From Safed to Venice: The *Shulḥan ārakh* and the Censor

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I

In the year 1565 the first edition of a new book, the *Shulḥan ārakh* (‘Set Table’), appeared in Venice. This monumental composition was immediately diffused throughout the Jewish world and quickly attained authoritative status. By the end of the century, twenty editions of the *Shulḥan ārakh* had been published.¹ These editions varied in size, from huge folio volumes to very small ones (10 to 14 cm), defined by their publishers as pocket books to be taken on travels. Since then, this composition has been published in many versions, and in numerous editions of all sizes. With the exception of prayer books, it has remained the most popular book in Jewish libraries from the 16th century until today. The title *Shulḥan ārakh* became a symbol of Jewish tradition, for those who followed the Law as well as for those who rejected it.

The author of the *Shulḥan ārakh*, R. Yoseph Karo, was already well known, and his previous books had attained canonical status shortly after their first publication, earning him the title of ‘The Author’ (*Ha-Mehaber*). He was born in Spain in 1488 and after the expulsion moved first with his family to Portugal, and subsequently to several places in the Ottoman Empire. He finally settled in Safed, which was to become one of the most significant cultural centers in Jewish history, a place of spiritual revival having a critical impact on the generations.

¹ On the first editions of the *Shulḥan ārakh* see R. Margaliot, ‘The First Printings of the Shulḥan ārakh’, in: Y. Raphael ed., Rabbi Yosef Karo: Insights and Studies in the Mishnah of the Maran of the Shulḥan ārakh (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1969, pp. 89-100; M. Benayahu, Yosef Behiri (Hebrew). Jerusalem 1991; while Margaliot found 14 printed editions, Benayahu argued that there are 20. See also Benayahu, ‘Why did Karo compose the Shulḥan ārakh?’ (Hebrew), Asufot 3 (1989), pp. 263-274. Four of these edition appeared with the commentary of R. Moshe Isserles, Ha-Mappah (the Table Cloth) that presented the Ashkenazi tradition, and later became part of most editions.
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to come. Besides Karo, Safed residents included his disciple, R. Moshe Cordovero, and later R. Yitzchak Luria Ashkenazi, the founder of the Lurianic Kabbalah.2 Karo himself embodied mystical experiences and reflections, and combined messianic enthusiasm with the most comprehensive study of the Law. He was, as Zvi Werblowski called him, a lawyer and mystic,3 a combination quite common at that period in Europe and essential for the understanding of his project.

The first editions of the Shulhan ‘Arukh were published in the same years in which official censorship was first introduced into the Hebrew print industry in Italy, then the center of Jewish printing. Following the decisions of the Council of Trent, the Church as well as the political authorities in the Italian states established a new mechanism of pre-publication surveillance, in which each book had to be revised and approved before its printing. This policy was intended to replace the radical measures taken a decade earlier by Cardinal Carafa, head of the Inquisition who later became Pope Paul IV, under whose leadership hundreds of books were prohibited and burned, including the Talmud. Following a Papal bull of 1553, thousands of copies of the tractates of the Talmud were gathered and burnt in many Italian cities. This extreme policy proved to be inefficient, and raised the awareness of the need for new measures to face the challenge of the growing print industry on the one hand, and the Reformation on the other. The third session of the Council of Trent (1562-3) dedicated a long discussion to the


issue of censorship, and, in conclusion, issued a new *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, which significantly reduced the number of books that were prohibited outright. It also introduced a system of permanent surveillance based on the principle of expurgation: the removal or revision of certain paragraphs in the books as a condition for permission to publication. This decision marks the recognition that surveillance was not a one-time matter designed, or imagined, to ‘restore’ a supposedly previously existing reality, but rather an ongoing process.4

These measures were also applied to the production of Hebrew literature. Censors, most of them converts, were made responsible for removing anti-Christian passages from texts as a condition for their authorization. The new index preserved the ban on the Talmud. Nevertheless, the rest of Hebrew literature, including literature based on the Talmud, was now officially permitted after revisions.5

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Shulhan Arukh was therefore one of the first Hebrew books to be revised before publication and to receive legal approval by both state and ecclesiastical authorities. The composition that reflects the reshaping of Jewish tradition appeared at the same time, and in the same context, in which Catholic boundaries and ecclesiastical institutions were also shaped.\(^6\)

The mechanisms of permanent surveillance established during this period were far from being consistent and coherent. The Council of Trent marks the mere beginning of a process that continued for centuries and was to become a major factor in the process of centralization. Thirty years later, the text of the Shulhan Arukh came under the eyes and pen of another censor, Domenico Gerosolimitano, who demanded several additional corrections to the already printed editions, as well as new rules for future editions (most had been voluntarily implemented by then). Domenico, alias Shmuel Vives, came from the same context as the book discussed: the center of Safed. After several years in the Ottoman Empire, where he served as a physician, he arrived at Venice, where he converted to Christianity and became the most prominent censor of Hebrew literature.

The present essay reflects on the interactions between the publication of this major and formative Jewish composition, and the emergence of new modes of control. The publication of the Shulhan Arukh will serve as an illustration that reveals some of the main aspects of the transition to modernity, and as a prism for examining interrelations between culture, printing and censorship. At first sight, these processes can be seen as independent, and even as opposed to each other. The great legislator and the convert-censor are hardly equal partners, and their intentions were obviously different. But from an historical perspective, it is interesting to identify the ways in which both Karo and the convert strove towards a redefinition of Jewish existence, and participated in the redefinition of Jewish space and Jewish collective

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consciousness. My intention is to show how the principles of censorship were integrated into the process of re-shaping Jewish tradition and were also compatible with the contemporary principles of Jewish culture and its dominant directions. In two different ways, these two figures – the author of the *Shulḥan Ārukh* and the censor – raised in the same context, demonstrate the divergent directions of Jewish modern discourse. Both the book and the censor exemplify the transition to print.

II

The *Shulḥan Ārukh* should be seen as a clear manifestation of what is commonly called ‘print culture’. Indeed, it was not a revolutionary book. To some extent it should be seen as the conclusion of a long process whose origins go back to the 12th century, with the appearance of Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*, a composition intended to provide a systematic arrangement of talmudic law and make it accessible and comprehensible. In spite of the controversy it generated, this work gradually attained authoritative status. Later, new books of the same genre appeared, the most important of them being R. Yaakov b. Asher’s *Arba‘ah Turim* and the Ashkenazi *Sefer Mizvot Gadol* (*SeMaG*). The explicit aim of the *Shulḥan Ārukh* was to bring coherence and clarification to the field, and to solve questions of disagreement among the different authorities, particularly between Maimonides and R. Yaakov b. Asher. It was not intended to replace the other compositions, which were reprinted time and again. In form, it follows the *Arba‘ah Turim*, and to a certain extent can be seen as a conclusion of the history of the editing of the *Turim*, whose distribution and impact had grown in the preceding decades. Twenty editions of this composition were published before 1500. But at the same time, the *Shulḥan Ārukh*

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7 Books of codification express the systematization of knowledge, its summary and unification, as well as the integration of knowledge and practice. Unlike the Talmud, in which the halakhic discourse is introduced in the form of a continuous dialogue that moves from one issue to another, books of codification organize the laws according to subject.

8 R. Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy*, London 1993, pp. 251-269. Bonfil refutes Sonne, who claimed that print led to an increase in the influence of the *Turim*; see I. Sonne, ‘Journeys through the Place where Reality and the Book – History and Bibliography – are Adjacent’ (Hebrew), in:
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also significantly follows Maimonides’ interpretations and conclusions.9 The Shulhan Ārukh was also the conclusion of Karo’s own project: his comprehensive commentaries on the Arba’ah Turim (the Bet Yoseph, first printed a decade earlier, 1551-1558), and on Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah (the Kesef Mishneh, which was completed after the publication of the Shulhan Ārukh).

These aspects of continuity notwithstanding, we should emphasize the dramatic consequences that accompanied the appearance of the Shulhan Ārukh. It was immediately recognized as the ultimate authority and became the standard book for halakhic discourse, in spite of opponents who tried to undermine the entire project or criticized some of its rulings. The history of the Hebrew literature of codification can therefore be seen as an exemplary demonstration of the history of literacy in general, manifesting both continuity and change. The question in this case is not whether the transition to print was a revolution, but what was revolutionary in the advent of printing? As many scholars have emphasized, the invention of print should not be seen as a radical shift, but rather as the conclusion of cultural and technological developments, which preceded its appearance and were later integrated into the production of printed editions.10

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9 See Twersky, ‘The Shulhan Ārukh’ (above, n. 3).
Indeed, the *Shulḥan Arukh* embodies many aspects associated with the advent of print, such as: unification; distribution; the rise of new codes and new communities of readers; and the standardization of textual traditions and praxis. It was recognized immediately as the authoritative presentation of Jewish Law. The explicit purpose of this book was popularization – making the law available to every Jew – though the main intention was to bring about unification through a standard book serving both scholars and laymen. Karo assumed the book would reach a large audience, but at the same time also directed it towards scholars, as a guide for the study of the Talmud and the more sophisticated halakhic books. Indeed, this book became the basic text for study in the *yeshivot* (Jewish academies), as well as a manual for laymen that could be found in many private libraries. The composition was written with the explicit awareness that it would become an authoritative and standard text. Karo was an obvious, albeit exceptional, example of ‘a new author’, who was well aware of the advantages and the rules of the innovation of print. Inspired by an obvious messianic perception, he was well aware that the composition would be quickly disseminated throughout the Jewish world, and hoped that it would bring unification and consensus. He insisted on personally supervising its publication and made sure that the editors followed his instructions.

Karo’s intention was to establish what could be described, following Benedict Anderson, as an ‘imagined community’. This was not, however, a national community, the subject of Anderson’s book (which emphasized the role of the printing press in the emergence of modern national identities). On the contrary, this was a community of Law – followed by groups from different cultural contexts, who spoke different languages and preserved the Law in a wide range of divergent historical realities. This was not a community possessing a single culture, or set of customs. The type of collectivity defined by the *Shulḥan Arukh* was different; the book itself was to serve as the common territory of a dispersed people, who applied the law to different cultural contexts. This book was therefore perceived as a messianic manifestation, demonstrated by the declaration of the precise performance of the law.

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It produced a type of symbolic territory, defined by the common book that comes from Safed, the Holy Land, and integrates the exiles into a community, albeit a heterogeneous one.

The act of unification was, however, also an act of division. For shortly after its appearance R. Moshe Isserles (the ReMA) published *Ha-Mappah* (‘The Table Cloth’) to the *Shulḥan ʿArukh* (‘Set Table’), considered to be an interpretation and supplement to Karo’s work, while also challenging its claim to universal authority by introducing Ashkenazic traditions and customs that differed from the Sephardic ones. Rather than challenge the status of the *Shulḥan ʿArukh*, however, Isserles established the status of the *Shulḥan ʿArukh* as the authoritative text.\(^\text{12}\) In most of the editions since 1574, the *Shulḥan ʿArukh* was printed with *Ha-Mappah*, thus creating an interesting tension that was realized on the printed page. It was an act of integrating the Sephardic tradition and its accommodation into the Ashkenazi world, the confirmation of the authority and its undermining appearing on the same page.\(^\text{13}\)

All these dimensions demonstrate the modernity of Karo’s project, and thus challenge the common perception of modernity. The beginning of modernity is often marked as the rejection of the *Shulḥan ʿArukh* by the intellectuals of the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment) in the late 18\(^\text{th}\) century and by the reform movements of the 19\(^\text{th}\) century. At that time it was perceived as the symbol of stagnation and anachronism against which the ‘modernists’ revolted. It is therefore important to recognize that this symbol of tradition is itself modern (or at least ‘early modern’), an

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\(^\text{12}\) See E. Reiner, ‘The Ashkenazi Élite at the Beginning of the Modern Era: Manuscript versus Printed Book’, *Polin* 10 (1997), pp. 85-98. In Reiner’s words: ‘The fact that he wove his comments into the main text as glosses, indicates – besides upholding the traditional Ashkenazi attitude to a text – that the work itself, meant to serve as a textbook for laymen, had been accepted in Rema’s yeshivah at Krakow as a students’ reference book. Instead of the *Arbaʿah Turim*, the main text for the study of *poskim* (rabbinic judicial authorities) in the Ashkenazi yeshivah up to Rema’s day, he chose to use the new book, which was free of accumulated layers of glosses and emendations, up-to-date and lucid, and arranged along the same lines as the old *Turim* so that it could easily be introduced into the yeshivah curriculum. This was the crucial step in altering the canonical status of the *Shulḥan ʿArukh*. For a further discussion, see J. M. Davis, ‘The Reception of the *Shulḥan ʿArukh* and the Formation of Ashkenazic Jewish Identity’, *AJS Review* 26 (2002), pp. 251-276.

\(^\text{13}\) See Reiner, ‘The Ashkenazi Élite’. 

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obvious product of print as well as a manifestation of print culture and print awareness. It manifests the unification and organization of everyday life, and the reshaping of collectivity. It clarifies that not only is it impossible to talk about tradition versus ‘modernity’, but it is the very act of shaping ‘tradition’ that signifies the transition to modernity. The very dichotomy of ‘modernity’ versus ‘tradition’, that assumes the a-historical pre-modern existence of ‘tradition’, ignores the novelty and ‘modernity’ inherent in the shaping of tradition, the tradition that was later denied. On these grounds we should see modernity as a much more complex phenomenon, which can be marked by two dimensions: the first publication of the Shulḥan Ārakh; and its subsequent rejection by various groups. Each of these contradictory dimensions is in itself complex and multidimensional, in ways that leads us to rethink modernity as both the standardization of the Law and its rejection. It is not that one replaced the other, but that both appear simultaneously, each receiving various expressions in the course of history. In many aspects, the history of the dissemination, publications, interpretations and rejections of the Shulḥan Ārakh can be seen as a main axis of modern Jewish history, a notion that challenges common perceptions of modernity.

Focusing on censorship lends these suggestions another dimension and exemplifies the way early modern discourse of the Jews and their status emerged together with the emergence of new patterns of Jewish collectivity and ways of life. The concurrence of the arrival of the manuscript and the introduction of censorship should not be seen as merely coincidental. The major Jewish composition and the introduction of censorship were part of the same process associated with the introduction of printing and the professionalizing of publishing. Moreover, the publication of the book had been delayed for several years; it was compiled in four years (1555-1559) – in each of them Karo completed one volume – but was published only several years later.14 We have no evidence as to the reason for this delay, but it is possible to assume that one of the reasons was the temporary closure of the Venetian Hebrew print houses, following the condemnation and burning of the Talmud in 1553. It does not explain why he did not

14 See Margaliot (above, n. 1); Benayahu, R. Yosef Beḥiṭi (above, n. 1).
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publish it in Cremona or Sabbionetta, where Hebrew print shops continued production even when the Venetian industry was closed. Moreover, the last volume of Karo’s *Bet Yoseph* was published in 1558 in Sabbionetta, and was one of the first books to receive the ecclesiastical ‘license’ during the period of the campaign against the Talmud. The publication of the *Bet Yoseph* was seen as an emergency step, as the large number of talmudic citations it contained could commend it as a type of substitute for the Talmud. During this period, Karo could also have printed the book in one of the printing houses of the Ottoman Empire, and thus avoid the Catholic surveillance. But we may assume that he believed that an explicit permission from the Inquisition would prevent any further prohibition. It seems probable that he preferred the Venetian houses, owned by Christians, both for their quality and because they ensured the book’s dissemination all over the world. When he finally submitted the composition to the Venetian press (in Di Gara’s printing house, under the supervision of the publisher Meir Printz) he insisted on controlling its publication. Interestingly, it seems that it was easier for him to control the publication in Venice than in the Ottoman Empire. For the second edition was printed in Salonica and, according to Haberman and some historians who followed him, Karo even banned this edition, as it was published without his permission.

III

As was already mentioned, censorship of Hebrew literature must be discussed as part of the larger process of institutionalization of censorship and the establishment of new measures of control over literature in that period. This took place against the background of the transition to print, on the one hand, and the threat of the Reformation, on the other. Furthermore, rather than being a measure directed against the Jews alone, censorship was initiated precisely because Christians were reading Jewish literature. Thus, censorship should be examined in the framework of the rise of Christian Hebraism in the 15th and 16th centuries – that is, the growing interest of Christian scholars in certain

15 See Sonne, ‘R. Moshe b. Shushan and the Sabbionetta Printers’ (above, n. 6). It is possible that he did not send the manuscript to Sabbionetta because of a disagreement between his delegate, Ben Shoshan, and the printer.
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branches of Jewish literature, regarding them as essential for understanding Scripture and for confirming the Christian faith. As such, censorship must be seen as a means of incorporating Jewish literature into Christian discourse and into the category of permitted knowledge.\(^{16}\) It simultaneously created two communities of readers: books that were of common interest to Jews and Hebraists – biblical exegesis, midrash and Kabbalah; and books designed primarily for Jewish readers, such as halakhic literature. Most of the deletions of censors are to be found in the books of the first group. Most of the books that belong to the second (with the exception of Ashkenazi prayer books) were left mostly untouched.

Furthermore, censorship should not be seen merely as an agent that denies knowledge; it must also be understood as a constitutive factor, one of the elements that participated in the reshaping of literacy during the critical stage of the transition to print. Censorship is undoubtedly a controlling agent with a definite role, the intention of which (in the case of Church procedures) was to define the boundaries of orthodoxy. Yet its consequences must be examined in relation to other formative agents that took part in the cultural process and accompanied the transition to print, such as publishers, printers, editors and, in particular, the communities of readers.\(^{17}\) With the implementation of the principle of expurgation, censorship was also integrated into the process of preparation of texts for publication, and the censors served as one of the agents participating in the formation of the domain of reading. The explicit intention of the censors was to prevent forbidden contents; the practice of censorship, however, entailed a careful reading of various texts and resulted in the authorization of what the Church considered to be permissible knowledge. Censorship was imposed upon the Jews and definitely had an impact on Hebrew literature, but it did not necessarily deny knowledge.

The control over Hebrew literature demonstrates this aspect, because we can evaluate the role of different agents, according to both their

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16 For an expanded discussion of this thesis see my The Censor, the Editor and the Text (Hebrew), Jerusalem 2005.
professional affiliation and their religious identity. We should remember that most of the Hebrew book industry in Italy at this formative period – beginning with Daniel Bomberg, who opened his printing press in 1517 – was concentrated in Christian-owned print shops. The Hebrew print house was an exciting meeting place among Jews, Christians and converts, who were employed as editors and proofreaders. One may assume differences among the participants in this project, based on their religious identity; the encounter was often charged with polemics and tension. It seems, however, that these disagreements took place within the framework of previously agreed upon principles. An investigation of the editorial activity of the converts before and after their conversion demonstrates that, with respect to their attitude toward the text, conversion had no significant implications.

In the second half of the 16th century, censors appointed by the Inquisition (or employed by printers) joined this framework. As previously mentioned they were, for the most part, converts. The institutional absorption of categories of censorship into the process of preparation of books for print began following the burning of the Talmud, and intensified after the Council of Trent, as part of the expansion of control over written literature. Various editions printed in the late fifties and the sixties reflect a substantive incorporation of the principles of censorship. The trauma of Talmud burning and the financial losses it entailed left publishers wary of taking risks; hence, they themselves initiated acts of control. The first implementation of official acts of control was in the Conti Press in Cremona, established in 1556, during the campaign against the Talmud. From 1557, printing of books required special approval from the Inquisition.18 Subsequently, the same measures were instituted in Venice and in other cities.

Like the editors, those converts who worked as censors continued to deal with the same literary corpus they had studied prior to their conversion. The fact that converts also frequently performed the work of editing in the Hebrew print shops illustrates the complexity and ambiguity of the distinction between the terms ‘editor’ and ‘censor’. Thus, the starting point for many of the censors and editors was similar;

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18 See Benayahu, Hebrew Printing at Cremona (above, n. 5), pp. 74-86.
they emended the text in the aim of rendering it acceptable to their new religious affiliation.

This is especially marked in those cases in which converts worked both as editors and censors, so that in practice, the two activities were often integrated within the process of publication. Among them were Paulus Eustacius (Eliyahu ben Menachem of Nola, who converted after 1566) and Vittorio Eliano (of the Conti Press and later of the house of di Gara in Venice). Sometimes the converts changed roles when transferring to a new employer. In many cases the same person did the editing and the expurgation; gradually, the principles of censorship were incorporated into the editing process, whether by following explicit directives of the censor, or by applying directives that had been previously internalized.

All this said, we do not claim that censorship is nothing but a form of editing. Rather, this discussion enables us to position censorship with respect to editing. The censor’s guidelines were different from those of the editor: the censor turns to the text with the goal of erasing from Jewish books all those passages that do not meet the criteria of the Church or that were perceived to be anti-Christian. The censors’ erasures led, in several (though relatively few) cases, to the omission of passages that might have been preserved had they not intervened. But it would be incorrect to say that the erasure of those passages limited the possibilities for the development of Jewish culture.

IV

The rules of censorship were formulated 30 years later in the Sefer Ha-Zikkuk (‘Index Expurgatorius’), composed by the most prominent censor, Domenico Gerosolimitano, in a period that marked another stage in the institutionalization of Catholic censorship. As we have mentioned previously, Domenico Gerosolimitano was born in 1553 in Jerusalem, as Shemuel Vivas, into a well-known Spanish family. He then moved to Safed to study in the famous yeshivot. It is possible that the disciples of R. Yoseph Karo, R. Moshe Kordovero and R. Moshe

19 According to his testimony in the colophon to Bet Yosef, Tur Hoshen Mishpat (Venice: Juan Gripe 1567): ‘Revisto per mi Vittorio Eliano, iusta la copia della correction de libri. Come e nel officio deli clariss. Esecutori contra la Biastema’.
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Al-Sheih were among his teachers. His later activity as a censor shows that he acquired an impressive commend of various fields of Jewish literature. But Vivas did not stay in Safed. Later in life he apparently moved to Istanbul, where he lived in the court of the Ottoman emperor and, according to his own testimony, served as a court physician. In the 1590’s, he moved to Venice, where in 1593 he converted to Christianity and joined the Dominican Order. Along with other converts he participated in checking books in Mantua, Monferrato, Milan and Rome, where he also served as a Hebrew teacher in the Collegio dei Neofiti. In 1596, during his activity in Mantua, he composed the Hebrew Sefer Ha-Zikkuk (‘Index Expurgatorius’). Similar to other compositions in the genre, Sefer Ha-Zikkuk consists of an introduction providing principles, followed by a detailed discussion of more than four hundred Hebrew books. In each case, the specific words or sentences singled out for erasure are mentioned. In some cases, the references also provide explanations for the erasure.20

The main concern of Sefer Ha-Zikkuk was the elimination of attacks, explicit and implicit, against Christianity contained in the Jewish texts and the prevention of possible anti-Christian readings. The passages included: slanderous condemnations of Christianity; passages denying the humanity of the nations of the world or reflecting a desire for the destruction of the Christian world – expressed in sentences like ‘the

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20 On Domenico see P. C. I. Zorattini, ‘Domenico Gerosolimitano a Venezia’, Sefarad 58 (1998), pp. 107-115; A. M. Rabello, ‘Domenico Gerosolimitano’, Encyclopedia Judaica (1970), vol. 6, col. 158. Domenico wrote an autobiographical account (Ms. Vatican neofiti 32), parts of which were published by G. Sacerdote, I codici ebraici della Pia Casa del Neofiti in Roma, Rome 1893, p. 188; Aside from the sections published by Sacerdote, Ignazio Guidi added further details based on a document found in the archive of Santa Croce by Tomaseti; see I. Guidi, ‘Domenico Grosolimitano’, in: A. Freiman and M. Hildesheimer eds., Ferschrift zum Siebzigsten Geburstage Abraham Berliner’s, Frankfurt 1903, pp. 176-179. According to the document found by Ioly Zorattini, Domenico converted on August 6, 1593. This fact is also confirmed from his own biographical testimony. Written shortly before his death in 1621, he states there that he has been a Christian for 27 years. As he states that he converted at age 40, he must have been born around 1553. Shortly before his death, he dictated his account of Istanbul. This account has been recently published in: Geoffrey Lewis ed., Domenico’s Istanbul, translated with an introduction by M. Austin, Warminster 2001. For an updated summary of his life, see G. Prebor, ‘Sefer Ha-Zikkuk of Domenico Yerushalmi (1555-1621) and its Influence on Hebrew Printing’ (Hebrew), Ph.D., Bar-Ilan University 2003, pp. 33-60.
nations of the world are not called human’, ‘the best of the Gentiles, kill’; passages employing demonic metaphors to describe Christianity and the Church; and calls for revenge. All were eliminated completely, and were often excluded from later editions. Words like goy (‘gentile’), meshumad (‘convert’) or Edom – that is, words to which are attributed an anti-Christian significance (in general, correctly) – appear time and again in Gerusalemitano’s ‘survey’ of Hebrew literature.

These terms had a formative role in the shaping of medieval Jewish discourse and in the Jewish polemic against Christianity. The censors, however, suggested replacements of these terms: the word goy was replaced by Ḥokhama (‘worshipper of celestial bodies’), min (‘heretic’) by epikoros, Edom by Bavel ['Babylon'], and so on. Similarly, terms like ‘Canaanite’ or elilim were promoted in order to veer away from anti-Christian interpretations and create a common field of readings that defines Jews and Christians together in opposition to elilut (‘idolatry’, referring to pre-Christian worship), or, sometimes, Islam. The search for replacements demonstrates that the aim was not the restriction of Jewish readings, but the channeling of these readings in a direction that was not anti-Christian. The Church recognized the Jews’ right to self-definition, and their right to follow their tradition, but rejected the polemic definition directed against the Christian majority. The ‘other’ implied by the discourse is no longer a well-defined entity, i.e. Christians and Christianity, but is distanced from the contemporary polemic and becomes an abstract linguistic entity. Of course, even after the changes were made, Jews could give an anti-Christian interpretation to the text if they so chose, as they often did.

The main thrust of censorship concurred with central elements of editing, and with the Jewish culture that developed in parallel. Even prior to the institutionalization of censorship, and even when the print shops were Jewish-owned, many anti-Christian passages were often eliminated, and words directed against Christianity were dropped or replaced. In many printed books we frequently (though certainly not systematically) find erasures or replacements of the words mentioned above – goy, meshumad or Edom – as well as other anti-Christian expressions. Censorial activity certainly accentuated this tendency, but, in the end, it was only part of a broader process, which began prior to the invention of print and subsequently continued to develop. A notable
fact is, that the editions in which censorship restrictions were strictly preserved were often those preferred by both the contemporary public and modern scholars. The elimination of particular words during the stage of preparation of the composition for print required that the sentence be reformulated in such a way that the relevant field of readings would remain, but minus the polemic references to the ‘other’.

On certain occasions censorship indeed played a formative role. A good example is the Ashkenazi prayer books, *maḥzorim*, which unlike Sephardi and Italian prayer books contained explicitly anti-Christian *piyyutim* (religious poems). Here, censorship had a major formative influence. In the framework of this censorship, many explicitly anti-Christian *piyyutim* were deleted, including those expressing expectation of the political destruction of the Christian kingdom and the vengeance that would be wreaked against them as part of the messianic scenario. These contents disappeared from the Jewish texts.

On the other hand, the censorship required in books of legislation was particularly minimal, almost negligible. It did not touch or prevent a single one of the commandments. Although the censor did demand some erasures in a number of sections of these canonical books, they were relatively limited and were done with suitable attention, so as to avoid damaging the main statements of the halakha. Halakhic literature is the framework in which concrete Jewish existence was officially acknowledged; hence, the limited censorship of this literature demonstrates the wide permission granted through the implementation of control.

Most of the passages that were changed were those in commandments intended to distance Jews from Gentiles or forbid Gentile practices. But the aim of the censor was not to prevent the practice of these laws. In his third article in the introduction to *Sefer Ha-Zikkuk*, Domenico Gerosolimitano even explicitly states that ‘if, however, [the term *goy*] deals with any of the laws of the Hebrews, such as the laws of the Sabbath or prohibited foods, or wine touched by a Gentile or such, it is acceptable’. In other words, the separation from the Gentile, as formulated in Jewish law, is permitted. The explicit aim was the preservation of the halakhic discussion, while eliminating its anti-Christian formulation, even with respect to laws that were explicitly formulated in order to separate Jews from Christians.
The *Shulḥan Ārukh* itself was already written or edited according to the instructions of the ecclesiastical censorship, even though these regulations have not yet been fixed. The modern redactor of the *Mishneh Torah* expresses this in a fascinating way when, during a review of the history of certain halakhic texts, he demonstrates that ‘the *Shulḥan Ārukh* had been already censored from the beginning, in its first edition’. This is a striking comment; it means that the composition that has been seen for generations as the manifestation and embodiment of Jewish tradition should be considered as ‘censored from the beginning’. We cannot say whether it was censored by Karo himself, or by the editor in the printing press. The difference is not really significant or relevant, as there is no other allegedly uncensored version. Moreover, this text was confirmed by the author himself and accepted by all later generations. To say that it was ‘censored from the beginning’ means that one aspect of the shaping of Jewish tradition is to be found in its accommodation to the rules of censorship. There is no reason to believe that either Karo or his editor saw the instructions of the censors as damaging the texts, and there is no evidence of any objections to this policy. It implies that even before it came under the hand of the convert Inquisitor, censorship was internalized into the composition of the *Shulḥan Ārukh*, which became the focus of the modern Jewish experience.

We should emphasize, however, that this was done in the period in which the Talmud was prohibited. The composition of the *Shulḥan Ārukh* occurred in the same years in which thousands copies of the Talmud were burnt. Indeed, ‘Index Trent’ left the hope that it would be printed again, declaring that ‘if (the composition) appears without its title *Talmud*, and without the attacks and injuries directed against Christianity, it will be tolerated’. But as we know, in spite of hopes and several attempts to realize this option (such as the Basel edition of 1578 that was published under the supervision of an ecclesiastical

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delegate), this did not take place, and in 1596 even this qualification was removed from the prohibition. The continuous prohibition of the Talmud had a significant impact on Jewish culture, although later Italian Rabbis remained familiar with the composition, which they studied clandestinely, as well as with other corpora that were prohibited in early modern Europe.

While the Talmud itself was prohibited, most of the commandments and customs determined from it were explicitly authorized. This ambivalence marks a crucial dimension of the transformation of the entire Jewish discourse. The Talmud was denied both as a blasphemous book (because of the obvious anti-Christian passages it contains), but also because it was perceived as a rival source of authority. That is why the publication of the title Talmud was unconditionally prohibited even according to the Tridentine Index, which preserved the option for its republication. The title was denied even when the content was permitted.

V

This ambivalence defines the space of Jewish autonomy and its limitations. Jews explicitly and officially gained the right to keep both their books and their laws intact, on condition that they give up anti-Christian sentiments and any direct challenge to Christian superiority or express any objection to political authorities. The distinction between the Law and its source of authority – the ‘Oral Torah’ – defined Jewish existence as ‘ethnicity’ and ‘religion’, but not as a rival carrier of revelation and authority. This type of definition goes hand in hand with the logic of ghettoization that was implemented at the same time. As has been emphasized recently by Robert Bonfil, Benjamin Ravid and Roni Weinstein, the ghetto also provided an official acknowledgment of the right of the Jews to live in the Christian cities and preserve their laws and rituals. Censorship demonstrated a similar

23 For the entire discussion see Parente, ‘La Chiesa e il Talmud’ (above, n. 5).
24 See the discussion of this issue in Parente; see also in my The Censor (above, n. 16), chapter 2.
tendency, an explicit recognition of the Hebrew canon, after the polemic aspects embodied in it were removed.

It is significant that the *Shulhan Arukh* was written during the very years of the campaign against the Talmud. Karo did not take on his ambitious mission because of the prohibition, with the aim of preserving the knowledge of the Torah under such circumstances. In fact his previous book, the extensive *Bet Yoseph*, was perceived as a type of substitute for the Talmud. Although its publication began before the burnings of the Talmud (in the years 1551-1553) the final two volumes were published in Sabbionetta and Cremona in 1558, and were edited with careful censorial consciousness. This project clarified the principles of expurgation as they were implemented during the compilation of the *Shulhan Arukh*. It reflects a similar notion, emphasizing Jewish autonomous practice while reducing the polemic dimensions. In any case, it is significant that the magisterial composition remained within the boundaries permitted by the Inquisition.

Censorial erasures of halakhic literature (including *Mishneh Torah* and the *Arba‘ah Turim*) were usually limited to certain specific topics, although in several cases these erasures were significant. The censorial discussion of these works dealt mainly with laws concerning the attitude toward gentiles and the definitions of idolatry, where the censors’ basic demand was to draw a distinction between Christianity and idolatry. Yet even as far as these laws were concerned, the censor allowed the retention of all aspects designed to distinguish Jews from Gentiles. For example, both *Sefer Ha-Zikkuk* and the censors did not intervene in matters concerning prohibited wine, vessels made by Gentiles, etc., even if they sometimes required that the word *goy* be replaced in the sections dealing with these issues. Their restraint in

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such cases provided explicit recognition of the Jews’ right to maintain their separateness from Gentiles in basic areas of life. On one level, the distance from the Gentile was marked through the replacement of the term ‘avodah zarah (literally, ‘alien worship’; that is, idolatry, in a sense that was also associated with Christians) by ‘avodat elilim (literally, ‘worshipping of idols’) or other substitutes. Thus, in the Tur, Ḥoshen Mishpat, ‘it is prohibited to be judged before judges who are goyim’ (‘gentiles’) was emended by the censor of the Sabbioneta edition to ‘aku’m, and, in the di Gare edition, became ‘it is prohibited to be judged before judges who are Ishmaelites’.26

The first official signature of censors appeared on the second edition of the Shulḥan ʿArukh, Venice 1567 – by Vittorio Eliano, who used the conventional formula: revisto per mi Vittorio Eliano, iusta la copia della correction de libri Come e nel officio dell’i clariss. Esecutori contra la Biastema. But if we compare it with the sources in the books upon which it relied, we find the same principles already implemented in the first edition. For example, in the first edition of the Shulḥan ʿArukh, the title of the section on the laws of the foods of goyim was changed to ‘Laws of the Foods of the Nations (ʿamamin)’ (Yoreh Deḥah, Venice: Meir Prinz, 1565, p. 29a). The censors also accepted the term dinei ha-umot (‘laws of the nations’) as the general term. Similarly, the expression ‘as a rule, the “Gentiles” (stam goyim) take bribes’ (chapter 68) became ‘the Cutheans’ (stam kutim); ‘it is prohibited to return a lost object to a goy’ (chapter 72) became ‘it is prohibited to return a lost object to an ʿakuʾm’. To the expression yemei ʿeidehem (‘days of their feasts’) they added shel ʿakuʾm. Thus, where Even Ha-ʿEzer, chapter 24, dealing with the permission of women to come to market, distinguished between ‘Israelites who are not suspect of

26 Similar changes are made in manuscripts and printed editions of the Mishneh Torah. See a summary of this in the introduction (Hebrew) to the Shabtai Frankl edition (above, n. 21). On the other hand, in the Shulḥan ʿArukh the censor demanded the complete erasure of chapter 26 of Ḥoshen Mishpat (‘not to be judged by the laws of the Gentiles, consisting of four paragraphs’). In the copy in the National Library in Jerusalem, however, signed by Franguella, there are no erasures. The issue of dina de-malkhuta dina (‘The law of the kingdom is the law’) and the appeal to Gentile courts of law was an important concern of the Italian communities at this time. They sought to limit the application of the rule, yet they were aware of the need to receive permits from the authorities and apply them in many areas of Hebrew law. See Bonfil (above, n. 8), pp. 246-251.
homosexuality’ and the goyim who are, in many editions the word goyim was replaced by ʿovdei elilim (‘idolaters’).

This change also enabled the printing of the entire corpus of halakha, and thus provided legitimacy for autonomous Jewish existence, including its blatantly separatist aspects, among them elements that implied a basic rejection of the Gentile. This principle applies also to laws in which certain erasures were required; for example, in chapters 139-160 of Tur, Yoreh Deʿah, dealing with ʿavodah zarah (‘idolatry’) and its offerings (which was later changed to ʿavodat elilim). In chapter 139, which states that ‘deriving any utility from ʿavodah zarah is prohibited’, the halakhic framework remains while details that clearly hint at Christianity were erased. Paradoxically, this choice of words could, and certainly did, lead to the identification of Christians with idolaters. One particularly interesting case is to be found in chapter 224: ‘One who sees Mercury or other idols (ʿavodah zarah / elilim) says, “praised are You, our God, Lord of the universe, who is long-suffering to those who defy his will”’. In the Cracow and Lublin editions, the following comment is added: ‘but in our days, we do not recite this blessing, since we are among them and see it every day’.

Censorship thus participated in the larger process of the transition of Jewish identity to modernity; from a discourse based on theological terms and embodied within the theological debate, to a definition of Judaism in terms of ‘ethnicity’ and ‘religion’ – those concepts that were to dominate modern discourse. This was a long, multifaceted and complicated process, in which Catholic censorship played only a very limited role. But the printing press in general, and censorial discourse in particular, provides a unique opportunity to analyze the transition to

27 In the new edition published by Ha-Turim Institute, the term ‘nations’ has been restored. Further on in the passage we find censorial erasures not accepted in the Cracow edition: ‘Whoever sees a place from which idolatry was uprooted, if he is in the Land of Israel, he says: “Blessed are you, our Lord, king of the universe, who uprooted idols from our land”. If he is outside the Land, he says: “…who uprooted idols from this place”. And Maimonides, of blessed memory, wrote, that in both cases: “just as you have uprooted it from this place, so may you uproot it from all places, and return the hearts of those who worshipped (idols) to Your worship”, and I don’t know why Maimonides rules so …’. In the copy of the Venice edition in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, the curses against idolaters were erased from this chapter.
modernity. As I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere, the entire Hebraist discourse embodies this transition.

Moreover, we should emphasize that the period in which ecclesiastical censorship was institutionalized and exercised, the second half of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century, was a time of one of the most significant cultural revivals in Jewish history. Not only did the introduction of control over written culture not bring about a ‘cultural degeneration’, but the opposite is true. Besides the Shulḥan ʿArukh, we should also mention the printing of the kabbalistic tradition, as well as the rise of new types of ‘secular’ literature (such as historiography, poetry etc.). This impressive renaissance developed within the boundaries determined by the censors.

The rapid dissemination of the Shulḥan ʿArukh was accompanied by the spread of Lurianic literature, and particularly its internalization into ritual and the prayer book. It is interesting to note that the censor left the cultural products of the center of Safed almost intact. He completely authorized the tradition from whence he came and had formally abandoned. From his own point of view, as reflected in the practice of censorship, there was no contradiction between his conversion and this specific tradition (although he had more severe objections towards other sections of Hebrew literature). Together with the Shulḥan ʿArukh, these spiritual treatises also reflect how the advent of printing was associated with the rise of a new economy of everyday life, the spiritualization of life, and the integration of mystical texts into rituals. The Shulḥan ʿArukh should be seen as part of this tendency to organize life in all its details, and to view the observance of the commandments as part of the process of redemption.

Censorship is surely not the cause of this transition, but only a marginal historical actor in its realization. But it is a prism that illuminates the entire cultural field. It serves as a juncture in which Jewish cultural processes meet the new modes of governance and control. Jewish developments cannot be seen solely as a response to the new developments – rather, they are part and parcel of the same process.

VI

Aside from the discussions on Gentiles, we should mention here some additional erasures tied to laws of sexual relations, which have nothing
to do with theological polemic. For example, we find (Tur, Orah Hayyim, 240) the following passage: ‘But a man’s wife is permitted to him, so that anything he wishes to do with his wife, he may do. He may have sex with her whenever he pleases and kiss any body part he pleases, whether in the natural way or in an unnatural way or through bodily parts, as long as he does not ejaculate sperm in vain. And R. Yonah explained that even if he ejaculates sperm it is also permitted to copulate in an unnatural way, as long as he not make a habit of it, and does it only accidentally’. This passage was ‘erased after further investigation (be-tyyyun)’ in various editions, leaving the passage to read: ‘But a man’s wife is permitted to him, so that … he may have sex with her whenever he pleases … as long as he not ejaculate seed in vain …’. This emendation is interesting, because it accepts the halakha regarding ‘ejaculation of sperm in vain’, but eliminates the details on permitted sexual positions. Thus, the activity of the censor is related to the overall process taking place at this time, which is concerned with the concealment of sexual relations. In particular, the censor rejects the permission granted to have sex with a woman ‘in an unnatural way’, and in doing so, certainly proceeded in the same direction taken by Jewish society. The censor, indeed, did not efface the passage reading: ‘but if it was without her consent, it is prohibited’.28 It is

28 In Mishneh Torah, Laws of Prohibited Intercourse, chapter 21, the words ‘in an unnatural way’ were erased, while the rest of the sentence was left intact. So is the case in the commentary on the six tractates of R. Asher (Venice: Bragadin, 1552, 28a); Seder Nashim in The Mishnah with Maimonides’ Commentary. For a summary of the various emendations see Frankl, who writes (Mishneh Torah, vol. 12 [Shoftim], p. 1863): ‘In the printed edition of Venice, 1574, in which the Kesef Mishneh was printed for the first time, the censor eliminated every mention of intercourse “in an unnatural way” wherever it was mentioned in the Yad [=Mishneh Torah] (in all printed editions and manuscripts I examined) or in the commentators. In some places, the words “not in a natural way” were replaced by others. There were also errors in other matters, similar to unnatural intercourse … The Tur and the Bet Yoseph and the Shulhan Arukh, which were printed in that period have the same faults. In the case of the Shulhan Arukh, as a result of the omissions in the first edition all subsequent editions suffered the same fate, and we cannot know what was written originally on this matter (in most places it was the Rema who added such comments). But in the Tur Bet Yoseph, the first edition was not censored, but only the subsequent ones (in the Warsaw edition which is the one still copied today, much is missing in Tur Bet Yosef, Orah Hayyim, chapter 240, but nothing is lacking in Tur Even Ha-Ezer).
doubtful if these erasures led to any changes in Jewish conduct of that period, but they relegated the details to the private realm.

These observations do not intend to underestimate the oppressive dimensions of the new categories that directed the practice of censorship, and it would be wrong to ignore the power relations in which this practice emerged, and the reality it maintained. But it would also be wrong to ignore the constitutive role of the censors, and particularly the ways in which the practice of censorship points us towards a better understanding of the entire cultural process, and how external and internal processes were intertwined. We should see them as two sides of the same system, two developments that came out of the process of centralization (that was first demonstrated in the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain), and the rise of modern modes of power and power/knowledge relations. Jewish culture simultaneously redefined the concepts of its essence – exile and the messiah, tradition and Law – as well as the practices in which these concepts were embodied. The Jews gave new expressions to their uniqueness and role – through their clear distinction from the other nations, between their existence and the historical existence of nations in general – but not in a framework of polemic against Christianity. In fact, the acceptance of censorship marks the indifference to these topics in the Jewish consciousness of that time.

The censors themselves foreshadowed later Jewish attitudes. Through the act of conversion, the converts expressed the denial of the halakha. But at the same time, they also served as the protectors of the tradition, and as the agents who explicitly permitted it. It is in that sense that the conversion of the censor receives its symbolic significance. Both in the act of conversion and in the act of censorship, the censors reveal aspects of modern Jewish discourse. The censor participated in the definition of Judaism as a ‘religion,’ that is to say, as a set of rituals and beliefs that he himself rejected, and as an important textual tradition. While foresaking obedience to the Law, these figures continued to read the same corpus. Interestingly, in this manner they dialectically prepared the foundations for the modern European perception of Judaism and history. As such, they expressed an early stage of later secular Jews’ practice; just like ‘secular’ Jews, they continued to deal with the
same literature, while rejecting commitment to the halakhic values of those texts. The Post-Enlightment Jew took a similar attitude with respect to halakha, but without having to change his religion. He embodies in his work both the constitution of tradition and its rejection, and at the same time establishes the boundaries of Jewish existence.

The entire context of the publication of the *Shulḥan Ḕ Arukh*, its censorship and dissemination, refers therefore to the divergent and contradictory aspects of modernity, but also point to the interactions between these allegedly contradictory aspects. The examination of the publication of the *Shulḥan Ḕ Arukh* within the context of the establishment of new patterns of surveillance may challenge our very notion of modernity, suggesting that modernity includes both the establishment of tradition and Law, and their subversion. Although the intention of the censor was to restrict Jewish readings, in practice he participated in the construction of Jewish space and the reshaping of Jewish collectivity.

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