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# Biblical Allusions and Themes in the Early Renaissance: Joseph Sarfati's Use of Biblical Hebrew as an Encoded Language

*Shon D. Hopkin*

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES, numerous scholars have successfully overturned the “lachrymose” view of Jewish history in the Diaspora, demonstrating that the Jews were not constantly embattled victims of heavy persecution.<sup>1</sup> Rather, throughout the long history of the Jewish Diaspora and over the wide range of lands and cultures where the Jews lived, they were typically highly acculturated, with opportunities to participate in most of the economic and cultural opportunities available to others.

As positive as the Jewish situation often was, however, the Jews were still a clearly identifiable ethnic and religious minority, at times subject to violent religious persecution. Robert Chazan has recently reviewed the situation of the Jews in medieval Europe (1000–1500). He strongly defends the overall reassessment of the Jewish situation as more positive than was often believed. In order to provide an appropriately nuanced view, however, he also describes episodes of intense persecution, violence, and challenges to Jewish identity. As he summarizes the situation,

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1. This work began with an essay by Salo Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?,” *Menorah Journal* 14 (1928): 515–26. See also David Engel, “Crisis and Lachrymosity: On Salo Baron, Neobaronianism, and the Study of Modern European Jewish History,” *Jewish History* 20 (2006): 243–64, and Jonathan Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart: Rethinking Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

“Jewish status in medieval Western Christendom was complex, to put it mildly. Key to this status was the traditional stance of Christianity toward Judaism and Jews, as interpreted by the Church. This stance contained multiple elements, often existing in considerable tension with one another.”<sup>2</sup>

As will be seen, the life and work of Joseph ben Samuel Sarfati (pronounced Tsarfati, d. 1527) effectively demonstrates this nuance, including evidence of both strong social acculturation and high attainments in Rome, along with the need for caution while living as a minority in the midst of the dominant Christian society. This paper will focus on Sarfati’s coded warnings to his own people not to place their trust too heavily in the benefits of full absorption into the Christian religion and society. I will show that Sarfati used both the Hebrew language and biblical symbolism to encode those messages for his people. In particular, I will propose that the biblical theme likening the allure of foreign gods to adulterous love was used by Sarfati to present a message of warning for his own people.

### The use of Hebrew and biblical imagery in the early Renaissance

In the Diaspora the Hebrew language and the Jewish sacred texts often emerged as a focal point for the Jewish identity across the Mediterranean.<sup>3</sup> Hebrew was a language that united the Jewish people and gave them a unique identity.<sup>4</sup> During medieval times, Hebrew was something less than a true spoken language, but something more than simply a

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2. Robert Chazan, *Reassessing Jewish Life in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 133.

3. One good source for the viewpoints found in this and the next paragraph is Jacob Neusner, *In the Aftermath of Catastrophe: Founding Judaism 70–640* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009).

4. John Myhill, *Language in Jewish Society: Towards a New Understanding* (London: Cromwell, 2004), 66–68.

liturgical language.<sup>5</sup> The consistent return to and use of Hebrew meant that Hebrew and Aramaic words and phrases were shared easily and entered fluidly into common use. This vernacular, along with the high educational achievements of many communities in the area's language and culture, helped to create mixed languages such as Ladino, Yiddish, and many others.<sup>6</sup> The ability to communicate in a language unknown to the dominant culture made both written and spoken Hebrew useful not only in the synagogue, but also in nonreligious dialogue where one could encode one's message from outside ears. Although Hebrew knowledge among non-Jews was on the rise during Sarfati's day as the Renaissance encouraged a return to the study of the Bible in its original languages, most learned Christians were not highly skilled in their knowledge of Hebrew.<sup>7</sup> According to John Myhill, "Hebrew has also served as the Pan-Jewish language, the medium for use between Jews who do not share another common language and also for Jews when they do share a common language but want, for one reason or another, to use a maximally distinct Jewish language (e.g., if they want to be certain that non-Jews will not understand what is being said)."<sup>8</sup>

All these factors help explain why medieval and early Renaissance Jews regularly wrote both sacred and secular literature in Hebrew<sup>9</sup> and

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5. Myhill, *Language in Jewish Society*, 60–63. See also Naftali Loewenthal, "Hebrew and the Habad Communication Ethos," in *Hebrew in Ashkenaz: A Language in Exile*, ed. L. Glinert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 168.

6. See Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 9–10, 15–18.

7. Sarfati served for a time as the Hebrew teacher for the linguist Teseo Ambrogio, who subsequently became a professor of Oriental languages at the University of Bologna. See Julia Haig Gaisser, trans., *Pierio Valeriano on the Ill Fortune of Learned Men [De infelicitate literatorum]: A Renaissance Humanist and His World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 111. In 1539, twelve years after Sarfati's death, Ambrogio published one of the first studies in comparative Semitic linguistics—*An Introduction to Chaldean, Syriac, and Armenian, and Ten Other Languages*—a work well ahead of its time in concept if not in content. See Teseo Ambrogio, *Introductio in Chaldaicam linguam, Syriacam, atque Armenicam, et decem alias linguas* (Pavia: Simoneta, 1539).

8. Myhill, *Language in Jewish Society*, 66.

9. For the particular emphasis on the use of "pure" Hebrew in both sacred and secular literature among Jews in medieval Spain (of which Sarfati was a descendant),

then expected those writings to be read and understood by their Jewish communities. Writers such as Sarfati wrote extensively in Hebrew and, as will be seen, translated other works from languages such as Spanish and Italian into Hebrew to give the Jewish Mediterranean community greater access to them. Jewish authors also wrote in the indigenous European languages of their home countries to reach a much broader audience than just their Jewish community, particularly in Spain and Italy where Jewish participation in the cultural movements of the day was the greatest.<sup>10</sup> Jewish works written in Hebrew, however, could be read across other linguistic boundaries. After the development of the printing press, works in Hebrew gained even wider dissemination, and some of Sarfati's own poetry is found among them. Books printed in Hebrew were rapidly purchased not only in Italy but across the Mediterranean and particularly in Europe.<sup>11</sup>

A writer's use of the Hebrew language was not the only sign that the Jewish community could trust that writer. Medieval and Renaissance writers made extensive use of biblical allusions, particularly in their poetry. The development of these biblical literary allusions began in medieval Spain because of the influence of Arabic literature and the Arabic view of the holiness of the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>anic language.<sup>12</sup> Many of the allusions would have been very clear to a biblically literate Jewish audience, who would have recognized specific biblical phrases in their original language. Biblical allusions opened up a world of additional meanings. A seemingly innocuous phrase could allow the careful reader to enter

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see Raphael Patai, *Tents of Jacob: The Diaspora Yesterday and Today* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 113–22.

10. Dan Pagis, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), xi–xii.

11. For discussions on the popularity and content of early Hebrew printing, see Marvin J. Heller, *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book: An Abridged Thesaurus* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); D. W. Amram, *The Makers of Hebrew Books in Italy* (New York: Greenstone, 1909); J. Bloch, "Venetian Printers of Hebrew Books," in *Hebrew Printing and Bibliography*, ed. C. Berloin (New York: KTAV, 1976), 67–70.

12. Peter Cole, *Selected Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 11–13.

into an entire realm of secondary meanings. Leo Strauss has written persuasively about the existence of encoded themes in Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed* and in other Jewish works.<sup>13</sup> Although the use of Hebrew already served to encode the message, biblical allusions did not function solely for that purpose. Rather, the biblical allusions also served to identify the talent of the author. Jewish authors used allusions skillfully and frequently to provide their works with color, depth, and nuance for their Hebrew-reading audience. Sometimes the allusion was included simply for the sake of showing the poet's proficiency and did not provide additional meaning.<sup>14</sup>

### Overview of Sarfati's life

Sarfati's short life spanned the final years of the fifteenth century through the first quarter of the sixteenth century. With his early death in 1527, Sarfati's life is situated at the borders between the medieval and Renaissance periods as typically defined today.<sup>15</sup> Sarfati was one of the best-known Italian-Jewish figures of his time. He interacted closely with the elite of both the Christian and Jewish worlds, acting as personal physician (archiatier) to no less than three popes and serving as rabbi and Jewish representative in Rome. As Pope Clement VII's archiatier,<sup>16</sup> Sarfati hosted him in his home for an entire summer while Clement sought solitude from his noisy palace as he recovered from an illness; Sarfati also provided lodging for the famous Jewish messianic claimant David Hareuveni for several months.<sup>17</sup> In the early years of his adult-

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13. See, for example, Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1952), 38–42.

14. Cole, *Selected Poems*, 13.

15. The information in this paragraph is taken mostly from Mosheh David Casuto, *Hayehudim befirentze biteqfat hareneysans* (Jerusalem: Mekhon Ben-Tsevi, 1967), 340–50.

16. Hermann Vogelstein and Paul Rieger, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom* (Berlin: Meyer and Müller, 1895), 2:83–86.

17. Upon entering Rome in 1524, Hareuveni mentions only three individuals, including Sarfati: "I went to the Pope's palace, riding on horseback, and my servant before

hood, Sarfati lived with his family in Florence, where he formed valuable friendships with Moses ben Joab da Rieti (who composed a beautiful elegy to Sarfati at the time of his death) and Solomon Poggibonsi, both well-known Jewish composers and poets of their time. During the same period Sarfati also established important relationships with the powerful Medici family, patrons of the arts, one of whom would later become the aforementioned Pope Clement VII.

Pierio Valeriano, an early Renaissance humanist and contemporary of Sarfati, gave him high praise for his cultural attainments:

[Joseph] had devoted the greatest effort to philosophy and mathematics, had progressed wonderfully in Hebrew literature under his father's teaching, and, not content with this learning of his ancestors, had aspired also to Greek. Moreover, he had learned Latin well enough to challenge all his contemporaries in Rome in the elegant simplicity of his verse and prose and to compete on an equal footing with all the young men. In addition to these attainments, he was endowed with the most upright character, so that you would find nothing wanting in the young man apart from the knowledge of the Christian religion.<sup>18</sup>

Sarfati's life, however, was not entirely full of fame and ease. His history includes a number of page-turning tragedies, including the theft of his inheritance in 1524 by one of his father's household servants. Sarfati pursued the servant across the Mediterranean to Constantinople, where the thief handed him over to the Turkish authorities as a papal spy. He was attacked and wounded by the police and barely managed to escape.<sup>19</sup>

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me, and the Jews also came with me, and I entered the presence of Cardinal Egidio; and all the Cardinals and Princes came to see me, and with the said Cardinal was R. Joseph Ashkenazi, who was his teacher, and the physician Rabbi, Joseph Sarphati." See David Hareuveni, *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages: 19 Firsthand Accounts*, trans. Elkan Nathan Adler (New York: Dover, 1987), 270–71.

18. See Gaisser, *Pierio Valeriano on the Ill Fortune of Learned Men*, 111.

19. For this and the following account from Sarfati's life, see Gaisser, *Pierio Valeriano on the Ill Fortune of Learned Men*, 111–14.

Three years later, another calamity, occurring at the height of his success and reputation in Rome, would lead to Sarfati's early demise. Pope Clement VII had long been engaged in efforts to weaken the power of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. After conquering the French army in Italy that had been supported by the pope, Charles did not have enough money to pay his troops. Seeing the riches of the city of Rome, the imperial army—supposedly acting mutinously against the orders of its leaders—proceeded to sack Rome on May 5, 1527.<sup>20</sup> During the conflict many Christian leaders were able to escape death only by fleeing to the Vatican. The pope did so by using a fortified passage connecting the Vatican with the Castel Sant'Angelo.

Sarfati was an unfortunate victim of these violent political and religious games, upheavals, and intrigues. His house was pillaged from top to bottom, and all his goods and wealth were completely lost. Sarfati was captured and physically tortured by members of the mutinous army. Understanding his value to the Jewish and Christian communities, four mercenaries held him captive for four days, demanding a great quantity of money as ransom. Sarfati finally escaped in the middle of the night after his guards had fallen into a drunken sleep. However, he was only able to flee barefoot, wearing nothing more than his linen undershirt. Having suffered severe deprivations on his trip to a small village outside of Rome, where he sought refuge, he contracted an infection that the village inhabitants identified as the plague, likely a form of typhus. He was driven from the village and banished to the countryside. There he died from starvation and thirst, sheltered only by a simple hut and, according to Valeriano's treatise on the ill fortunes of learned men, with no one to even bring him a drink of water. Sarfati had no known descendants. Although it would be unfair to criticize the Christian leaders for not including Sarfati in their retreat, his death, alone and outside the city walls, serves as a strong reminder that, as a Jew, Sarfati was an outsider, no matter how valuable his services to the pope and to others had been.

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20. See "The Sack of Rome (1527)," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert C. Broderick (Nashville: Nelson, 1976), 416.

## Sarfati's poetry

As mentioned above, Italian Jewish poetry was heavily influenced by the forms and features of medieval Jewish poetry from Spain, partially because of the preeminence of Spanish Jewish thought and literary forms, but also because of the persecution and extensive scattering of Sephardic Jews. In turn, the direct influence of Arabic poetry on Hebrew in the Iberian Peninsula meant the introduction of new rhyming and metrical schemes into Hebrew literature.<sup>21</sup> Some Italian authors, such as Sarfati, were of Sephardic descent, creating a natural flow of theme and form from the Iberian peninsula to Italy. At the end of the fifteenth century, however, during Sarfati's lifetime, the influence of Spanish literature began to give way to that of the Renaissance.<sup>22</sup> Sarfati's poetry shows a combination of both Spanish and Renaissance motifs and form.

Sarfati's Hebrew *diwan* (the Arabic word for a collection of poetry) contains two hundred and thirty poems.<sup>23</sup> The *diwan* is at least partly the work of one or more copyists, and it is impossible to know which, if any, of the scripts are those of Sarfati's own hand. Much of the handwriting in the *diwan* is very difficult to read, causing an additional layer of difficulty in the translation process. The only works of Sarfati that were definitely disseminated widely during his lifetime, as evidenced by extant printed books, are the introductory poems that he penned in praise of the second edition of the *Biblia Rabbinica* in his day.<sup>24</sup>

Sarfati's *diwan* reflects the nuanced situation of the Jews in Europe, demonstrating a broad expression of the literary features of his time as well as the more traditional themes emanating from Spain. He appears to have been the first poet to introduce the Italian Renaissance form of *ottava rima* into Hebrew.<sup>25</sup> Sarfati explored a wide variety of topics in

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21. Pagis, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages*, xiii–xiv.

22. Pagis, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages*, xiii–xiv.

23. Joseph ben Samuel Sarfati, "Diwan of Joseph Sarfati" (ms. Mich. 353, Neubauer 554/3, Bodleian Library, Oxford). This is the sole surviving copy of the three poems I analyze in this paper.

24. These are poems 68–70 in Sarfati's *diwan*.

25. Pagis, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages*, 62.

both his Latin and Hebrew poetry, including subjects such as wine, card playing, love, and religious devotion. Approximately twenty poems in Sarfati's diwan are overtly religious. Three of them were written in praise of God, three on Maimonides's thirteen principles, seven for specific Jewish holidays, one as a lament over Jerusalem, and another seven on mixed themes, such as his praise for the *Biblia Rabbinica*.<sup>26</sup> Poem 114 of Sarfati's diwan, along with many others, serves as an excellent example of a purely "secular" offering.<sup>27</sup> The tone of his poetry ranges from reverent, to playful, to admonishing, to sarcastic and biting.

His Hebrew poems demonstrate that his powerful relationship with high levels of Christian society at times caused friction, jealousy, and misunderstandings in his own community. At least thirty poems in his diwan—including poems 11, 13, 14, 21, 26, 30, 32, 36, 39, and others—contain Sarfati's heated responses to his critics and opponents.<sup>28</sup> In poem 168 he describes one who has sought to destroy him by catching him in a trap. Sarfati, however, proclaims that this man will fall in the net himself. Sarfati indicates that there are those who have longed for his death. His introduction to his translation of *Celestina*, which will be analyzed below, also contains a warning to those who criticize him. Through all these poems, Sarfati emerges not as a dry, historical figure, but instead as a man who lived a tumultuous life and freely expressed strong opinions and feelings in his poetry.

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26. See Dan Almagor, "Yosef ben Shmuel Sarfati: bibliografyah mu'eret," in *Italia: Studi e ricerche sulla storia, la cultura e la letteratura degli ebrei d'Italia*, ed. Robert Bonfil (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1996), 111.

27. For examples of Sarfati's "secular" poetry, see Jefim Schirmann, *Mivhar hashirah ha'ivrit be'italyah* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1934), 226, 228.

28. This theme was not uncommon in medieval times; see Arie Schippers, *Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition* (New York: Brill, 1994), 305–7. A survey of poetry provided in an anthology by Peter Cole shows numerous translated titles indicating censure or discord: "A Curse" (p. 32), "You Mock Me Now" (p. 68), "You've Stolen My Words" (p. 85), and others. Peter Cole, *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain 950–1492* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Biblical prophets regularly compared the worship of foreign gods to the sin of adultery since both involved the breaking of sacred covenants and trust.<sup>29</sup> God was frequently compared to the husband (Ezekiel 16:8; Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 3:14; 31:32), Israel to a bride, and foreign gods to the wife's adulterous lovers (Jeremiah 2:20; 3:1; Ezekiel 16:28, 41; Hosea 2:18). The biblical book of Hosea overtly makes the connection between the image of the adulterous wife and apostasy to a foreign religion.<sup>30</sup> Foreign religions promised happiness but in the end would leave Israel contaminated and destitute. Only Israel's relationship with the true God would provide her with lasting covenant blessings of protection and true prosperity. At times Israel was compared to an unfaithful husband who had chased after "strange women" (1 Kings 11:11; Proverbs 22:14; 23:33). Many of these texts served a dual purpose, both providing important wisdom regarding the dangers of sexual immorality and at the same time warning against abandoning the true God of the Israelites. As one biblical scholar clarified, "[The "foreign" or "strange" woman] symbolized either a Canaanite goddess and her cult, non-Israelite religion in general, or 'the seductions of this world' (so Saadiah Gaon); . . . Prov 6:20–35 [is, as indicated by Michael Fishbane,] an 'inner biblical midrash on the Decalogue' in which the foreign woman symbolizes 'the seduction of false wisdom.'"<sup>31</sup>

The Renaissance fascination with romantic love<sup>32</sup> made romantic imagery particularly useful as an allegory for religious devotion. The

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29. See Michael Fishbane, "Accusations of Adultery: A Study of Law and Scribal Practices in Num. 5:11–31," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 45 (1974): 44. See also Elaine Adler Goodfriend, "Adultery," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:85–86. For biblical references, see Exodus 34:15; Numbers 25:1–3; Hosea 4:14.

30. See Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, trans. Gary Stansell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1974), xxvi. See also C. L. Seow, "Hosea, Book of," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 3:195–96.

31. Goodfriend, "Adultery," 1:85.

32. See Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, rev. and aug. ed., trans. Montgomery Belgion (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Books, 1966), 3–7. See also Nandini Das, *Renaissance Romance: The Transformation of English Prose Fiction* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 1–4; Dale V. Kent, *Friendship, Love, and Trust in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge:

Song of Songs (i.e., Song of Solomon), however, was of much earlier, more widespread, and more long-lasting importance in the allegorical interpretation of love to teach an abstract, religious message. Jewish texts, beginning with the Targum and the later Midrash Rabbah and continuing pervasively up to the nineteenth century, have read the sexual images of Song of Songs as referring to religious devotion.<sup>33</sup> As will be seen, Sarfati took advantage of this prevalent interpretation to point to underlying biblical themes that encouraged wisdom and religious fidelity among the Jews.

The frequent use of romantic love in the ways described above should not be taken as universal. In the poetry of medieval Spain and elsewhere, both romantic and sensual love were topics that held their own fascination and were not always indicative of some type of moral discourse.<sup>34</sup> In the same way, as mentioned earlier, even biblical allusion did not always indicate didactic intent, but was at times simply a literary flourish of the work's composer. These cautions must be kept in mind when analyzing Sarfati's poetry for secondary meaning, and of necessity require cautious conclusions, unless there is sufficient evidence to clearly demonstrate an "encoded message." Of the three poems that will be analyzed over the remainder of this paper, the first two are short enough that conclusions must remain tentative. Such is not the case for the third poem, whose length allows deeper investigation.

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Harvard University Press, 2009), 52–75; John C. Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love: The Context of Giordano Bruno's Eroisi Furori* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 12–24; Albert J. Smith, *The Metaphysics of Love: Studies in Renaissance Love Poetry from Dante to Milton* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985). For a discussion of courtly love in medieval times, see Alexander A. Parker, *The Philosophy of Love in Spanish Literature, 1480–1680* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 20–31.

33. Roland E. Murphy, "Song of Songs, Book of," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:153–55. For information on the interpretation of the Song of Songs in medieval times, see G. L. Scheper, "The Spiritual Marriage: The Exegetic History and Literary Impact of the Song of Songs in the Middle Ages" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1971).

34. Pagis, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages*, 62.

*“Be careful in the ascents”*

Sarfati’s use of Hebrew biblical allusions to warn of becoming too fully enthralled or connected with the Christian religion and culture of his day can be seen in the following poem:

35 זמן ישפילך אם ימצאך ואל תכבד ויגעו נושאך ואל ישבעך פן ישנאך. 36	במעלות זר שמור אל תעלה פן ואל תקל מאד פן ילעגו לך והוקר רגלך מבית צמיהם	1 2 3
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- 1 Be careful in the ascents of the stranger; do not go up;  
fate will humble you, if it finds you.
- 2 Do not make yourself light, lest they ridicule you;  
nor be heavy, for they will be tired of carrying you.
- 3 Keep your feet from their gathering places.  
Let them not be satiated with you for they will hate you.

Sarfati’s choice to write in Hebrew is already a clue that he is speaking specifically to a Jewish audience. The overt message could easily be construed as general social wisdom, teaching the audience how to successfully navigate cultural norms in order to advance socially. The specific meaning becomes more pointed when connected with its biblical allusion, below. Sarfati begins by warning his people to be careful among a foreign people or in the audience of a stranger, especially among their “ascents,” which could refer to social gatherings; however, because Sarfati used Hebrew to compose the poem, the “ascents” more likely refer to their churches or to other places of power and influence. In Rome there were many of these locations, particularly in the Vatican, which in many ways already constituted one of the highest places or ascents in the Christian world in Sarfati’s day.

35. End-rhyme *-ekha*.

36. This is poem 22 from Sarfati’s diwan. It has been published in Dan Almagor, “Al ner, ‘al gevarah, ve’al hiduq-hakhagorah: 8 shirim le-Yosef Tsarfati,” *Musaf hasifrut shel yedi’ot akhronot*, December 14, 1979, 21.

Sarfati also gives important advice regarding how the Jews speak with the dominant culture, encouraging them on the one hand not to make light of themselves or to make themselves ridiculous in the eyes of the dominant society, but on the other hand not to exalt themselves or to make themselves heavy through requests, lest those in power get tired of carrying them. Line 3 provides the biblical key in its allusion to Proverbs 25:17, in which the reader is admonished, “Withdraw your foot from your friend’s/neighbor’s house; lest he be weary of you, and so hate you.”<sup>37</sup> Sarfati’s choice to connect his words with Proverbs 25 is intentional since the general theme of Proverbs 25 closely matches that of his poem. Most of Proverbs 25 contains instruction on how to avoid censure and disgrace in the eyes of one’s enemies by taking great care with the words one speaks. According to Proverbs 25, the speaker should neither exalt nor abase himself in the presence of others (vv. 6–7), should not publicly argue with others (v. 8), and should not tell his secrets in public (vv. 9–10)—important advice for any minority group.

The accuracy of this interpretation actually hinges on the understanding of Proverbs 25. Does this chapter intend to provide only general social wisdom that is useful in the presence of a generic “stranger”? Or does it fit with other biblical advice such as that found in Proverbs 6, 8, 9, 24, 30, and 31?<sup>38</sup> A close analysis of the entire chapter by biblical scholarship provides no clear resolution.<sup>39</sup> The first two verses of Proverbs 25 appear to place the context within a court setting, in which a supplicant or visitor at a kingly court is being given advice for his visit.<sup>40</sup> If the biblical allusion points to all of Proverbs 25, this would fit Sarfati’s situation in Rome closely.

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37. Author’s translation, following the King James Version (KJV).

38. See Goodfriend, “Adultery,” 85.

39. See Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary 22 (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 188–94.

40. Murphy, *Proverbs*, 190.

*Poem to the exiles of Spain*

Another poem, apparently associated with a specific historical context, contains a stronger and more overt warning to the exiles of Spain who have gone down to Rome. A study by Anna Esposito elucidates a likely historical framework for the poem.<sup>41</sup> According to Esposito, in the first three decades of the sixteenth century (a precise overlap with Sarfati's life and work), Sephardic immigrants to Rome "were not only the most numerous, but also the most solid both economically and culturally, . . . although there were tensions and rivalries within the community" because of their arrival. The poem will be analyzed in light of this historical context.

The poem contains five lines of two hemistiches each. In true Arabic form, as is often found in Sephardic poetry and in the poetry of Sarfati, the end rhyme of each line—*qi*—is the same.<sup>42</sup> Each hemistich contains eleven syllables, and the pattern in each hemistich unfailingly places a short vowel at the third and seventh syllables. As in other poems, Sarfati plays with phonemes to connect words and concepts throughout.

## שיר אל גולת ספרד אל רומי ירד

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בֵּית יַעֲקֹב הִקְבַּח וְהִנָּקִי	1 הַשְׁתַּעֲשְׂעוּ וְשַׁעֲרוּ כְצוּר חֲזָקוֹ
וּבְכָל-גְּלִיל רוּמִי וְאִיטָלְקִי	2 גַּעְלוּ בְעַם נִזְעַם בְּלִיעַל
אֲרָצָם תִּגְרָשְׁכֶם וְחִוֵּץ תִּקְיֵא	3 טָרֵם בְּחֶטְאֵם תִּסְפוּ טָרֵם
מִשְׁפִּיל שְׂאוּל לְרֵאוֹת וּמַעֲמִיקִי	4 טָרֵם חֲרוֹן אַף רָם וּמִתְנַשֵּׂא
קוּמוּ צְאוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמְלָקִי <sup>43</sup>	5 הַתְנַעֲרוּ עוּרוּ פָּנוּ לְכֶם

41. Anna Esposito, "The Sephardic Communities in Rome in the Early Sixteenth Century," *Imago Temporis. Medium Aevum* 1 (2007): 171–79.

42. Jonathan P. Decter, *Iberian Jewish Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 40–41.

43. In this line, Schirmann does not follow the manuscript, which clearly reads as rendered here. Schirmann gives instead סרו רדו מתוך עמלקי. The translation into English of Schirmann's rendering ("Turn aside! Go down from the midst of Amaleki!") does not substantially differ from the translation provided here from the text of the manuscript. Schirmann, *Mivhar hashirah ha'ivrit be'italyah*, 233.

## Poem to the exiles of Spain who descended to Rome

- 1 Look in dismay, and consider; as a rock be strong,  
O house of Jacob, the small yet pure.
- 2 Loathe the villainous people, subjects of wrath  
in every region of Rome and Italy.
- 3 Ere in their sin you are destroyed; ere  
the land expels and vomits you out;
- 4 ere the wrath of the lofty and powerful One  
becomes as deep as She'ol.
- 5 Shake yourself and wake up! Turn yourselves away.  
Arise! Go forth from the midst of the Amalekites!<sup>44</sup>

The introductory title of the poem given in the diwan points to a specific group, exiles from Spain who had entered Rome. Less clear is precisely what Sarfati is advising the exiles in Rome to do. Is his warning to go forth from the midst of the Amalekites an encouragement to leave Italy, possibly because of the tensions their arrival has created? Or should it more appropriately be seen as an encouragement to be wary of the undue influence of the “villainous people, subjects of wrath”?

Numerous references appear to identify Christian society as the villainous people. Other candidates, such as the Jews already in Rome or the new arrivals themselves, do not appear to fit the context. These references are strengthened by biblical allusions, words, and phrases that highlight Sarfati's concern regarding the interaction of the immigrants with the inhabitants of Italy. If the villainous people are the Christians—and that interpretation should be accepted unless a more likely candidate is proposed—then Sarfati's decision to use Hebrew so that only the Jews would have ready access to its message was critical. Certainly, the spread of the poem to a wider audience could have been devastating for Sarfati's relationship with his Christian hosts. Sarfati therefore relied on its coding in Hebrew to prevent the Christians from accessing the message.

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44. Translation mine. Poem is number 205 from Sarfati's diwan. It is also located in Schirmann, *Mivhar hashirah ha'ivrit be'italyah*, 233.

The biblical allusions in this short poem are numerous and add depth to the poem's meaning. The injunction in line 1 to look in dismay and consider (Heb. *hishta'she'u ushe'u*) could also be translated as an injunction for the Jews to cover their eyes and look away from tragedy, possibly alluding to Isaiah 29:9. Isaiah 29 expresses dismay at the pending destruction of the Jews, who did not heed the warnings of God or hearken to his counsels. As a result, Israel will be encircled by its enemies and brought down to the dust, an image similar to that Sarfati provides in line 4, although in that instance it is God's wrath that will expel the Jews from the land.

In line 2, Sarfati enjoins the Jews to loathe or despise the base or villainous inhabitants of Rome and Italy. Although the full, trilateral form of the verb is regularly attested, this form of the verb *ga'lu* ("loathe" or "despise") is found only once in the Hebrew Bible, or indeed in any of the Jewish religious texts. In Ezekiel 16:45, the Lord criticizes those Israelites who allow themselves to be surrounded by and to fall in love with non-Israelite influences on all sides. When they should have "loathed" those associations, they instead "loathed" their proper husband and the children of their covenant. Because they did not loathe the false religions of the Amorites, Hittites, and Samaritans that surrounded them, in the end they were "corrupted more than they in all [their] ways" (Ezekiel 16:47 KJV). The flow of ideas fits that of Sarfati's poem, which tells the immigrants to loathe the Christians and warns that a failure to do so will enflame God's wrath against them and cause them to be ejected from the land (much as Spain had evicted them earlier).

The description of the Christians as a base people (Heb. *beliya'al*) also alludes to similar biblical phrases. One of these is Deuteronomy 13:13 (v. 14 in the Hebrew versification), which calls some of the Israelites "children of Belial" (KJV, Heb. *'anashim beney-beliya'al*) because they go searching after other gods. As a result, these children of Beliya'al must be killed by the Lord. This is a slightly altered warning from that of Sarfati in which the Christians and not the Israelites have received the title of Beliya'al. However, the end result is the same. Those who remain under the influence of foreign gods will ultimately meet an unfortunate end.

Line 3 contains a warning to the Jews that they will be consumed or destroyed (Heb. *tisfu*). This verb appears four times in the Hebrew Bible, each instance conveying a warning of destruction to the Jews if they do not avoid the corrupting sins of the surrounding people. Numbers 16:23–27 (NIV) is an instructive example:

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Say to the assembly, ‘Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.’” . . . [Moses] warned the assembly, “Move back from the tents of these wicked men! Do not touch anything belonging to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins.” So they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram had come out and were standing with their wives, children and little ones at the entrances to their tents.

Ultimately, the Lord proved that these men were guilty of idolatry, and in the end they suffered death for their betrayal—that death coming as the earth opened up and swallowed them into its depths. Similarly, Sarfati warned that the unresponsive, recalcitrant Jews would be ejected from the land because of the sins of the people of Italy.

Sarfati’s warning that the land would expel (Heb. *tegareshkhem*) the Jews or “vomit [them] out” (Heb. *taqi*) if they did not depart willingly has multiple links with biblical texts, each of them indicating that the earth responds directly to the Israelites’ lack of righteousness. In Leviticus 18:28, the Israelites are told that if they defile the land they will be vomited out, and in Leviticus 20:22 they are enjoined to observe all the statutes of the Lord so the land does not vomit them out. In Sarfati’s poem, the Christians defile the land, but nevertheless, it is still this defiled land that will vomit out the Jews if they refuse to flee from among the “Amalekites.”

The allusion to the fierce anger of the Christians in line 4 is a direct reference to the same phrase (Heb. *kharon ’af*) in Numbers 25:3. This story is important because its connection between idolatry and illicit love demonstrates well the biblical connection between these two themes with which Sarfati and the Jews would have been very familiar:

While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. So Israel yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor. And the Lord's anger burned against them. (Numbers 25:1–3 NIV)

As can be seen, sexual immorality in this text is explicitly linked to the faithlessness of the Israelites to the Lord as they go whoring after other gods. This seduction of the Israelites by the foreign gods leads in verse 4 to the Lord's direction to kill the offenders in order to turn the fierce anger (*kharon 'af*) of the Lord away from Israel.

A final biblical allusion can be found in line 5, in which Sarfati warns the Jews with finality and clarity to turn aside or to go out from among the Amalekites (Heb. *penu lakhem . . . mitokh 'amalaqi*). Each time the Bible uses the phrase *penu lakhem*, it directly implies moving away from an incorrect or dangerous way toward a destiny. For example, in Numbers 14:25 the Lord encourages the Israelites who have left Egypt to turn away from their course (*penu lakhem*) since it will take them through the land of the Amalekites and the Canaanites. Instead they are to go toward the Red Sea, in the direction that the Lord commands.

The Amalekites would become the group perhaps most identified as the everlasting enemy of the Jews, with which the Jews were forever at physical and ideological war because of their mistreatment of the Israelites in the wilderness and their worship of false gods.<sup>45</sup> According to one scholar, the biblical injunction against the Amalekites (Exodus 17:14; Numbers 24:20; Deuteronomy 25:19) “became so deeply rooted in Jewish thought that many important enemies of Israel were identified as direct descendants of Amalek. Thus [a] tannaitic aggadah of the first century BCE identifies Amalek with Rome.”<sup>46</sup> For the new immigrants, the title Amalekite would have applied perfectly to the Christians, who had recently expelled them from Spain and forced them into a lengthy journey.

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45. Elimelech Epstein Halevy, “Amalekites,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (New York: Gale Virtual Reference Library, 2007), 2:28–31.

46. Halevy, “Amalekites,” 31.

*Sarfati's introductory poem to his translation of Celestina*

Although Sarfati's translation of *Celestina* is no longer extant, the existing introductory poem to his translation can be situated among a number of other poems he wrote as introductions to books. Those that preceded the *Biblia Rabbinica* can be found in remaining copies of that work. They can also be found in Sarfati's diwan. The presence of his introductory poem to *Celestina* in the diwan appears to indicate that Sarfati did actually complete his translation of *Celestina*.<sup>47</sup>

Literary critics almost universally view the love story *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, known as *La Celestina* (herein *Celestina*),<sup>48</sup> as a masterpiece of Spanish prose surpassed only by Cervantes's *Don Quixote*.<sup>49</sup> As with many masterpieces, it features a complexity of themes, plots, subplots, and probable subterfuges that allow it to be interpreted through multiple lenses, retaining meaning and force in various contexts even down to the present day. In 1902 Manuel Serrano y Sanz published Inquisition documents showing that Fernando de Rojas, the purported author of *Celestina*,<sup>50</sup> was a *converso*, the son of forced Jewish converts to Christianity.<sup>51</sup> Since that time literary scholars such as

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47. Dan Almagor, "Shirim 'al sefarim le-Yosef ben Shmuel Sarfati," in *Asufot Kiryat Sefer (A Supplement to Kiryat Sefer 68)*, ed. Y. Rosenberg (Jerusalem: B'nei B'rith, 1998), 21–36.

48. The title first given to the work was *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea*. This title was changed in later editions to *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*. Much later, the work began to assume the name of its most prominent character, *Celestina*. This is the title by which it is most generally known today.

49. María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, *Two Spanish Masterpieces: The Book of Good Love and the Celestina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 5.

50. Debate continues about whether or not Rojas, whose name is given in an acrostic located in the introductory poem to the work (as Sarfati's is given in his own introductory poem), actually authored the work. See Ruth Davis, *New Data on the Authorship of Act I of the "Comedia de Calisto y Melibea"* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1928); and F. González Ollé, "El problema de la autoría de 'La Celestina,'" *Hispanic Review* 31 (1963): 153–59, among many others.

51. Manuel Serrano y Sanz, "Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas, autor de *La Celestina* y del impresor Juan de Lucena," *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos* 6 (1902): 245–99. This article included the Inquisition proceedings for Rojas's father-in-law, Alvaro de Montalbán, in 1525, during which Alvaro requested to have appointed

Stephen Gilman and Otis H. Green have hotly debated how this identity may have shaped the formation of the work.<sup>52</sup>

In the story, Calisto sees Melibea in a garden setting and is immediately enflamed with passionate love for her. When she rejects his advances, Calisto sinks into despair. He only recovers when his servants introduce him to the main character of the story, Celestina, a witch who promises to procure Melibea's favor for a price. She appears to bewitch Melibea with an enchanted thread, and Calisto and Melibea later consummate their love. The story ends in tragedy when Calisto falls while descending from Melibea's garden wall. Melibea responds by throwing herself from her tower to her death. The final scene of the book, written in the form of a play, shows Melibea's father bitterly decrying the betrayals of love. Whether or not *Celestina*, with its heavy tone of disillusionment, should be read as a work portraying the converso angst under which Rojas lived and which, if any, of its main characters should also be seen as New Christians has not been resolved in any satisfactory manner to this day.

Notwithstanding the difficulty in interpreting the author's own purposes in *Celestina*'s tragic love story, a lens does exist for understanding how at least a portion of the Jewish community understood the work

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"as his lawyer the Bachiller Fernando de Rojas, his son-in-law, who is a converso." The Inquisitor denied this request and declared that the lawyer had to be someone "without suspicion." See Sanz, "Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas," 263, 69. Regarding Rojas's parents, Inquisition documents may indicate that his father was burned in an Inquisitorial auto-da-fé. See Francisco Cantera Burgos and Pilar León Tello, *Judaizantes del arzobispado de Toledo habilitados por la Inquisición en 1495 y 1497* (Madrid, 1969).

52. For those, such as Otis H. Green, who have argued against reading *Celestina* using a converso lens, see Green, "The *Celestina* and the Inquisition," *Hispanic Review* 15 (1947): 211–15; Leo Spitzer, "A New Book on the Art of *La Celestina*," *Hispanic Review* 25 (1957): 1–25, and many others. For a few examples of the many responses to these concerns, see Stephen Gilman, "A Rejoinder to Leo Spitzer," *Hispanic Review* 25 (1957): 112–21; Antonio Sánchez Serrano and María Remedios Prieto de la Yglesia, *Fernando de Rojas y La Celestina: el escritor y la literatura* (Barcelona: Impresa de Barcelona, 1991), 33–40; Peter N. Dunn, *Fernando de Rojas* (Boston: Twayne, 1975), 3–8; Ya'akov Yisra'el Fink, "Haselestinah umahberah hayehudi," in *Yahadut Tsarfat* (Paris: Mahberot, 1951), 168–86.

during Rojas's lifetime. Sarfati's introductory poem to his translation of *Celestina* appears in his diwan as poem 214. He completed the translation in 1507 (as demonstrated in the final line of the poem), just eight short years after *Celestina*'s initial publication in Spain, only two years after its translation into its first foreign language (Italian in 1505), and a full thirteen years prior to its translation into another language (German in 1520).<sup>53</sup> Sarfati's full Hebrew translation would have provided significant clues for the modern scholar to understand how he read the work. Although only Sarfati's introductory poem to his translation survives, it can still provide similar hints. At least five scholars—Mosheh Cassuto,<sup>54</sup> D. W. McPheeters,<sup>55</sup> Dan Almagor,<sup>56</sup> Dwayne Carpenter,<sup>57</sup> and Michelle Hamilton<sup>58</sup>—have interpreted the meaning of Sarfati's poem previously. The Hebrew poem can be found in the publications of Cassuto, Almagor, and Carpenter, and Cassuto was the first to identify many of the biblical allusions discussed below. I believe Sarfati was

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53. Several studies give good overviews of the various editions of *Celestina* and discuss their importance and meaning in relation to the work overall. They include Keith Whinnom, "The Relationship of the Early Editions of the *Celestina*," *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 82 (1966): 22–40; Clara L. Penney, *The Book Called "Celestina"* (New York: Hispanic Society, 1954); and Frederick J. Norton, *Printing in Spain: 1501–1520, with a Note on the Early Editions of the "Celestina"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 20–35.

54. Mosheh Cassuto, "Mishrey Yosef ben Shmuel Sarfati: hakomedyah harishonah be'ivrit," in *Jewish Studies in Memory of George A. Kohut*, ed. Salo W. Baron and Alexander Marx (New York: The Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1935), 121–28.

55. D. W. McPheeters, "Una traducción hebrea de *La Celestina* en el siglo XVI," in *Homenaje a Rodríguez-Moñino* (Madrid: Castalia, 1966), 399–411.

56. Dan Almagor, "Hagirsah ha'ivrit harishonah shel *lah selestinah*," *Bamah* 127 (1992): 19–28.

57. Dwayne E. Carpenter, "The Sacred in the Profane: Jewish Scriptures and the First Comedy in Hebrew," in *Fernando de Rojas and "Celestina": Approaching the Fifth Centenary*, ed. Ivy A. Corfis and Joseph T. Snow (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1993), 229–36; Carpenter, "A Converso Best-Seller: *Celestina* and Her Foreign Offspring," in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 267–81.

58. Michelle M. Hamilton, "Joseph ben Samuel Sarfati's 'Tratado de Melibea y Calisto': A Sephardic Jew's Reading of the *Celestina* in Light of the Medieval Judeo-Spanish Go-Between Tradition," *Sefarad* 62 (2002): 329–47.

drawn to translate *Celestina* because he saw it in part as a coded warning to avoid corruption from Christian society; at least he seems to have used his own introductory poem to introduce that theme himself. As in the second poem analyzed above, Sarfati uses Hebrew and biblical allusions to develop the biblical theme of adultery as a metaphor for the false promises of the Christian church and society to the Jews. Although I have indicated that biblical allusions may serve as an additional layer of coding, in the case of this work, the ambiguity of Sarfati's introductory poem on the surface seems to defy easy interpretation, as in *Celestina's* own introductory poem and prologue.

שיר חברו המשורר על העתקת חברו מליביה וקליסטו

אֲשֶׁר הִמָּה בְּפֶחַח חֶשֶׁק לְכוּדִים,	1 פְּנוּ דוֹדִים לְמִלְחָמַת יְדִידִים,
בְּטוֹב מְלִים וּבְמִשְׁלִים תְּמוּדִים,	2 וּמַעֲנִיָּהֶם בְּהִנְכַח שְׁנֵיהֶם
מְרִיבָתָם וְאַהֲבָתָם <sup>59</sup> צְמֻדִים,	3 וְעוֹז חַמּוֹת וְאַיִמוֹת הַעֲלָמוֹת,
בְּדַבָּרָם אֶל-בְּנוֹת הַחַן וּפִידִים,	4 וּמִמְתַּקִּים אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁפְתַי תְּשׁוּקִים
וּמִהַתְּלוֹת וְתַחֲבוּלוֹת עֲבָדִים,	5 כְּלִי נִשְׁקָם בְּהֶאֱבָקָם בְּחֶשֶׁקָם,
לְשׁוֹם שֶׁבֶר בְּלֵב גָּבֵר וּפִידִים,	6 וּנְכַלִּיהֶם כְּלִי חֶמְס כְּלִיָּהֶם,
וּמְרָדִים בּוֹ כְּכֹל-עֲתוֹת מְרָדִים;	7 וְקִשְׁרָם עַל-כְּבוֹד בַּעַל לְגַבּוֹ,
וְאַיִד פּוֹרְשׁוֹת בְּכֹל-חֲצוֹצוֹת מְצוּדִים,	8 וְשֵׁם עֲרָמוֹת וּמְרָמוֹת הַזְּקֵנוֹת,
לְהַדְלִיק אֵשׁ בְּלֵב דוֹדִים וְאוֹדִים,	9 וְשֵׁם שִׁיחוֹת תְּדַבְּרָנָה שְׁפָחוֹת
בְּהַרְבֵּתוֹן בְּקָרְבָתוֹן תְּשֻׁדִים,	10 וְתַרְוִינָה <sup>60</sup> גְּבִירוֹת רוֹשׁ וְלַעֲנָה
יְצוּרֵיהֶם בְּצִירֵיהֶם פְּרוּדִים;	11 וְקוֹל אֲהָבִים בְּמִכְאוּבִים עֲצָבִים
בְּאֵף זַעַם בְּנִבְזֵי עַם גְּדוּדִים,	12 בְּכִי דַמְעָם נְהִי שְׁוַעַם וְשִׁבְעָם
בְּכֹל-רְגַע בְּכֹל-פֶּגַע תְּרָדִים,	13 וְצוֹחָתָם וְאַנְחָתָם וְאַיִד הֵם
בְּתַת מְלִים כְּמוֹ דְלִים מְרוּדִים,	14 וְגַם-הַבָּלָם בְּצִיר הַבָּלָם וְאַבָּלָם,
בְּיַד אִשָּׁה כְּלִי בּוֹשָׁה שְׂדוּדִים,	15 וְשִׁבְתָּ כֹל-נִבְוִי עִם כְּכֹלְכֵל
וְנִדְפִים בְּכֹל-פְּנוֹת וְנָדִים.	16 מְנַגְּפִים יַחֲפִים לְאַלְפִים,

59. Here I have followed the manuscript, rather than Cassuto's and Almagor's renderings, which changed *ואהבתם ואהבתם* to *מרבתן ואהבתן*. See notes 54 and 56 for these sources.

60. Here I have followed Cassuto and Almagor, who changed *תרונה* in the manuscript to *ותרונה*.

בְּסִבְלָם מִמַּעַם אֶלְפֵי פְּרָדִים	17 אֶחָו שִׁיחָם נְדוּד אֶרְחָם וְטָרְחָם
בְּמִשְׁוֹאוֹת מְאֹד מֵהֶם כְּבָדִים.	18 וְהֵעֵת יִכְשְׁלוּ יִבְלוּ וַיִּכְלוּ,
וְאִין מִכְשִׁיר וְאִין מִשִּׁיר צְעָדִים	19 וְאִין בִּינָה וְאִין עֲצָה נְכוּנָה,
וְשָׂמוּ בְּחָרֵי רִגְלָיו בְּסֻדִים	20 לְגֵבֶר גְּבָרוּ עָלָיו עֲלֻמוֹת,
וְאִיפֹה יִמְצְאוּ סִמְךָ סְעָדִים?	21 וּבִמָּה יִשְׁעֲנוּ שְׁעִים בְּאַהֲבִים
וְאִין חֲמֵל וְאִין גְּמֵל תְּסֻדִים.	22 וְאִין בְּאַהֲבָה מִחֶסֶה וּמְכֻסָּה,
וְהִיא תִצְבֵּר בְּלֵב גְּבוּר פְּחָדִים,	23 וְהִיא תִשְׁבֵּר גְּוִיַת אִישׁ וְתִקְבֵּר,
וְהִיא תִעֲבִיר גְּאוֹן מִגְּבִיר גְּדוּדִים.	24 וְהִיא תִשְׁפִּיל גְּבַה רוּחַ וְתִפִּיל,
בְּאֶף מִהִיּוֹת בְּבֵית עֲלִיוֹן פְּקִידִים.	25 מִתִּי הַשָּׁם וְהַשְּׂכָל תִּגְרָשֶׁם
בְּעֵלָה יִעֲבֹדוּן לָהּ פְּקוּדִים.	26 וּמִעֲדָנָה וְעַד-זְקֻנָּה וְשִׁיבָה
בְּשִׁקָר עֲרֻכִים נְגֻדָה וּבָדִים;	27 שְׁבַחְיָה בְּכָל-עֵת הָאֲוִילִים
וְשָׂמִי מְלֹאוֹ רוּחוֹת וְאָדִים.	28 אֲדַמָּה פְּעֻלָּה <sup>61</sup> הֶעֱדָר גִּשְׁמִי <sup>62</sup>
וְרִיק לְהַמּוֹת כְּאֻמוֹת עַל יְהוּדִים,	29 וְשׁוֹאֵן שִׁירוֹת לְפִתּוֹת הַגְּבִירוֹת
וְתַת רַעִים צְעִיפִים עִם רְדִידִים,	30 וְאִדָּה כֶּסֶף לְבָב יַעֲלוֹת יֶאֱסֹף,
וַיִּצְמִיחַ בְּכָל-חַח נְרָדִים,	31 וְהִזְקֵב יִנְשֵׂא דוּד וַיִּרְהֵב,
וְהוּא יִנְעִים יְשִׁישִׁים עִם לְדִים,	32 וְהוּא נָשִׂיא וְהוּא יְשִׂיא אֲנָשִׁים,
וְרַב חֶרוֹן <sup>63</sup> עָלָי גְּרוֹן רְבִידִים.	33 וְרַב מִשְׁאוֹת יְשִׁיבוֹן לֵב צְבָאוֹת,
וְלִיפּוֹת חֲלִיפּוֹת כָּל-בְּגָדִים!	34 תְּנוּ מְנוֹת וּמִתְנוֹת לְעַפְרוֹת,
וְתַת דּוֹדִים עָלָי יָדִם צְמִידִים. <sup>64</sup>	35 הֲכִי קֶצֶפֶם יִרַף נִזֶם בְּאֶפֶס,
תְּרוּהוּ כְּחַפְצָהוּ מְגָדִים,	36 וְכֵן עַפְרָה בְּדוּד תִּחְשַׁק וְתִשְׁק,
כְּתֻמָּתוֹ לְשִׁבְעָתוֹ גְּזִידִים.	37 וְלֹא תִזִיד בְּדַרְכָּה עוֹד וְתִזִיד
נְטוֹת מְנָה וְסוּר אֵל הַצְּדָדִים!	38 אֲכַל מֵה-טוֹב וּמֵה-נְעִים צְנוּעִים,
וְדוּד הֵם שְׁנִיחָם לֹד שְׁהָדִים.	39 לְנִכְלִיחָם וְכִבְלִיחָם שְׁלֵמָה
וְשָׁעִיר עִם הַמּוֹן שְׁדוֹת וְשָׂדִים, <sup>65</sup>	40 בְּקֶרְבָם מִלְאֲכֵי מְוֹת יִגוּרוֹן,

61. Here I have followed Cassuto and Almagor, who changed פעלם in the manuscript to פעלה.

62. Although difficult to read, this is most likely גשמים in the manuscript.

63. Here I have followed Cassuto and Almagor, who changed מרון וטב in the manuscript to רב חרון.

64. In this line I have provided final *mems* rather than final *nuns*, following the manuscript rather than Cassuto and Almagor in the words קצפם, באפם, דודם, and ידם. However, I have followed Cassuto's and Almagor's rendering when they changed ירב in the manuscript to ירף.

65. In lines 39 and 40 I have retained the final *mems* from the manuscript rather than following Cassuto and Almagor in these words: וכבליהם and בקרבם.

בְּכַשְׁפֵּיהֶן וְכָל-חַי מַאֲבִידִים.	41 וְאַלֶּה שְׂדָדִים יוֹם יוֹם בְּנֵי אִישׁ
כְּלֵי נְדָה בְּסוֹת חֲמֻדָּה אֲפוּדִים.	42 בָּרַח יִפְּזוּ רְאֵה דָפְנוּ הִכִּי הוּ
שְׁנוּנִים בְּדָ וְתוֹדָ לְבָדָ שְׁפוּדִים.	43 מֵאֵס צִפְּנוּ הִכִּי סוֹפְנוּ צְנִינִים
מִשְׁגָּעִים אֲשֶׁר פָּרְעִים וּמוֹדִים.	44 כְּסִילִים הֵם אֲשֶׁר נַעֲנִים אֲלֵיהֶם <sup>66</sup>
לְגַם אֲקִים לְכָל-חַשְׁקִים וְדוֹדִים.	45 וּמְלִיבְיָהּ לְכָל-רַעֲיָה וְדוֹדָה
וְאִשׁוּ יִבְרָחוּ מִכָּל-יְקוּדִים,	46 וְיִטּוּ מִנְּתִיב חַשְׁק לְאֲמִי,
וְשָׂרְשׁוּ יַעֲרוּ עַד יְסוּדִים.	47 וּמְלָבָם יִכְבוּהוּ וְקַרְבָּם,
וּבִי תִצְהַל עֲדַת וְקַהֲל שְׂרִידִים.	48 פְּנֵה אֵלַי וְהֵט אָזְנוֹ לְמַלִּי,
בְּחֶרְמִי יַעֲלוֹת יִתְדוּ אֲגוּדִים,	49 הַטּוֹב תִּהְיוּ לְבוֹז רַעִי וְשׁוֹעִי,
וּכְתָּיִשִׁים בְּיַד נָשִׁים עַקוּדִים?	50 בְּאִיּוֹן אֲזַל וְקַרְנֵי עֵז כְּאֵזֶל
נְשִׂיא לְמַנְתְּדִים דָּת מַעֲמִידִים,	51 אֲנִי יוֹסֵף בְּנוֹ הַרְבַּ שְׁמוּאֵל,
לְאֵהֶל יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁעוֹן יְתִדִים,	52 מִקּוֹר חֲכָמָה וּמַעְיֵנו כָּל מְזֻמָּה,
אֲשֶׁר שָׂרַת גְּדוֹל מִשְׁלִים וְרִדִים,	53 וְצָרְפַּתִּי יִכְנוּהוּ הֵלֵא הוּא
אֲשֶׁר הַשְׁמִים גָּאוֹן רְמִים וְזוּדִים.	54 אֲדוֹן יוֹלִיּוֹס וְכַהֵן רֹאשׁ לְאֲמִים,
עֲנִי רָשִׁים וְלֵב אִישִׁים טְרוּדִים,	55 אֲמַת הַעֲתִיק לְשׁוֹנֵי זֶה לְהַמְתִּיק
פֶּאֶר שִׁיחֵי לְאַחֵי הִיהוּדִים.	56 וְרַק עֲנִנוּ אֲנִי מַעֲתִיק וְעַרְדָּה
הֵלֵא יְהִיו <sup>67</sup> בְּמִדְתָּם מְדוּדִים,	57 עֲדַת לְצִים אֲשֶׁר נִגְדֵי תְלוּצִים
אֲשֶׁר שָׁם הֵם לְתַת הַדִּי עֲתִידִים,	58 וּבַעֲרָה כֶּם לֵאמֹר חֲנָם גִּיהֲנָם,
חֲסִידִים כָּל-עַדִּי חֲמֻדָּה עֲנוּדִים;	59 וְדִינוּנֵי בְזֹאת לְזַכּוֹת הַמוֹנֵי,
וְיִנְדְּבְכֶם אֲלֵהֵם טוֹב וְכָדִים,	60 וְחִישׁ יִזְרַח עָלַי רֹאשְׁכֶם מְאוֹרְכֶם,
וְתַחֲיוֹן <sup>68</sup> תוֹדָה קֹדֶת חִילִים וְאִידִים.	61 בְּהַדְלִיק אֶת-לְבַבְכֶם יַעֲלֶת-חֵן,
פְּנוּ דוֹדִים לְמִלְחָמַת דִּידִים.	62 כְּאֶחָד מִהֶרֶו עוֹרוּ וְסוּרוּ,
	תֵּם נִשְׁלַם תַּל"ח

A poem composed by the poet upon the translation of the work regarding Melibea and Calisto

- 1 Observe, beloved, the war of lovers,  
trapped in the snare of desire,

66. I have retained the final *mem* from the manuscript in the word אליהם, rather than change to the renderings of Cassuto and Almagor, which offer אליהן.

67. I have here retained the renderings of Cassuto and Almagor, who provided יהיו rather than יהיו in the manuscript.

68. I have here followed the versions of Cassuto and Almagor, who changed ותחיון in the manuscript to תחיון.

- 2 with their intentions to bandy  
beautiful words and charming fables,
- 3 and the powerful anger and dread of maidens,  
for whom conflict and love are intertwined,
- 4 with dulcitudes in the lovers' mouths  
when they speak artfully to beautiful women.
- 5 In the struggle against the lovers' desire,  
consider also the servants' weapons: mocking and  
scheming.
- 6 Their mischief (for their weapons are weapons of violence)  
is to plant destruction and devastation in a man's heart.
- 7 Their conspiracy is to rob their master's honor,  
and in every moment they rebel against him.
- 8 See the craftiness and deception of old ladies,  
how they cast forth snares in every street.
- 9 See the maidservants tell tales  
that light a fire and embers in the heart of lovers.
- 10 They feed their mistresses venom and bitter wormwood,  
multiplying suspicions within them.
- 11 The voices of lovers are in sorrowful pain,  
their limbs torn apart in their deep anguish,
- 12 their tearful weeping, and the lament of their imploring;  
they are filled  
with wrath among a despised, wandering people.
- 13 See their screams and their sighs and how  
in every moment, and with every pain, they tremble,
- 14 as well as their injury, the anguish of their foolishness,  
and their sorrow,  
spouting complaints like the completely destitute.
- 15 See how all the wise leaders of the people, like Calcol,  
sit ashamed, robbed by the hand of a woman.
- 16 Destitute and barefoot they go by the thousands;  
scattered on every corner, they wander to and fro.
- 17 I will tell their tales, their vagabond ways, and their travails  
as they suffer a heavy load, like that of thousands of mules
- 18 who stumble, wither, and perish  
with burdens too heavy for them.

- 19 There is no wisdom, and there is no correct counsel,  
and no one fit to guide, and no one to straighten the step
- 20 of a man conquered by maidens  
who spitefully place his feet in the stocks.
- 21 Upon what may lovers depend?  
Where will they find support or assistance?
- 22 There is no shelter or shade in love;  
there is no one to have pity, nor any who grants favor.
- 23 She<sup>69</sup> will break and bury the body of a man;  
she will fill the heart of the valiant with fear;
- 24 she will humble and knock down the haughty;  
she will remove the great pride from a strong man;
- 25 she will cast out men of renown and wisdom,  
in anger, from their position in high places.
- 26 From the youth to the white-haired ancient,  
men who serve her are bound by her yoke.
- 27 The foolish constantly praise her,  
and in vain they deceitfully pose for her.
- 28 See how their deeds fail to deliver rain,  
although the sky is full of wind and clouds.
- 29 Songs to seduce maidens are in vain,  
like speeches of boasting mothers about their children.
- 30 Silver will gather the hearts of gazelles,<sup>70</sup>  
as will the gifts of veils and scarves.
- 31 Gold will lift up the lover in glory  
and will convert every thorn into spikenard.
- 32 It rules as a prince, elevating men  
and bringing much joy to the elderly and to children.
- 33 Great gifts will soften the heart of armies,  
as necklaces will placate great wrath.
- 34 Give gifts and offerings to the gazelles,  
and clothing and dresses to beautiful women!

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69. "She" refers to love, a feminine noun in Hebrew, but also reminds of the aforementioned "maiden."

70. Gazelles almost certainly refer to maidens, a common construction proceeding from the Arabic influence on the literature of medieval Spain.

- 35 Truly a nose ring softens their malice,  
as do arm bracelets given by their lovers.
- 36 Thus the beauty will desire her lover and will kiss him;  
she will satisfy him with sweets as he desires.
- 37 She will not brew mischief, as before, but will cook  
pottage to satisfy his desire.
- 38 O chaste ones! How good and excellent it is  
to turn away from her and to move aside.
- 39 Of their tricks and their chains, Solomon  
and David both are witnesses.
- 40 Within them dwell the angels of death;  
they swarm with demons and she-devils
- 41 who daily plunder the sons of men  
by their enchantments and cause all to perish.
- 42 Flee from their beauty; beware their defects, for they are  
menstruous vessels robed in glorious attire.
- 43 Despise their nectar, for they will become thorns  
sharp within you, with skewers that pierce your heart.
- 44 Only fools respond to them;  
only mad men prostrate themselves and worship.
- 45 And Melibea, with her friends and her lover,  
I will lift up as a sign for all those that love and desire
- 46 so that my people will turn from the path of desire—  
flee from its burning fire!
- 47 Extinguish it from your hearts,  
and destroy it entirely from within them.
- 48 Turn to me, and pay attention to my words,  
and you will rejoice in me, gathering and company of  
survivors.
- 49 Is it seemly for you, my friends and princes, to be shamed,  
bundled together in the nets of gazelles
- 50 like a ram without strength or horns of power  
or male goats bound by the hand of women?
- 51 I am Joseph, son of Rabbi Samuel, prince  
of the faithful, a pillar of the faith,
- 52 a source of wisdom and a wellspring of all subtlety,  
the support of the stakes of Jacob's tent,

- 53 whose name is Sarfati; is it not he  
     who has served great rulers and princes
- 54 such as Pope Julius, priest, head of the nations,  
     who has brought low the greatness of the prideful and  
     the wicked?
- 55 My tongue has translated truth to sweeten  
     the affliction of the impoverished and the heart of a  
     burdened people.
- 56 My only concern is as a translator; I arrange  
     the beauty of my conversation for my brethren the Jews.
- 57 The group of mockers that strive against me,  
     who will be measured according to their own  
     measurement—
- 58 not in vain will hell burn in them  
     who are condemned there to the future judgments.
- 59 Judge me favorably in this, my people,  
     faithful, adorned with every adornment of precious  
     things.
- 60 Your glory will soon shine over you,  
     and God will grant you the best of gifts
- 61 when a graceful gazelle lights your hearts,  
     although you remain in the midst of a burning  
     conflagration.
- 62 All as one make haste! Awake and turn aside!  
     Observe, beloved, the war of lovers.
- Ending complete in 1507

The introductory poem—in which Sarfati provides his name (lines 51, 53), just as Rojas had done in an acrostic in his own introductory poem to *Celestina*—opens with a line encouraging the listener to pay attention to the war of lovers. The line connects neatly with Rojas’s opening line to his prologue to *Celestina*, which indicates that “all is conflict.” Indeed, just as the poet warns the reader, the entire poem speaks of the conflict of love. Lines 2–10 discuss the woes of lovers who are entangled in the webs of love and indicate that evil people—wily servants and plotting old women—desire to ensnare the young and foolish by inciting their passions. These destructive characters use the power

of language to tease the thoughts of the young and to lead them into illicit relationships. These lines hearken directly to *Celestina*, in which a conniving procuress, servants, and maidservants all seek to profit by stoking the flames of love within the young couple.

The powerful results of these entrapments are catalogued in lines 11–21, making the lovers' plight sound pitiful to the extreme: "The voices of lovers are in sorrowful pain, their limbs torn apart in their deep anguish, their tearful weeping, and the lament of their imploring; . . . See their screams and their sighs and how in every moment, and with every pain, they tremble, as well as their injury, the anguish of their foolishness, and their sorrow" (lines 11–14). Sarfati describes love as having a real, overarching power that can create deep misery. These lines no longer correspond directly to the story of *Celestina*. Melibea's life does end in misery when Calisto dies at the wall. Sarfati's descriptions, however, seem to pass well beyond the psychological effects of love found in the story. In other words, Sarfati has a view of love and a possible didactic intent in translating *Celestina* and in writing this poem that perhaps extend further than simply providing the Jewish community with the story.

In lines 22–28, Sarfati turns his attention to "love" in general and claims, "There is no shelter or shade in love. . . . She will break and bury the body of a man; she will fill the heart of the valiant with fear; she will humble and knock down the haughty; she will remove the great pride from a strong man; she will cast out men of renown and wisdom" (lines 22–25). The theme shifts again in lines 29–37 and teaches the audience how to assuage the power of love and how to obtain the favor of maidens; rather than damaging the lover, "the maidens" will instead favor him. Sarfati teaches the audience that "silver will gather the hearts of gazelles, as will the gifts of veils and scarves. Gold will lift up the lover in glory" (lines 30–31). He even issues a command or direction: "Give gifts and offerings to the gazelles, and clothing and dresses to beautiful women! Truly a nose ring softens their malice, as do arm bracelets given by their lovers" (lines 34–35). He then describes the positive benefits of this type of offering: "Thus the beauty will desire her lover and will kiss

him” (line 36). This is a surprising shift in theme. Up until this point, the poet has been unwavering in his condemnations of and warnings against the dangers of love. Here Sarfati encourages a certain relationship with love based on monetary bribes. Again this theme does not seem to directly match the story line of *Celestina*.

In lines 38–50, Sarfati suddenly returns to his former encouragements, imploring his audience to have nothing to do with women and love. He makes the only overt reference in the entire poem to the subject of his translation, *Celestina*, when he gives the name of Melibea in line 45 and states that she will be “as a sign” (Heb. *lenes*). In these lines the poem becomes more and more focused on Sarfati’s audience, with Sarfati speaking directly to them in multiple lines: “O chaste ones! How good and excellent it is to turn away from her and to move aside. . . . Flee from their beauty; beware their defects. . . . Despise their nectar. . . . Flee . . . extinguish . . . destroy” (lines 38, 42–43, 46–47).

Sarfati begins to employ more regular and overt Jewish symbols and references in line 39. Besides referring in that line to David, Solomon, and the angel of death from the first Passover in Egypt, in line 42 he uses a Hebrew word replete with Jewish connotations when he refers to seductive women as *keley nidah* (Eng. “menstruous vessels” or “impure vessels”), eliciting a host of implications surrounding the law of Moses that required strict separation for women during their monthly cycle. In line 46 he refers explicitly to the needs of “my people,” emphasizing that these warnings are specifically intended for the Jews. In line 48 he calls his audience a “gathering and company of survivors,” again referring directly to the Jews. Also in line 48, he asks for his audience’s attention and their trust: “Turn to me, and pay attention to my words.” When compared with the first line—“Observe (literally “turn to”), beloved, the war of lovers”—we can clearly see the shift in focus.

In the conclusion of the poem, lines 51–62, Sarfati gives his credentials and explains why the Jewish people should trust him as a guide. “I am Joseph, son of Rabbi Samuel, prince of the faithful, a pillar of the faith, a source of wisdom and a wellspring of all subtlety, the support of the stakes of Jacob’s tent, whose name is Sarfati; is it not he who has

served great rulers and princes, such as Pope Julius, priest, head of the nations?” (lines 51–54). As has been mentioned, Sarfati was able to interact successfully with a powerful non-Israelite group and its chief leader, much like Joseph of Egypt did. Joseph’s unique position, comparable to that of Sarfati, allowed him to serve as a protector for his people and to further their cause.

Sarfati places four commands upon his audience in quick succession in the last line of his poem—“Make haste!” “Awake!” “Turn aside!” and “Observe!” He seems intent on retaining the attention of his audience and of helping them to turn aside from disastrous consequences. The hints and allusions in this poem point to a subtler message hidden within the connections to *Celestina* and indicate how Sarfati read that work and at least some of the reasons he was interested in it.

The first clue that Sarfati is providing a message within a message to his audience is the realization that his words do not perfectly describe *Celestina*. As Hamilton describes: “Of the 62 lines of Sarfati’s poem, only about 10 contain explicit references to the plot and characters of the *Celestina*. The other 50 or so lines—roughly 85% of the poem—treat in a very general way some of the themes found in *Celestina*, such as the pangs of love, the suffering of lovers and the deception of speech. Yet Sarfati also introduces a series of motifs that seem somewhat alien to *Celestina*.”<sup>71</sup>

Other hints demonstrate that Sarfati was trying to call his readers’ attention to an alternate message. He constantly urges his readers to “pay attention,” “be alert,” and “awake” to the message of his poem. On multiple occasions he uses words that the Jewish people would have understood as specifically applying to them, although in the poem Sarfati is overtly speaking only of men being destroyed by love. For example, in line 12 he speaks of the “tearful weeping, and the lament of their imploring; they are filled with wrath among a despised, wandering people.” On closer inspection, the careful reader must explore the identity of this despised, wandering people, filled with wrath. This reference is

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71. Hamilton, “Sarfati’s ‘Tratado de Melibea y Calisto,’” 331.

descriptive of the Jews expelled from Spain, those filled with the wrath of Spanish Christianity. Sarfati pointedly addressed that group in the second of the poems analyzed above.

Once this relationship becomes clear, other references to the plight of the lost lovers begin to sound more like the situation of the Sephardic Jews ejected from Spain or the forced Jewish converts to Christianity, plagued by the insistent and punishing gaze of the Inquisition. According to line 16, “Destitute and barefoot they go by the thousands; scattered on every corner, they wander to and fro”; the line here describes the situation for some of the Sephardic Jews who had remained faithful and made their way to Italy.<sup>72</sup> Immediately after employing this description, Sarfati states that he will be the one to tell their story, “I will tell their tales, their vagabond ways, and their travails as they suffer a heavy load, like that of thousands of mules who stumble, wither, and perish with burdens too heavy for them” (lines 17–18). These lines could refer to the burdens of lovers, but can a large number of lonely, rejected men ever appropriately be called a community? Thus the reader may ask who this community of lovers that Sarfati has chosen to represent in his tale telling might be, if it is not an allusion to his own Jewish community.

Later, Sarfati again refers directly to the Jewish people, stating that he gives these warnings “so that my people will turn from the path of desire—flee from its burning fire” (line 46). The fact that Sarfati here speaks overtly of the Jewish people, “my people,” emphasizes that the message to avoid lust or desire is particularly important for them and that this message is offered not to protect a general audience but to guide a specifically Jewish audience. Although Carpenter’s choice of translation is too liberal, he hit at the substance of line 46 with his

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72. See Esposito, “Sephardic Communities in Rome,” 161–69. See also Hayyim Beninart, “Edim yehudim mita’am hatevi’ah beveyt din ha’inqvizitzyah,” in *Pirqey Sefarad* (Jerusalem: Hotsa’at Me’agnes, 1997), 1:486–88; Amador de los Ríos, *Historia Social, Política y Religiosa de los Judíos de España* (Madrid: Impresa de Madrid, 1960), 689; Benzion Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), 55–63, 416–18; Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 55–63.

rendering: “Veer from the path of Gentile lust; above all, flee its fiery end.”<sup>73</sup> The second half of this line indicates that the Jewish reader needs to “flee from its burning fire.” Written at a time when the fires at the stakes of the Inquisition in Portugal and Spain were at their height, this reference to flight from fire would likely have hit a responsive chord within that audience and would again have called their attention to a deeper message. Indeed, in the line immediately preceding this one, Sarfati had indicated that he would hold up Melibea and the love of Melibea “as a sign,” indicating that the figure of Melibea stands as a symbol for something else. Under this interpretation Melibea would become a sign of the dominant culture, and the love of Melibea would represent the Jews’ “adulterous” yearnings after the benefits promised by the religion of Christianity.

Sarfati’s poem is replete with biblical allusions that warn of the dangers of being drawn away to serve other gods. Although difficult to recognize in English, they include Hebrew terms that exactly match the description of Simeon’s violence in response to Dinah’s rape by a Gentile in Genesis 49:5–6, another Hebrew allusion to Proverbs 25:14 with its advice on how to act appropriately when in conversation with enemies (line 28), a reference to Esau selling his birthright for pottage (line 37), and the mention of David and Solomon, who were destroyed by relying too much on the love of Gentiles (line 39). In line 42, Sarfati teaches that although the lovers (or the Christian society they represent) appear clean and glorious on the outside, too much association with them will produce the same kind of impurities that the Christians have:

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73. Carpenter, “A Converso Best-Seller,” 278. Carpenter’s translation depends on how the manuscript is interpreted. The copier for the manuscript often removed the final *mem* of plural words ending in *-im*. Here this would mean that the word I have translated as “my people” (Heb. *le’umi*) could be understood “nations” (Heb. *le’umim*) and that the translation “Gentile lust” (Heb. *khesheq le’umim*) would be correct. Although the mark that the copier typically placed in the manuscript when removing a *mem* is not visible in this phrase, there may be other locations where a *mem* was removed without the designating mark. Whether or not Carpenter’s translation is accepted or not, it appears to me that Sarfati’s intent was to warn of this type of attraction, as Carpenter’s translation indicates.

“Flee from their beauty; beware their defects, for they are menstruous vessels robed in glorious attire.”

Sarfati instructs his audience how to gain favor with “their lovers” in lines 29–38. “Silver will gather the hearts of gazelles. . . . Gold will lift up the lover in glory” (lines 30–31). In the next lines the focus shifts to an avoidance of persecution: “Great gifts will soften the heart of armies” (line 33). This mention of armies connects the object of love with those who hold weapons of power on behalf of the state. In Rome this would refer to the power of a papacy that also controlled its own armies. Only if the Jewish audience has gold and gifts—in other words only if the Jewish community is economically useful to the Christian hierarchy—will the beauty “desire her lover and will kiss him” (line 36).

Affirming that his only concern is his role as translator, Sarfati returns to his role as a mediator between the Jews and Christians in lines 55–56. He “arranges” his conversation—with the Jews and with the Christians?—for the benefit of his “brethren the Jews.” He encourages others not to fight against him in his role. These words hint that there were those in the Jewish community who did not trust him in representing the Jews before the Christians.

Sarfati—himself a Sephardic Jew—makes one more pointed reference to the situation of the Jews in Spain and Portugal in line 61, reminding them that “you remain in the midst of a burning conflagration.” The image of burning fires would again remind the Jews at that time of the fires of the Inquisition. With that reminder, Sarfati encourages his Jewish audience, “All as one make haste! Awake and turn aside! Observe, beloved, the war of lovers” (line 62). This poem is not a warning to individual lovers. Sarfati is speaking to a community and urges that community to act as one and with urgency. The Jewish community, according to Sarfati, needs to awake rapidly in order to turn aside from the influence, allure, and promises that the Christian community is offering them. They need to pay close attention to the reality that their existence is a war between two sets of religious promises and ideals and that they are living in the “war of lovers.” Thus Sarfati demonstrates his understanding of *Celestina* as a work warning a converso audience

against overt reliance on their newfound status as Christians, or, at the very least, he uses his introduction of that work as a coded message of caution to his own people.

## Conclusion

Although Sarfati took advantage of the great opportunities around him and chose to equip himself with all of the social, literary, scientific, and medical skills that would make him useful to the Christian society within which he lived, some of his Hebrew poetry appears to demonstrate a concern that the Jews would be unduly influenced by those opportunities. Using the coded language of Hebrew and biblical allusion, Sarfati sought to warn them against trusting too completely in the promises and proffered protection of the dominant culture that could seduce them away from their true faith. In the end, if the Jews chose to abandon their traditional faith, they would be destitute and despised. Written at a time when the theme of romantic love permeated the pages of Renaissance literature, allusions to the biblical theme of adulterous love as a symbol for betraying one's religious beliefs were especially useful. Not only did Sarfati employ that motif in much of his poetry, but the theme apparently also motivated—at least partially—his translation of the famous Spanish work *Celestina*. Throughout Sarfati's works, the continued power and relevance of the Hebrew language and of biblical themes can be seen still functioning in early Renaissance times as a force connecting the Jewish people across the borders of the various lands of the Diaspora.

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