of the Temple Mount which is concentric to the Sacrificial Precinct.



scriptural basis for the Talmudic model's Womens' Precinct (fig. 1)²⁸. Another architectural

fig. 1



discrepancy between the standard interpretation of Ezekiel and the Talmudic model that Leon must resolve

in order to root Tractate Middoth in scripture is the positioning of the auxiliary chambers (לשכות)

of Ezekiel 42:1-13 . Most reconstructions of the Ezekielian model (with the notable exception of

Villalpando's model) position these chambers in freestanding buildings adjacent to the Temple

sanctuary²⁹. However, the Talmudic model only features chambers that hug the wall of the

Sacrificial Precinct³⁰. To resolve this discrepancy, Leon (possibly following the example of

Villalpando in this regard) once again creatively reinterprets Ezekiel. He asserts that in the

Ezekielian model all chambers, including the auxiliary chambers, in fact do hug the walls of the

Sacrificial Precinct as they do in the Talmudic model, establishing the Ezekielian model as the

scriptural basis for the Talmudic placement of the auxiliary chambers³¹. Other Talmudic temple

elements that Leon roots in the text of Ezekiel include the Chamber of Phineas the Dresser, the

Chamber of Abtinas, as well as the marble tables and the royal throne in the Sacrificial Precinct

³². Another indication that Leon interpreted the Ezekielian temple description as conforming to

the Talmudic model might derive from a set of portraits of the Dutch haham by Salom Italia (fig.

2). Underneath both portraits, Leon's reconstruction of the talmudic model is depicted alongside

²⁸ Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew], 2.6.44

²⁹ E.g. Shlomo Yitzhaki, Yom-Tov Lipman Heller, Nicholas de Lyra, Joseph Mede. see Shafer. *HaMikdash HaShlishi* [Hebrew]; Morrison. *Isaac Newton and the Temple of Solomon*.

³⁰ Tractate Middoth, 1:5-7,5:1-4.

³¹ Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew], 2.5.32, 2.18. 106, 126-7,132-4, 2.20.171-3.

³² Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew], 2.2.10, 2.16.99, 2.18. 106, 132, and see references to Ezekiel ad loc.



a figure grasping a measuring rod and cord³³. This figure most likely represents the identically equipped angelic being that guides the prophet Ezekiel through the Temple in the Biblical narrative³⁴. As if to confirm his identity, the figure as he is depicted in the earlier portrait stands underneath a legend featuring a verse from Ezekiel (43:12)³⁵. Leon's rabbinically validating exegesis of scripture is not limited to Ezekiel. As previously mentioned, Leon cites I Kings, II Chronicles, and other Biblical accounts of the Jerusalem Temple in his reconstruction of the Talmudic model³⁶. Although these scantier descriptions less frequently blatantly contradict the Talmudic model, there is one notable discrepancy between the Temple as described in II Chronicles and in Tractate Middoth. While the Talmud marks the height of the Sanctuary's porch at one hundred cubits, II Chronicles sets it at one hundred and twenty cubits³⁷. Leon resolves this discrepancy by asserting that the porch described in Chronicles is in it of itself only one hundred cubits high, while its ornamental roof adds an extra twenty cubits to its height. He further asserts that this roof also adorns the Talmudic model. Thus, Leon establishes II Chronicles as the source for the height of the Talmudic model³⁸. As for the dimensions provided for the Sanctuary in I Kings and II Chronicles, they result in a structure that is much smaller than the grand Sanctuary as described in Middoth³⁹. Leon resolves this discrepancy by asserting that the scantier temple descriptions of I Kings and II Chronicles do not do justice to the full scale of Solomon's Temple, whose expanded measurements are preserved in Tractate Middoth⁴⁰. Thus, Leon validates I Kings and II Chronicles as the suitable scriptural sources for the Talmudic model. All in all,

³³ Offenburg, Adri K. "Dirk van Santen and the Keur Bible: New Insights into Jacob Judah (Arye) Leon Templo's Model Temple". *Studia Rosenthaliana*, vo. 37, 2004, pp. 402, 404, 417.

³⁴ Ezekiel 40:3.

³⁵ Offenburg, Adri K. "Dirk van Santen and the Keur Bible," p. 402.

³⁶ Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew].

³⁷ Tractate Middoth 4:6; II Chronicles 3:4

³⁸ Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew], 2.21.176, 2.26.246 and references to II Chronicles *ad loc.*

³⁹ I Kings 6; II Chronicles 3.

⁴⁰ Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew], 2.22.196 n. 2.



Leon's creative reinterpretation of scripture is designed to enable the rooting of the Talmudic temple model in scripture.

As previously noted, Leon was far from the first rabbinic scholar to contend with the apparent discrepancies between the Biblical temple models and the Talmudic model. However, whereas his predecessors resolve these discrepancies by asserting that the varying temple descriptions correspond to varying historical iterations of the Temple, Leon insists that all the varying Biblical descriptions in fact conform to the Talmudic model of the Temple⁴¹. There are instances⁴² when Leon acknowledges architectural differences between the First and Second Temple, however, these instances are specifically singled out⁴³. Otherwise, as previously demonstrated, Leon treats the Biblical and Talmudic accounts as if they are describing the same building⁴⁴. As for elements of the Temple utterly unique to the Biblical descriptions, Leon will import those elements into his Talmudic model as if they are part and parcel of the rabbinic tradition. Examples of such elements include the sanctuary's Narrowing Windows, the Spiral Stairs, the Trickling Waters, and the Solomonic Sea of I Kings⁴⁵. The classical accounts of Josephus are also given a pro-rabbinic treatment. Drawing from *Antiquities*, Leon incorporates elements unique to Josephus' account such as the Royal Stoa and the Temple Warning Inscriptions⁴⁶. This is not to suggest that Leon's reconstruction is a hybrid of Biblical, classical, and rabbinic accounts, for the temple described in the *Retrato* is thoroughly a Talmudic building.

⁴¹ E.g. Shlomo Yitzhaki, David Kimchi, Maimonides, Yom-Tov Lipman Heller. *see* Shafer. *HaMikdash HaShlishi* [Hebrew]; *Maimonides*, Bet Habekhira I:II; Radak on Ezekiel 40:5; Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew], introduction and throughout; Shane, Al L. "Jacob Judah Leon," p. 50.

⁴² E.g. Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew], Introduction, 2.22.196 n. 2 2.18.112 n1, 2.11.59 n2.

⁴³ *See* n. 42 and Offenburg, Adri K. "Jacob Jehuda Leon (1602-1675) and his Model of the Temple," *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. E.G. van der Wall and Johannes van der Berg, Leiden: Brill, 1988, p. 101.

⁴⁴ That is, Leon indicates that the Second Temple was rebuilt in exact accordance with the First Temple's plan as it is preserved in Tractate Middoth.

⁴⁵ Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew], 2.22.195, 2.23.213, 217, 3.8.14-6.

⁴⁶ Leon. *Tabnit Hekhal* [Hebrew], 2.3.24, 2.5.30.



Rather, the added Biblical and classical elements adorn Leon's Talmudic model like historical credentials, bolstering the authority of the rabbinic tradition by associating it with more widely accepted historical materia. By the end of Leon's wonderfully creative *Retrato*, Josephus has become part and parcel of the rabbinic tradition, Ezekiel and Middoth have been construed as describing the same building, and the Talmudic model of the Jerusalem Temple has been thoroughly rooted in Scripture.

The Spanish text of the *Retrato* indicates primarily a Jewish audience of Spanish & Portuguese extraction. Leon's Christian readers would have to avail themselves of either the Latin, Dutch, or French editions (1642-3) of the *Retrato*, as a Spanish text would have been less accessible to them⁴⁷. As for the Hebrew edition (1650), it was probably prepared for a rabbinic audience⁴⁸. However, former *conversos* newly returned to Judaism would possess little to no knowledge of Latin and Hebrew, and would be much more familiar with Spanish. Therefore, the *Retrato* was most likely composed in Spanish to accommodate them, just as Mannaseh ben Israel's *Conciliador* was composed in Spanish "to benefit the members of [his] nation who, for the most part, lack an understanding of the Hebrew language"⁴⁹. Thus, Leibman typifies the audience of Leon's *Retrato* as "*converso*". As for Leon's own *converso* origins, they remain elusive⁵⁰. Simon Schama suggests he was born near Coimbra or Amsterdam, while Jacob Zwarts insists that he was born in Hamburg⁵¹. What is known is that Leon (née Leaõ) was of Spanish & Portuguese extraction⁵². However, he arrived with his parents in Northern Europe by 1605, when

⁴⁷ Nadler, Steven M. *Menasseh ben Israel: Rabbi of Amsterdam*, Jewish Lives Series, eds. Heene Smith, Anita Shapira, and Steven J. Zipperstein, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018, pp.63.

⁴⁸ See n. 23

⁴⁹ Nadler. *Menasseh ben Israel*, p. 62.

⁵⁰ Shane, Al L. "Rabbi Jacob Judah Leon (Templo) of Amsterdam (1603-1675) and his Connections with England," *Transactions & Miscellanies (Jewish Historical Society of England)*, Vol. 25 (1973-1975), p.120.

⁵¹ Schama, Simon. "The Story of the Jews: Finding the Words, 1000 BC-1492 AD," New York: HarperCollins, 2013, p. 166; Offenburger, Adri K. "Jacob Jehuda Leon," p. 69.

⁵² Offenburger, Adri K. "Jacob Jehuda Leon," p. 98.



by his own reckoning he would have been an infant⁵³. Leon would have no memory of life under Catholic rule or the inquisition. Furthermore, he would have had a thoroughly rabbinic-Jewish upbringing, studying under the tutelage of Isaac Uziel⁵⁴. Nevertheless, it would be rash to conclude that Leon was thoroughly disconnected from his former *converso* heritage. If he did not personally experience any sense of tension between his identity as a member of the *Naçao* and as a rabbinic Jew, then he certainly had to contend with such tensions as they manifested among his pupils and congregants in Middleburg, and Amsterdam. Besides from being a schoolmaster at the Ets Haim academy (having replaced ben Israel upon the latter's dismissal) and an "assistant Rabbi," *Rubi* Leon likely served as a *dayan* (rabbinical judge), meaning he was well steeped in the communal affairs of the *kahal*. Needless to say, Leon was heavily involved in the education of recently arrived former *conversos* in Middleburg and Amsterdam⁵⁵. Thus, Leon would have been intimately familiar with the types of frustrations expressed by former *conversos* as they encountered the rabbinic tradition for the first time.

The first former *converso* to voice those frustrations in a systematic way was Uriel da Costa. In 1614, da Costa arrived in Hamburg with his brother, eager to begin his life as an open Jew. However, it appears that da Costa was put off by the what he calls the "*tradição de boca*," that is, the rabbinic tradition⁵⁶. Da Costa's public dissemination of his critiques of rabbinic tradition culminated in his excommunication, humiliating ceremonial reconciliation with the Amsterdam community, and eventual suicide⁵⁷. Da Costa is often grouped together with the more famous Spanish & Portuguese heterodox thinker, Baruch Spinoza⁵⁸. Indeed Miriam Bodian

⁵³ *ibid*, p. 98; Schama. "The Story of the Jews," p. 69; Shane. "Rabbi Jacob Judah Leon," p. 120.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 96-8.

⁵⁵ Shane. "Rabbi Jacob Judah Leon," p. 120-1.

⁵⁶ Moreno-Goldschmidt, Aliza. "Menasseh ben Israel's Thesouro dos Dinim," p. 348.

⁵⁷ Proietti. *Uriel da Costa* [Italian], p. 13.

⁵⁸ *E.g.* Moreno-Goldschmidt. "Menasseh ben Israel's Thesouro dos Dinim," p. 342.



painted da Costa as a sort of humanist philosopher by asserting that his critiques fundamentally express the radical notion “that an individual, through the exercise of reason, had the right to challenge the authenticity of a religious tradition purportedly based on revelation.”⁵⁹ However, even Bodian identifies “the Oral Law” to be the specific object of da Costa’s critiques.⁶⁰ Thus, it might be too broad of a generalization to qualify both da Costa and Spinoza as systematic critics of Biblical and religious tradition⁶¹. Only later in life, as “experience and years clarified many things” for da Costa did he experience a “change in judgment” which provoked him to conclude in his biography *Exemplar Umanae Vitae* that “the law of Moses was not divine, but merely a human fabrication”⁶². Young da Costa, on the other hand, was fully convinced of the authority of *Ley de Moses*, revered as it was among Judaizing *conversos* in inquisitorial lands⁶³. While in Portugal, he studied the Old Testament meticulously and resolved to observe its precepts⁶⁴. In the bibliocentric lands of the inquisition, without access to rabbinic material, it is only natural that da Costa’s conception of truth and ethics would stem from the Biblical text⁶⁵. Thus, when he arrived in Hamburg, he came to realize “within a matter of days” that the rabbinic tradition “did not in the slightest accord with what Moses had prescribed”⁶⁶. Herman Prins Salomon has demonstrated that da Costa was the author of a 1616 letter sent to Leone de Modena systematically outlining the former’s critiques of *halacha* in light of the apparent dissonance

⁵⁹ Bodian, Miriam. “Reviews of Uriel Da Costa: Examination of Pharisaic Traditions by H. P. Salomon and I. S. D. Sassoon,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Vol. 87, No. 1/2 (Jul. - Oct., 1996), p. 168.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *c.f.* Moreno-Goldschmidt. “Menasseh ben Israel’s Thesouro dos Dinim,” p. 342.

⁶² Proietti. *Uriel da Costa* [Italian], p. 153 [Authors translation]. *As to the authenticity of the Exemplar see pp.* 103-133.

⁶³ Moreno-Goldschmidt. “Menasseh ben Israel’s Thesouro dos Dinim,” p. 345; Proietti. *Uriel da Costa* [Italian], p. 145, 147-9.

⁶⁴ Proietti. *Uriel da Costa* [Italian], p. 145.

⁶⁵ Moreno-Goldschmidt. “Menasseh ben Israel’s Thesouro dos Dinim,” p. 344.

⁶⁶ Proietti. *Uriel da Costa* [Italian], p. 147 [Author's translation].



between the Biblical law and rabbinic tradition. The letter, as summed up in de Modena's fiery response *Magen VeSina* and in the introduction to da Costa's recently unearthed opus *Exame das Tradicoes Pharasias*, presents several instances of rabbinic traditions that blatantly contradict the text of the Hebrew Bible⁶⁷. For example: while the text of the Bible explicitly prescribes *lex talionis* in the case of an 'eye for an eye', the rabbinic tradition only entitles the injured party to monetary compensation. In light of this discrepancy, the bibliocentric da Costa prefers the Biblical text over rabbinic tradition. Da Costa argues that while *lex talionis* serves as a powerful deterrent, the lenient rabbinic legal system would not effectively dissuade potential criminals. Thus, da Costa denounces the rabbinic tradition as hindering authentic Israelitish justice⁶⁸. Ultimately, it is the apparent dissonance between the scripture and rabbinic tradition that motivates da Costa's skeptical attitude toward rabbinic Judaism. Da Costa lists other instances in which rabbinic tradition contradicts Biblical law. He challenges the rabbinic observance of an extra day of *Yom Tov* in the diaspora on the grounds that the practice explicitly violates the Biblical injunction against supplementing new laws to Torah (בל תוסיף)⁶⁹. Da Costa also underscores the disparity between scripture and the rabbinic tradition with regard to prescribed methods of execution. Whereas the Bible asserts that a prostitute who hails from the priestly clans is burned at the stake, the rabbinic tradition insists that she is made to ingest molten lead⁷⁰. Citing another contradiction between Biblical law and rabbinic practice, da Costa illustrates the case of the hazardous ox which gored a person to death. According to simple reading of the

⁶⁷ Salomon, Herman Prins. "A COPY OF URIEL DA COSTA'S "EXAME DAS TRADICOËS PHARISEAS" LOCATED IN THE ROYAL LIBRARY OF COPENHAGEN," *Studia Rosenthaliana*, Leuven: Peeters Publishers, vol. 24 no. 2 (fall 1990).

⁶⁸ Modena, Judah Leone de. *Magen VeSina*, pub. Abraham Geiger, Breslau, 1856, Q. 6.

⁶⁹ Modena. *Magen VeSina*, Q. 3; Deuteronomy 13:1. Interestingly enough, Haham Svi Ashkenazi used a similar argument to defend his position that travelers to the holy land need observe only one day of yom tov (Ashkenazi, Tzvi Hirsch. *Shut Haham Svi*, Debresiner, 1942. Responsa 167.).

⁷⁰ Modena. *Magen VeSina*, Q. 4.



Bible, the victims heirs may demand that the owner of the ox be put to death, whereas in the rabbinic tradition, the owner is only ever liable to financially compensate the victims heirs⁷¹.

Da Costa was not the only former *converso* to have been disturbed by the apparent dissonance between scripture and rabbinic tradition. Isaac Orobio de Castro admitted to Juan de Prado that upon first encountering rabbinic Judaism in Amsterdam he was confounded by “many of the customs, [and] rabbinical responsa as to practicalities, and rulings which do not inherently affect the law of God”, highlighting a perceived general dissonance between rabbinic tradition and the *Ley de Moses* as he conceived it⁷². For as Aliza Moreno-Goldschmidt asserts, da Costa’s frustrations reflect a “general intellectual turbulence” that former *conversos* shared in common⁷³. Like de Castro, former *conversos* were bibliocentric: “before the New Christians returned to Judaism, they had very limited access in Iberian lands to normative Jewish books...however... the Biblical text was relatively accessible to the *conversos*.” Their conception of Jewish faith and practice stemmed from the *Ley de Moses*⁷⁴. Thus, it is only natural that some of them would have been greatly put off by the apparent dissonance between scripture and rabbinic tradition. This bibliocentrism carried over from inquisitorial lands engendered a Jewish culture among the Spanish & Portuguese that strove to reconcile the rabbinic tradition to the Bible, as for them “it was unthinkable to disconnect any text that purported to deal with some aspect of the essence of Judaism from the Biblical source.”⁷⁵

Therefore, Moreno-Goldschmidt asserts, the rabbis and educators of these New Jews concluded that it was imperative to demonstrate the origin of rabbinic practice in the *Ley de*

⁷¹ Modena. *Magen VeSina*, Q. 5, A.5.

⁷² Kaplan, Yoseph. *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro*, trsn. Raphael Loewe, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 347.

⁷³ Moreno-Goldschmidt. “Menasseh ben Israel’s Thesouro dos Dinim,” p. 347-8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 344.

⁷⁵ Moreno-Goldschmidt. “Menasseh ben Israel’s Thesouro dos Dinim,” p. 344.



Moses in order to inculcate Jewish practice among former *conversos*⁷⁶. Moreno-Goldschmidt characterizes Mannasseh ben Israel's *Thesouro dos Dinim* as partly dedicated to addressing the dissonance between scripture and rabbinic law⁷⁷. In the *Thesouro*, the Bible features as the most prominent source of authority cited by ben Israel. The *halachic* manual includes more than a hundred Biblical references rooting rabbinic practices in the text of the Bible⁷⁸. For example: ben Israel roots the rabbinic Jewish method of ritual slaughter in scripture by interpreting the verse "and you shall slaughter...as I have commanded thee" as indicating that God orally transmitted the correct procedure for ritual slaughter to the ancient sages⁷⁹. Similarly, he defends the strict rabbinic Jewish sabbath restrictions by asserting that the ambiguity of the Biblical injunction against conducting "labor" on sabbath indicates that God must have orally clarified for the ancient sages what constitutes "labor"⁸⁰. Neither of these scriptural expositions were originally developed by ben Israel (in fact, they appear in the Talmud⁸¹). However, the fact that ben Israel goes out of his way to present them in a practical *halachic* manual designed for the layman suggests that he is mindful of critiques leveled against the *halacha* by rabinnic skeptics⁸².

In addressing Uriel da Costa's critiques of the rabbinic tradition, Leone de Modena dedicates the major part of his responsum *Magen VeŞina* to rooting the rabbinic tradition in scripture, thereby endeavoring to resolve the perceived dissonance between the 'written' (Biblical) and 'oral' (rabbinic) law. In *Magen VeŞina*, De Modena quite vociferously insists that

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Moreno-Goldschmidt. "Menasseh ben Israel's *Thesouro dos Dinim*," p. 347; Menasseh ben Israel. *Thesouro dos Dinim*, Part IV, 4:1; Deuteronomy 12:21.

⁸⁰ Moreno-Goldschmidt. "Menasseh ben Israel's *Thesouro dos Dinim*," p. 347; Menasseh ben Israel. *Thesouro dos Dinim*, Part III, 43:1.

⁸¹ *E.g.* Tractate Hullin 28a; Tractate Shabbat 177b.

⁸² Moreno-Goldschmidt. "Menasseh ben Israel's *Thesouro dos Dinim*," p. 347-8.



the Oral Law cannot in any way contradict the text of the Written Law⁸³. The exigency of this assertion, which may actually be at odds with several passages in the Talmud, indicates the pronounced bibliocentrism of Spanish & Portuguese Jewry. Merely demonstrating the ethical superiority of the rabbinic law would not be enough to inculcate adherence to rabbinic Judaism among former *conversos* like da Costa. Rather, de Modena must endeavor to root the rabbinic tradition in scripture in order to appeal to their bibliocentric mentality. De Modena employs a two-pronged strategy in order to thoroughly ‘biblicize’ the rabbinic tradition. Firstly, de Modena establishes the concept of the rabbinic tradition in general as rooted in the Bible. He asserts that many Biblical precepts are so ambiguous in their formulation that they necessarily require oral interpretation. As the Bible insists there is only one manner in which to fulfill the law (תורה אחת) (ומשפט אחד יהיה לכם), scripture itself indicates that only one tradition of Biblical interpretation--namely, the rabbinic tradition--authentically reflects the genuine meaning of scripture⁸⁴. Furthermore, de Modena expounds the verse “you must abide by the verdict they give you” as indicating that Israel must adhere to the orally transmitted rabbinic tradition⁸⁵. De Modena’s first approach mirrors ben Israel’s aforementioned expositions on ritual slaughter and the sabbath in that it asserts that the Bible itself sanctions the rabbinic tradition. His second approach is much more practical. De Modena highlights specific passages in scripture as the source for relatively esoteric rabbinic traditions that at face value appear completely detached from the simple meaning of scripture. For example: de Modena interprets the Priestly Examination of Haggai as the source for the rabbinic tradition regarding ritual impurity⁸⁶. While these complex regulations delineating the varying degrees of ritual contamination are not

⁸³ Modena. *Magen VeSina*, A1.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Modena. *Magen VeSina*, A1; Haggai 2: 11-13.



explicitly spelled out anywhere in the Bible, de Modena insists that Haggai grounds these laws in scripture. De Modena meticulously breaks apart and interprets each verse in Haggai's Priestly Examination as the scriptural basis for the varying degrees of ritual contamination according to the rabbinic tradition⁸⁷. Through interpretation of scripture, *Magen VeŞina* grounds the rabbinic tradition in the Bible in order to appeal to its bibliocentric former *converso* audience.

The similarities of ben Israel and de Modena's methods to Leon's is striking. Whether or not ben Israel and de Modena were as creative as Leon in their pro-rabbinic interpretation of scripture is beside the point. Ultimately, all three rabbins were motivated by Spanish & Portuguese Jewry's bibliocentric outlook to root rabbinic practice and tradition in the text of the Bible. In this regard, Leon enjoyed great success. His Talmudic model of the Temple became somewhat of an icon in the Spanish & Portuguese community in Amsterdam. In 1675, the community erected the famed esnoga of Amsterdam which was somewhat modeled after Leon's Temple⁸⁸. Even as pronounced a heretic as Baruch Spinoza owned a copy of the *Retrato*, for what Dutch Jewish library would be complete without it⁸⁹? Not to mention Leon's influence on Christian scholarship. One need only look to the Keur Bible and freemasonry's *Ahiman Rezon* to appreciate the impact Leon had on Christian perceptions of the ancient Temple⁹⁰. It might even be the case that iconic modern renditions of the ancient Temple, from Michael Avi-Yona's HolyLand Hotel model (1966) to the Jacob Judah's World's Fair temple model (1939) owe their popularity to Leon's triumph over rabbinic skepticism centuries before. Regardless, what is clear is that Leon's methodology is a product of the unique outlook of Western European Jewry in the

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Leibman. *Messianism, Secrecy, and Mysticism*, p. 63, 65.

⁸⁹ Offenburg. "Dirk van Santen and the Keur Bible," p. 409.

⁹⁰ Offenburg, Adri K. "Dirk van Santen and the Keur Bible"; Dermott, Laurence. *Ahiman Rezon: or, A Help to all that are (or would be) Free and Accepted Masons*. London: Robert Black, 1764.



seventeenth century. Owing to the Western Sepharadic Diaspora's unique circumstances, rabbis and communal leaders such as Leon, ben Israel, and de Modena had to adapt their teachings to appeal to the Catholic upbringing of the New Jews. In Leon's case, the rooting of the Talmudic temple in the Bible necessitated the creative reinterpretation of scripture. Ironically, it should be noted that Leon may have actually hit upon the Talmudic sages' own interpretation of Biblical temple narratives: while the Talmud makes a great fuss over ritual aspects in Ezekiel that contradict the rabbinic tradition, no reference is made of the architectural dissonance between the Ezekielian and Talmudic models⁹¹. This fact combined with references to Ezekiel found in Tractate Middoth and the asserted divine origin of the Talmudic plan might indicate that the Talmudic sages may have assumed that the temple described in Ezekiel *does* in fact correspond to the Talmudic Model⁹². Regardless, Leon's aim in rooting the Talmudic temple in scripture was in large part to appeal to the bibliocentric outlook of Spanish & Portuguese Jewry.

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⁹¹ see Tractate Menahot 45a-b.

⁹² e.g. Tractate Middoth 4:1; and see n. 12.



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fig. 2



