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Jewish Women: Instructions for Use. Slonik's *Seder Mišwot Našim* from Yiddish to Judeo-Italian

1 Books of Precepts in Early Modern Jewish Culture and Heilprun's *Precetti*: First Remarks

The precepts Jewish women are bound to observe are traditionally synthesized in three main *mišwot* (precepts) concerning *halla* (dough offering), *nidda* (menstrual impurity) and *hadlaqat ha-ner* (lighting of the candles at the beginning of Shabbat and the Festivals). These precepts, and in particular the second one, are at the very center of a Jewish woman's everyday life. It is therefore understandable that texts on this subject are found among the older documents in Yiddish. In fact, the genre of books of precepts for women—and men—is well attested from the beginning of the sixteenth century in Yiddish and, from the end of the same century, in Judeo-Italian as well. The first known Yiddish manuscript on this subject is dated 1504 and was copied in Italy.¹

During the same period, several tractates on matters of married life were circulating in Christian society and many of them were printed. They codified instructions about the behavior required by husbands and wives concerning sex and pregnancy.² In addition, the diffusion of *ante litteram* 'reference-books' meant for—to use Ann Blair's words—"facilitating access to a mass of texts considered authoritative" grew during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the impact of print can partly explain the success of this kind of literature.³ A second factor in the

1 Cambridge University Library, Or. Add. 547. See Mayer (1985:III); Romer-Segal (1986:44); Turniansky and Timm (2003:62–63); Fram (2007:141–142). On this manuscript cf. also Fox and Lewis (2011), and see Turniansky (2012). For the books of precepts for women in sixteenth century Italy cf. Settimi (2009); Weishouse (2016). Depictions of these precepts are known from Ashkenazic Hebrew manuscripts since the fifteenth century. See Shalev-Eyni (2008) and Sabar (2013). It is worth noting that in the same period this kind of literature was known in Ladino as well. See Schwarzwald (2012).

2 Bell (1999).

3 Blair (2010:1–2). In this seminal book, Ann M. Blair (2010:4) is actually focusing on other genres of books "considered essential for the educated in any occupation". Her work investigates what she calls the "info-lust" of humanists (Blair 2010:6). Still, books of precepts for women could be seen as

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change of attitude in the process of widening the range of knowledge is probably an increase in the control of the body and, especially, of sexual practices.⁴

The most influential work within this genre in Yiddish was written by Benjamin Slonik (1550 ca.–after 1620): his book, called *Seder Mišwot Našim*, was printed in Cracow in 1577 and again in 1585, in Basel in 1602, Hanau 1627 and Dessau 1699.⁵ At the beginning of the seventeenth century the book was translated into Judeo-Italian by an Ashkenazic Jew active mainly in Padua, Rabbi Ya‘aqov Ben Elḥanan Heilprun—his name appearing also as Rabbi Giacob Halpron or Alpron—and it was later printed by him in Venice in 1616 with the title *Precetti da esser imparati dalle donne hebree* (Precepts to be learned by Jewish women); see Figure 1. A manuscript of the same work, in Hebrew letters, was composed in Venice in 1607.⁶

The fact that Heilprun decided to publish the book in Judeo-Italian instead of just reprinting Slonik’s version in Yiddish was interpreted by Chone Shmeruk as a sign of a change in Ashkenazic culture in Italy. During the seventeenth century, Italian *Ashkenazim* gradually abandoned Yiddish and adopted Judeo-Italian Languages, even though Passover *Haggadot* continued to be printed with parts in Yiddish until 1716. Another explanation can be added: these kinds of booklets of halakhic instructions for family life were not common in the vernacular languages of Italian Jewry, as far as we know. Manuscripts in the vernacular were occasionally produced, such as the *Hokhmat Našim* (Velletri 1565–1599) by Jechiel Kohen B. Mose dei Manuscrivi, but the quantity of tractates on *mišwot*, *minhagim* (customs) and *musar* (moral behavior) we have in Yiddish, in both manuscripts and prints, cannot be compared to what survived in other Jewish languages. Italian Jewry has an old tradition of vulgarizations (in Judeo-Italian Languages) of books of the Bible and prayers, of glosses and of original compositions for Jewish festivals and celebrations of historical events, but books of halakhic content were mainly copied or composed in Hebrew and Aramaic.⁷

‘reference books’ meant for “knowledge and edification” (Blair 2010:2) for a wider audience, and “consultation-friendly layouts” (Blair 2010:5); the indexes at the end of most of the printed versions of books of precepts suggest they could have been easily used as manuals, or ‘how-to books’. This is suggested also by Fram (2007:XV).

4 Weinstein (2008).

5 Romer-Segal (1986: 54–55, nos. 8, 9, 11 [also a print of Cracow, 1595, which has not survived], 12, 13, 15). See also Fram (2007). The name Slonik is also registered as Solnik. Here the former is kept.

6 MS. New York, Jewish Theological Seminary. The manuscript was divided in two (JTS MS R1054 and JTS MS R1196). See Richler (1987: 136, no. 75); Fram (2007:139–140).

7 See *Sefer Hokhmat Našim* (Velletri 1565–1599) by Jechiel Kohen B. Mose dei Manuscrivi. See: Geneva, Switzerland, Library of Geneva, Ms. Comites Latentes 173 (Olim The National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, Israel Ms. Heb. 8° 5834). About this work, see Mayer Modena (1985:V); Fram (2007:140). For a comprehensive presentation of Judeo-Italian language and literature, see Mayer Modena

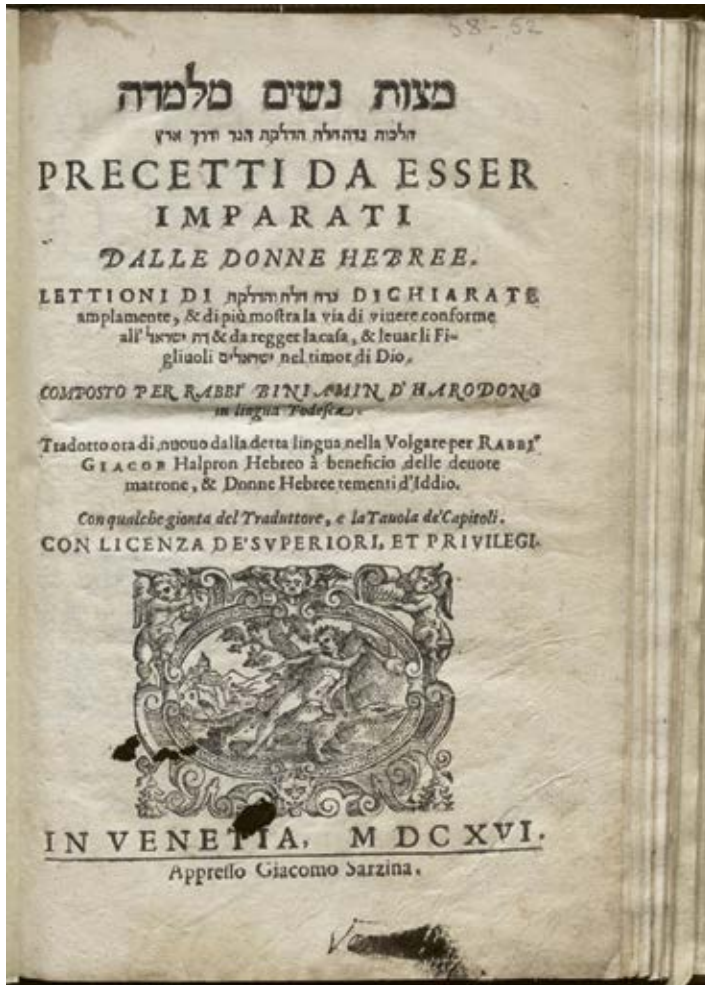


Figure 1: *Mišwot Našim Mēlammēdah: hilḳot nidda ḥalla hadlaqat ha-ner wē-dereḳ ereṣ* (Venice, 1616). Jerusalem, The National Library of Israel, 91 B 3196. Front page

Heilprun's version is a translation, but partly a rewriting as well. In this paper I wish to present the Judeo-Italian version of Slonik's *Mišwot Našim*, highlighting the similarities and the differences between the two.

(1997, 2022); Rubin (2017). For *volgarizzazioni* of the Bible see, among others: Cassuto (1926, 1929); Cuomo (1988). For prayers in Judeo-Italian, see Cassuto (1930a, 1930b). On the use of Hebrew among Italian Jews, see in particular Bonfil (1996:424–425).

2 Judeo-Italian Books of Precepts

The Yiddish works on women's precepts, and Slonik's book in particular, have been thoroughly studied by Agnes Romer-Segal and Edward Fram, who published a bilingual—Yiddish and English—edition of *Miṣwot Našim*, based on the 1585 print, and accompanied by a comprehensive introduction. In his presentation of manuscripts and printed books which are part of the genre of *Frauen-Büchlen*, he included also the Judeo-Italian tradition, listing some texts that have not yet been researched.⁸

Most books of precepts in Judeo-Italian are translated or reworked from Yiddish. This kind of books attests (1) that Ashkenazic Jews in Italy, from the second half of the sixteenth century and during the seventeenth century, had started to use Judeo-Italian, and (2) that Italian Jews also adopted books of precepts and kept copying and printing them. In 1985, Maria Luisa Mayer listed the Judeo-Italian manuscripts of this genre and prepared a critical edition of one of them.⁹ Most of the listed books—the oldest one dating from the second half of the sixteenth century—are openly presented as translated from the Yiddish. The same manuscript from Casale Monferrato, in Piedmont, published by Maria Luisa Mayer Modena, came into the possession of an Ashkenazic woman, Ricca Ottolenghi (Riccha Sacerdote Pavia), between 1586 and 1603.¹⁰ On 3r we read:

«questo *sefer* scritto in uolgare in modo che italiani et todeschi intenderanno come l'homo e la donna si debbeno gouernare di tuto quello gli farà bisogno tuto il tempo del anno [. . .]
Tempo ua e tempo uene
Tropo sta chi non fa bene
Facendo male sperando bene
Il tempo pasa e la morte viene»¹¹

This *sefer* [holy book] [is] written in Italian so that Italians [Italian Jews] and Ashkenazic Jews will understand how men and women should conduct themselves in everything they will need throughout the year [. . .]

Time goes and time comes / He who does not act well spends too much time / Doing bad, hoping for good / Time passes and death comes.

⁸ Romer-Segal (1986) and Fram (2007:139–149, *Appendix*).

⁹ Ms. L. 17 of the Biblioteca Civica di Casale Monferrato. See Mayer Modena (1985).

¹⁰ Mayer Modena (1985:2). One of the witnesses on a contract connected to Ricca was Jacob Alprono/Heilprun. See Mayer Modena (1985:1–2, especially note 1).

¹¹ Mayer Modena (1985:2). This is an Italian proverb: “facendo il male, sperando il bene, il tempo passa e la morte viene.”

Another manuscript in Judeo-Italian worth quoting is now in the Bayer Staatsbibliothek in München (BSB Cod. Hebr. 475), dated 1596 (see Figure 2); this is the ‘printer’s copy’,¹² the manuscript prepared in the printing shop of Giovanni di Gara in Venice which, to our knowledge, was never printed.¹³ Here we read:

מצות הנשים

ציואי לי אורדיני אי דינים דילי טרי מצות די לי דוני
 נדה חלה הדלקת הנר, נומינטי קון דיליניציאה
 טראדוטו דלה לינגוה טודיסקה אין בונה לינגוה
 איטליאנה אה ביניפיציאו דילי דוני דיווטי
 די איטליאה, קוסה נציסאריאה איט
 אוטילי מולטו קון לה טאוולה
 די טוטי לי דינים קי צי סי
 קונטינגונגו

סטאמפאטו אין ויניציאה ל אנו צינקוי מיליאה אי
 טריצינטו צינקואנטה סיא [דל]ה קריאציון דיל מונדו

אפריסו זואן די גארה

Mišwot Našim [Women’s Precepts]

That is, the commandments and *dinim* (religious laws) of the three *mišwot* of the women
nidda ḥalla hadlaqat ha-ner, newly translated with diligence
 from the Yiddish language into good Italian language
 for the benefit of devout women
 of Italy, a necessary and very useful thing
 with a table of all the *dinim*
 that are included

Printed in Venice in the year five thousand and
 three hundred fifty-six from the creation of the world
 at the printing shop of Zuan de Gara

Here, as well, it is declared that the book is a translation of a Yiddish version¹⁴ and that the translation was done because it was “necessary” and “very useful.” In the

¹² On ‘printer’s copy’ see in particular Trovato (1998) and Hellinga (2014).

¹³ Richler (2010:57–58). In this study Richler presents the hypothesis that the manuscript was copied by Leone Modena. I am grateful to the peer reviewer for having brought this paper to my attention.

¹⁴ On this manuscript and its relation to the Yiddish tradition, see Fram (2007:148–149). It is also listed in Mayer Modena (1985:V, a).

introduction by the translator, it is also stated that Ashkenazic women have many books about the Torah in their language and are more *dotti* ('learned') about the Torah than the Italian (Jewish) women who, because of embarrassment, often do not have the courage to ask the rabbis.

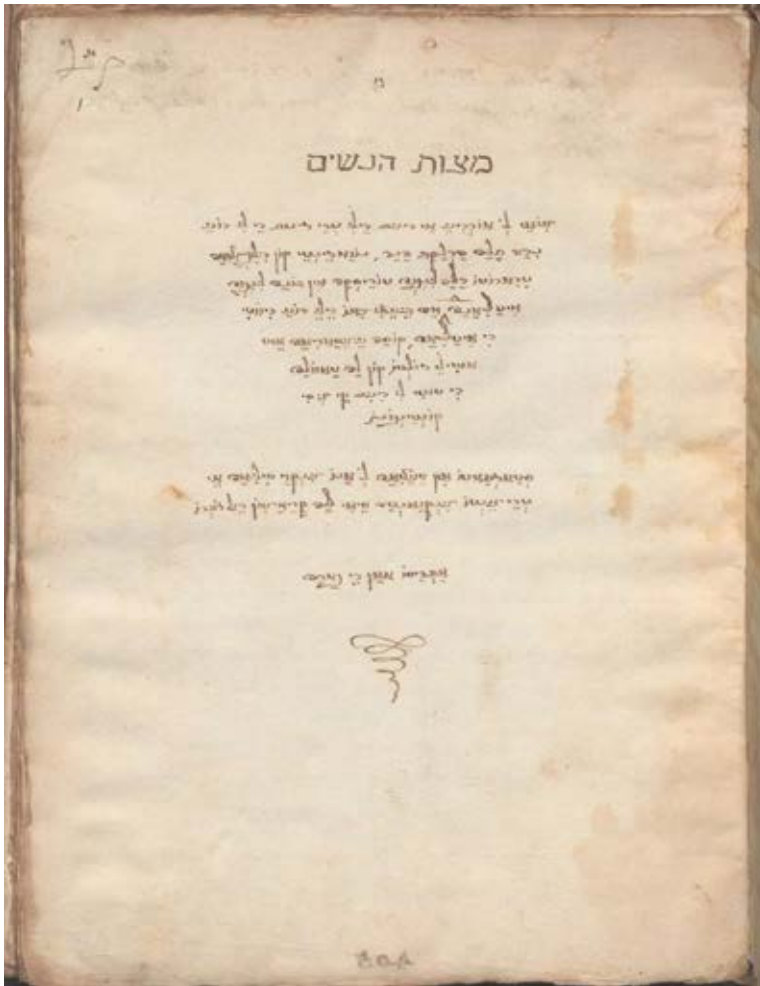


Figure 2: *Mišwot našim* (Venice, 1596), front page. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Cod. hebr. 475, 1r.

These books are usually meant for both Italian and Ashkenazic Jews. Since the mention of an original Yiddish work as a clear source of the Judeo-Italian ones is recurrent, it is probable that Yiddish texts on that matter acquired a sort of prestige among Italian Jews.

A second recurrent feature is that these books address both men and women at the same time. This is evident from some of the paratexts and from the content as well.

3 Ya‘aqov Ben Elhanan Heilprun and His *Precetti*

The author of the Judeo-Italian rendering of Slonik’s *Mišwot Našim* is Ya‘aqov Ben Elhanan Heilprun, a writer, scribe, translator and teacher who lived in Northern Italy, especially in Padua, and died in 1625.¹⁵ He published several books in Hebrew and Yiddish:

- the Yiddish version of *Oreḳ Yamim* by Rabbi Šemu‘el Benveniste, printed in Venice in 1598 in the printing shop of Giovanni di Gara;¹⁶
- a rewriting in Yiddish rhymes of Rabbi Šelomo Ibn Gabirol’s *Keter Malkut* that came out in Venice in 1600 from the printing shop of Giovanni di Gara;¹⁷
- a tractate in Yiddish on how to soak and salt meat based on Rabbi Moše Isserles’ *Torat ha-Ḥaṭṭat*, printed in Venice, probably in 1601–1602, in the printing shop

15 Steinschneider (1931:1213–1214, no. 5538); Carpi (1979 § 396:227–228 [הסכמה חזרה שלא לתת] § 513:290–291 [this entry brings a resolution of the Community Council to offer economic support to Heilprun, *sofer ha-qēhilla*], § 538:304, § 585:327 [here it is stated that if someone would be interested in renting the room in which Ya‘aqov Heilprun ז”ל (of blessed memory) lived—a room which was owned by the Community—he should go to the *parnasim* (community treasurers); the resolution was taken in 1625], § 590–591:330–331, § 623:350 [the resolution instructs that ten *ducati* should be given to Heilprun’s widow, who asked for money in order to leave Padua], § 752:410 [this entry deals with the inheritance of מרת אלינה, אלמנת הגאון במוהר”ר Heilprun’s widow], § 777:422–423 [here Heilprun is called *sofer ha-qēhilla*], § 779:424–425); Boksenboim (1989:545 [dated 1597], 634 [dated 1600], 642 [dated 1600]); Boksenboim (1990:82; this entry indicates that Heilprun was in Verona in 1603); Shmeruk (2003:179). Heilprun was close to the family of Simone Luzzatto. See Luzzatto (1882), and Veltri in his *Introduction to Luzzatto* (2013: XXV, XXXII–XXXIV).

While this paper was already in print, a relevant study about Ya‘aqov Heilprun and his work came out. See Fram (2024).

16 Shmeruk (1982:161–163, no. 24); Turniansky and Timm (2003:92, no. 45).

17 Haberman and Yudlov (1982:97, no. 196); Shmeruk (1982:163–166, no. 26); Turniansky and Timm (2003:35, no. 20). According to the dedication letter, the book is presented to his relative, Kayle Ottolenghi, *ešet hayil*, wife of Mendl Ottolenghi. On this work see also Berger (2007).

of Giovanni di Gara with the title *Dinim wē-Seder*. The book is dedicated to a woman, Moschita, daughter of Hizqiyya Parento;¹⁸

- *Naḥalat Ya‘aqov*, a collection of responsa in Hebrew, printed in Padua in 1622, in the printing shop of Gasparo Crivellari;
- *Orḥot Ḥayyim*, a book of *musar*, of moral teaching, in Hebrew, printed in Venice in 1623, *Nella stamperia di Giovanni Colleoni, Appresso gli Illustr. Sig. Pietro e Lorenzo Bragadini*.

Heilprun’s Judeo-Italian version of Slonik’s work has survived in one manuscript, and in the above-mentioned printed versions entitled *Precetti da esser imparati dalle donne hebree*: Venice 1616, Padua 1625, Venice 1710.¹⁹ The manuscript, Jewish Theological Seminary MS R1054 (see Figure 3), is an autograph and was copied in 1607 for a *nobilissima signora Giusta di Consoli consorte del dottissimo Rabbi Mordekhai Cuzzer da Riva*.²⁰ The printed version of 1616 is without doubt dependent on the manuscript, even if some changes are present.

The first fact to note is that, in the manuscript, Heilprun presents his book as *tradotto del[la] lingua todesca ne la volgare*, that is, as a translation from Yiddish into the vernacular, to which—in the manuscript version—he added some “improvements” (*et giunteli qualche migliori*), while in the printed book he writes that he translated the book from Yiddish for the sake of women who do not understand Yiddish and that he added some *particella*, some small parts.

In general, the dependence of *Precetti* on Slonik’s *Miṣwot Našim* is almost complete: (1) Slonik’s book consists of 139 chapters (one is missing), Heilprun’s—of 137; (2) both display a Table of Contents at the end of the work; (3) the internal order

¹⁸ Habermann and Yudlov (1982:105, no. 213); Shmeruk (1982:171–173, no. 31); Turniansky and Timm (2003:91, no. 44). The family name *Parento* is a variant of the more common form *Parenzo*. See Carpi (1973:563, s.v. פֿאַרענט, פֿאַרענט). On *Dinim wē-Seder* see also Turniansky (2016).

¹⁹ A copy of this print is held by the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, see: *Precetti da esser imparati dalle donne hebree* [. . .] / *composto per Rabbi Biniamim d’Harodono* [. . .]; *tradotto* [. . .] *per Rabbi Giacob Halpron Hebreo* [. . .], In *Venetia: Appresso Giacomo Sarzina, 1616*, R 8 91 B 3196. A copy is also held in the British Library, London, under the shelfmark: General Reference Collection 4034.de.11. The book was reprinted in 1625: *Precetti da esser imparati dalle donne hebree* [. . .] / *composto per Rabi Biniamin D’Harodono, in lingua Todesca*. / *Tradotto ora di nuovo dalla detta lingua nella Volgare per Rabi Giacob Halpron hebreo à beneficio delle deuote matrone, & Donne Hebreo temente d’Iddio* [. . .], In *Padoua: Per Gasparo Crieullari, 1625*; and again in 1710: *Precetti d’esser imparati dalle donne Hebreo / composto per Biniammin d’Arodono in lingua todesca; tradotto* [. . .] *nella volgare per Giacob Alpron, Venezia: G. De’ Paoli, 1710* (see the copy held in the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, R 8= 35 V 3763).

²⁰ On the Jews in Riva del Garda and the Cuzzeri and Alpron families, see Volli (1970:especially 481).



Figure 3: *Mišwot Našim Mēlammēdah: hilkot nidda ḥalla hadlaqa ha-ner wē-dereḥ ereṣ* (Venice, 1607), front page. Jewish Theological Seminary, MS R1054. Courtesy of The Jewish Theological Seminary.

of the chapters is identical (except in one case, see chapters 9–12 in both versions); (4) often the translation from Yiddish into Judeo-Italian is very literal. The evident features which appear only in the Judeo-Italian version are: the dedication in the print to a specific woman: Bona, wife of Signor Lazero d'Italia Hebreo in Mantova, and the Licenza of the Censor for the Santo Ufficio, F. Thomaso, dated 27 October 1614, *in Venetia*.

Inside the book there are several changes, and these are presented in the following sections.

3.1 Neutralization of Anti-Christian Elements

A recurring characteristic of Heilprun's version is the 'neutralization' of the references to non-Jews, i.e., Christians. An example can be found in a passage on ritual immersion during the intermediate days of the Festivals. In Slonik we read (I quote from Fram's translation): "But she may not allow any non-Jewess who does not work for Jews to do it [cut her nails], since the non-Jewess will think that she had been bewitched."²¹ The Yiddish text uses the expression *eyn shifkhe eyn goye*, 'a non-Jewish servant'. In Heilprun's version there is only a *shifkhà* (in Hebrew letters: שפחה, *šifḥa*) and no mention of magic.²² In other cases, instead of the term *goy* there is *Yishmael* (in Hebrew letters יִשְׁמָעֵאל, *Yišma'el*), also together with *Edomi* (אֶדוֹמִי).²³ Was this done because of fear from the Catholic censorship? Or is it an expression of a softening of anti-Christian bias?

3.2 In the Thick of It

In chapter 70 of the Yiddish text there is a detailed passage on what happens if a couple discover that the woman has begun menstruating during intercourse. In this case "they should both be terrified and she should feel great horror because of the tremendous sin" (in Heilprun's version & *hauer grandissimo terrore*, & *timore per il grandissimo* ער), and they should behave as follows.²⁴

²¹ Fram (2007:204, chapter 59).

²² *Precetti* (1616:34, capitolo 57).

²³ *Precetti* (1616:83, capitolo 115); Fram (2007:280–281, chapter 117); and *Precetti* (1616, capitolo 133); Fram (2007:298–299, chapter 135).

²⁴ Fram (2007:214–217, chapter 70). The English translation is by Fram. For the sources of this *halakà* see *Barayta bi-Švu'ot* 17v; Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, *hilḥot issure bi'a* 4:11; *Ṭur*, *Yore de'a*, *hilḥot nidda* 185; *Bet Yosef*, *Yore de'a* 185:5. The horror mentioned in both versions is clearly and foremost due to the importance of respecting the laws of menstruation in Judaism, but it can also be connected to the belief, attested in the Christian society of the same period, that copulation during menstruation generates monsters, lepers, epileptics and insane children (see Niccoli 1990).

Slonik, Mišwot Našim, chapter 70**Precetti, capitolo LXVIII**

ווען איין ורויא זאגט דען מאן דאז זיא איז טמא גיווארן אונ' ער האלט אין דעם בייא ליגן דא זאל דר מאן תכף שטיל הלטן. אונ' זאל זיך ניט רירן פֿון דר שטאט. ער טאר ניט ווייטער בועל זיין. אונ' טאר אויך ניט פֿון איר שיידן. וואוויא זיא ווערן אדר ווייטער בועל אדר דז זיא זיך שיידן זאלטן פֿון אנגדר דיא ווייל זיין גימעכט נאך הערט איז דא ווערן זיא חייב כרת. גלייך אז איינר דער בייא דער נידה ליגט דען דאש אב שיידן מיט דען הערטן גימעכט איז אזו איין הנאה אז דז בייא ליגן זעלברט. דרום זאלן זיא הארין ביז דר לושט ור גיט אונ' דש זיין גימעכט ווידר ווייך ווערט דא זאלן זיא זיך ארשט פֿון אנגדר שיידן. אונ' ווייל דר מאן אזו אויף איר שטיל ליגט דא זאל ער זיך ניט לעגן אויף זיין ווייב. ער זאל דיא ציאן פֿון דען פֿיסן אן שפרייצן אן דאש בעט אונ' זאל אזו שטיל ליגן ביש זיין גימעכט ווערט ווידר ווייך. איינס דז אזו איין מעשה צו קומן ווער אונ' ער העט דען דין ניט גוויש דז ער זיך ניט טאר שיידן פֿון איר אזו בלד אונ' ער העט זיך גישיידן פֿון איר ווייל זיין גימעכט איז הערט גיוועזן דא זאל ער גין צו איין רב אונ' זאל תשובה נעמן וויא אין דר רב ווערט היישן. אודר די אשה דרף קיין תשובה ניט טון

& converrebbe parlar un puoco chiaro per esser il caso importantissimo; ma perché è cosa difficile da esprimere in scrittura si tralascia, però uno che li occorresse tal caso, non havendo saputo il din di tal caso deve domandare un מורינו & farsi dar תשובה, ma la Donna non occorre a pigliar תשובה, perche per sua natura è sottoposta à tal accidente.

If a woman tells her husband that she has become unclean and he was in the midst of sexual intercourse, the husband should immediately be still and should not move himself from the spot. He may not separate from her. Were they either to continue to have intercourse or to separate from one another while his penis is still hard, they are liable for *karet*, just as when one lies with a menstruant,²⁵ for separating with a hard penis is as pleasurable as intercourse itself. Therefore they should wait until their lust passes and his penis becomes soft again and only then should they separate from one another. And while the husband lies thus still over her, he should not lean on his wife. He should prop [himself] up [on] the bed and should lie still thus until his penis becomes soft again. Anyone to whom such a thing happened and he did not know the law that he must not separate himself from her immediately and he had separated himself from her while his penis was still erect, he should go to a rabbi and receive a penance as the rabbi orders him but the woman need do no repentance.

and it would be advisable to talk clearly [about that], because the case is extremely important, but since it is a difficult thing to express in writing, it has been omitted, but if such a case happens to one, and he does not know the *din* [law] of this case, he has to ask the *morenu*,²⁶ & ask for a *teshuva* [penitence/penance], but the woman does not have to take a *teshuva*, since because of her nature she is subject to such an accident/case.

²⁵ See especially Lev 18:19 and 20:18.

²⁶ The term, meaning lit. 'our teacher', is widely attested in Judeo-Italian for 'Rabbi'.

The passage occurs in the first examples of the genre of the *Mišwot Našim*: it appears in the Yiddish manuscript from the Biblioteca Palatina di Parma, copied in Mantua in 1575 by Ayzik Kohen,²⁷ but there it is said only that husband and wife in such a case should separate, with no details (chapter 38).

In the printed version of Heilprun's *Precetti*, the passage is significantly abbreviated, but the same passage occurs in Heilprun's manuscript, 26v–27r:

מה ביוזני' איסיר בין אוורטיטו קווילו סי אבי דאפא[ר] איט קומי סי אבי די גא[...]. קווילו קי אורקי דיסי אין טאלי אקצידינטו איט קו[נוויר]ה פרלארה און פוקו [27א] קיירו פיר איסיר איל קאזו אימפורטאנטיסמו אינטראווינדו און טאל אקצידינטו נון דיבי פיקאר וואלונטאריימינטו די פיו די קווילו קי סי אי קאטו אין פאלו ניל טימפו קי לה [מ]אלי לא אוורטיסי קי סי סינטה איל דם נידות אי קוויל איסטנטי קי לוי אוסה קון ליי אלן[רן] סוביטו די אפירמסי איל מריטו איט נון סי דיבי מוויר דיל לוקו דווי סי ריטורנו ני נון סי דיבי ריט<ארי> ני אננטו ני אינדייטרו איט אי פרואיביט<ו> די פינרי קווילה בעילה קי אה פרינציפייטו ני מאנקו נון סי דיבי דיווידר די ליי קון איל מימברו קרישוטו פיר קי סאריבי חייב כרת קי טאנטו סריבי קוואנטו אוושה די אפר קון אונה נידה אביל דיליטו פיר קי איל סיפירסי קון איל מימברו קריסוטו אה טאנטו הנאה קומי ניל בעילה פרופריה פיר קוויסטו דיביני אינטרטינירסי פין טאנטו קי לי פאסי לא וואלונטה איט קי איל מימברו סיאה קאלמטו דא סואה [פושטה] איט לאשו אלורה סי דיביני סיפיראר איט פרא טאנטו קי סי אפירמנו נון לי סארה ליציטו די קל[ק]. מרסי סופרה די ליי מה סולו דיבי פוירסי סופרה לה פונטה די פידי סופרה איל ליטו או ליטירה או סטרסי אין איירי פין טאנטו קי איל מימברו ריטורנא אל סואו מיסרי. אה אונו קי לי אוקורסי טאל קאסו איט נון אוויסי ספוטו איל דין קי נון סי פוטיסי סיפיראר סוביטו איי לוי סי אוויסי סיפיראטו סוביטו קון איל מימברו אינדורייטו דיבי אנדר אה און מורינו איט פאר סי דארי תשובה מה לה דונה נון אקורה די טורי תשובה

but one has to be well advised about what to do if such an accident happens to one and it would be advisable to speak a bit clearly [about that], because the case is extremely important. Someone who has such an accident should not sin voluntarily more than he did already at the time the wife warned him that she felt the *dam niddot* [menstrual blood] in the instant in which he is having intercourse with her; the husband has to stop immediately and he must not move, neither backwards nor forwards, from the place in which he finds himself and he is forbidden to finish that *bē'ila* [sexual intercourse] that he started, nor may he separate himself from her while his member is enlarged, because he would be *hayyav karet* [liable for *karet* (untimely death)], as if he had intercourse with a *nidda* [menstruating woman] for contemptible pleasure—because to separate himself with the enlarged member causes as much *hana'a* [pleasure] as the *bē'ila* [sexual intercourse] itself. Therefore, he has to refrain himself as much as his will allows it and [wait until] his member is calmed and only then can he separate himself, and he is not allowed to calm himself [while lying] on top of her, but he can only stand on the tips of his feet over the bed or the bedstead/couch/cradle,²⁸ and wait²⁹ until his

27 Parma, Cod. 2511 (De Rossi Jud. Germ. 2), now [856], 10r; see Mayer Modena (1985:IV); Romer-Segal (1986:44); Richler (2001:190, no. [856]); Turniansky and Timm (2003:59–61, no. 30); Fram (2007:144).

28 The Italian term is *lettiera*. See Battaglia (1994–2002, s.v. *lettiera*: “Intelaiatura del letto, per lo più di legno [. . .], su cui si sistema il saccone o il materasso”; “2. Ant. Testiera del letto” [‘head-board’]).

29 I suggest reading it as *starsi in agire*, ‘to stop/interrupt from doing anything’. See Battaglia (1994–2002, s.v. [the form *stare in* + inf. is known in Old Italian]).

member returns to its measure. Someone to whom such a case occurred and he did not know the *din* [law], and was not able to separate himself immediately and he separated himself by moving backwards with his member, he should go to a *morenu* [rabbi, literally: ‘our teacher’]³⁰ and ask for a *tēšuva* [repentance], but the woman does not need to take a *tēšuva*.

This part was therefore present in the first version of Heilprun’s translation. An easy hypothesis as to why it does not appear in the printed version can be that the manuscript in Hebrew letters was intended for use by one woman and/or one family, but the printed book had a wider audience; such a detailed description could have been seen as immodest and improper. It is clear, anyway, that the passage is meant more for men than for women.

3.3 Gentle and Beautiful

Chapter 70 of the Judeo-Italian version is a bit different from the source. In particular, Heilprun added a passage:

& [la donna] si deve polire per parer bella alla presentia del marito, & non far come fanno alcune, che mai si poliscono se non quando escono di casa per parer belle à gli altri, & esser causa del $\pi\eta$ che alcuno gli piacerà, & la desidererà, & in casa sua vanno con la testa disconcia, con la scufia di notte tutta sporca, che pare una sguattera, qual cosa non si dovrebbe fare, anzi, in casa sua andar ben polita, per piacer a suo marito, accioche non desideri altra donna, & fuori di casa andar honestamente, ma che volete che io vi dica בעצור il tutto si fa al contrario, ma quelle che haveran timor di Dio metteranno mente a quello io li scrivo, & esorto, & si farà bella verso il suo marito [. . .].³¹

and the woman has to clean herself in order to appear beautiful in the presence of the husband, and not to behave as some, who do not clean themselves unless they are going out of their houses in order to appear beautiful to others, and they are cause of sin, because someone will like her, and will desire her, and at home they go around with ugly/undone³² hair, with the night-bonnet all dirty, so that she looks like a skivvy, and this is something that should not be done, on the contrary, the woman should go around well cleaned in her home, so that her husband will like her, and he will not desire any other woman, and outside her home she should go modestly. But what do you want me to say! *Ba’awonotenu ha-rabbim* [because of our many sins], the complete opposite is done, but those women who fear God will care for what I write for them, and I urge them, and she will make herself beautiful for her husband [. . .].

³⁰ On this term in Judeo-Italian, see Mayer Modena (2022:247–248).

³¹ *Precetti* (1616:42–43, capitolo 70); cf. Fram (2007:216).

³² On It. *disconcio*, see TLIO, s.v.

Heilprun decided to bring forth the importance of such a subject in his book, since he inserts a similar passage when he writes about the Shabbat. In Slonik we read:

אונ' ווען נון דיין מאן היים קומט פֿון שול. זוא <גיא>³³ אים אנקײגן היפּש אונ' פֿיין רײנקליך אן גיצוגן צו דען הייליגן שבת אונ' אנטפֿנג אײן ליפֿליך מיט אײן גוטן שבת אונ' ער זאל אויך ליפֿליך ענטוורן אונ' ער זאל זיך מיט דיר דער מייען אונ' איר זאלט גרושי שמחה מיט אנגדר האבן

And when your husband comes home from the synagogue, receive him while dressed nicely and very cleanly for the holy Sabbath and greet him lovingly with a “good *Shabbes*” and he should also answer you lovingly and he should delight with you and you should have great happiness with one another.³⁴

In the Judeo-Italian we read:

& quando il tuo marito verrà di scola a casa tu li debbi andar incontro ben addobbata, & ornata con la testa concia polita per כבוד שבת & non far come la più parte delle stomacose, che tengono in capo la scuffia di notte al שבת intrante per non metter il crinale, & altre conciatore, ma alla mattina poi che si hanno di uscir di casa si addobbano polite con tutti li ornamenti, & guai a quelle quanto sarebbe meglio che fuori di casa portassero la scuffia di notte, & senza adornamenti, & in casa si addobbassero per sodisfare a lor mariti, & parergli belle, & non alli huomini stranieri, & quanti עניות causa la donna quando vò per strada così pulita, & ben adornata, alcuno la vedrà, & la desiderarà, non havendo pensier se l'ha maritata, o da maritar, & questo si vien causato non sapendo, & quanti altri che per non uscir di proposito si tralasciano, è meglio a honor di Dio, & del שבת polirsi in casa sua, e comparir bella avanti il suo marito, questo si è far מצוה e granda, & ricever il marito con volto allegro, & benigno con dirli il buon שבת & ancor lui vedendoti così addobbata ti renderà il saluto, & dirà buon anno, & devesi trastulare con te, & in tal giorno nè l'un, nè l'altro non si deve ricordare niuna disgratia, nè cosa melanconica.³⁵

And when your husband comes home from the synagogue, you have to receive him well dressed, and well adorned, with a beautifully clean head for *kēvod Šabbat* [honor of the Shabbat] & you should not behave as most of the nauseating ones, who at the entrance of *Shabbat* keep night-bonnets on their heads, in order not to wear the *crinale*,³⁶ and other hair-styles, but in the morning, since they have to go out of their homes, they make themselves beautifully clean with all their ornaments and *haḥašim* [jewels] and they look at themselves in the mirror three or four times, so that nobody can say anything against them, so that all the people who would see her will have to praise her beauty, and her beautiful ornaments. Woe to those women, it would be so much better if they wore their night-bonnets outside

³³ The print from Cracow 1585 does not have the verb, but Basel 1602 print does (48v), and the *emendatio* definitively offers a better solution.

³⁴ Fram (2007:302–303, chapter 137).

³⁵ *Precetti* (1616, capitolo 135).

³⁶ See TLIO, s.v. ‘oggetto che orna o trattiene i capelli’ (‘object which adorns or holds the hair’).

their homes, and without ornaments, and at home they would adorn themselves in order to satisfy their husbands, and appear beautiful to them, and not to strangers, and how many *‘awonot* [sins] does the woman cause when she goes out in the street so clean and beautifully adorned—someone will see her and will desire her, not asking himself if she is married or not, and this sin is caused without intention, and so many more sins that, in order not to deviate from our subject, are left out. It is better for the honor of God and of the Shabbat, to be nicely clean in her own home, and appear beautiful in front of her husband. This is fulfilling a *mišwa*, and a big one, and to receive her husband with a cheerful and kind face, and greeting him with [wishing] good *Shabbat*, and he, seeing you so adorned, will greet you back, and will say: a good year, and he should have a good time with you, and on such a day neither of you should remember any disgrace, any melancholic matter [. . .].

The particular importance of exterior appearances for Jewish women in Italy is collaborated by other sources as well.³⁷ In addition, the condemnation of the external space and the fear of it is dominant. A short passage by Heilprun deals with the case in which a husband beats his wife. He follows Slonik, but he adds that, if this happens, she should remain silent, and not behave as those crazy women (*pazarrelle*) who start screaming so that all the neighbors gather, and she brings shame on herself and on her husband.³⁸

Still, in the Judeo-Italian version there is an added passage, which seems to soften the relation between husband and wife: after saying that the woman should please her husband, we read:

Slonik, <i>Mišwot Našim</i> , chapter 73	<i>Precetti</i> , capitolo LXXI
אונ' ער זאל זיך דער פרייזאן וואל אונ' זיך לנג זוימן אין דען מעשה מיט איר	& lui la deve allegare, & farli carezze con amore, & andar intrattenuto in congiungersi con lei, & non esser troppo furioso
and he should give her pleasure and take a long while in the act of the intercourse with her. ³⁹	and he should cheer her, and caress her with love, and proceed in a restrained way while joining her, and not be too furious

³⁷ For the colorful and vivid description of Jewish women in Venice see Elye Bokher's *tirade* in his poem *Paris un' Wiene* in Timm (1996:52–67 and LXXIV–LXXX). An example from illustrations can be found in Sabar (1989). Cf. also sumptuary legislations in Italy: see Bonfil (1991b:91–97); Bonfil (1994b: 104–111).

³⁸ *Precetti* (1616:74, capitolo 102); Fram (2007:264, chapter 104). On wife-beating in medieval *halakā*, see Grossman (1991).

³⁹ Fram (2007:218–219).

3.4 What to Read and What Not to Read

Another example in which there are differences between the Yiddish and the Judeo-Italian text is about what to read. In both the foreword and the conclusion of his book, Heilprun addresses this theme in detail, and the fact is more evident in the passages based on parts in which Slonik is more concise.

The theme appears in the Yiddish manuscript Parma mentioned above; there it is stated that women should read this booklet often, at least once every month,⁴⁰ and not read *ciance*,⁴¹ that is, inventions, lies, or other Yiddish books that have been composed to pass the time:⁴²

דארום מערק איבן אויף . וואו איך דיר האב גישריבן . אונ' ניט מאן דו עז זייא גשפייא אודר צאנצ'י אז אנדרי
טוישי בויכר דיא מאן הוט גימאכט אונ' גיטראכט דו מאן דיא ווייל מיט ור טרייבט :

Therefore pay attention to what I wrote to you and do not think that it is chitchat or chatter, as are other Yiddish books that have been made and composed in order to pass the time.⁴³

Besides, adds the author, to read his booklet is better than reading all other Yiddish books in the world, even better than the *Sedre* (weekly Torah portion), “since you do not understand any word in it” (וען דוא) אונ' אך בעשיר ווען דו דוא דיא סידרא ליישט . ווען דוא) (ור שטישט דוך קיין ווארט דינן :⁴⁴

Slonik touches on the theme of reading in several passages, instructing the audience to read the book every month,⁴⁵ to read it often,⁴⁶ to read it since it is better than books of *musar* (בכר),⁴⁷ to keep it before their eyes,⁴⁸ but, while condemning literature meant for entertainment, he does not mention any specific Yiddish work of that kind.

⁴⁰ Parma, Cod. 2511 (De Rossi Jud. Germ. 2), now [856], 3r and 10r–v.

⁴¹ “Discorso di scarsa utilità, chiacchiera” (TLIO, s.v.).

⁴² Parma, Cod. 2511 (De Rossi Jud. Germ. 2), now [856], 10r.

⁴³ The passage is identical to Slonik's version, except for the fact that he left out the term *ciance*, probably a glossa meant for Ashkenazic readers in Italy. See Fram (2007:265, chapter 104). For the connection between the Parma manuscript and Slonik's version, see especially Fram (2007:147–148).

⁴⁴ Parma, Cod. 2511 (De Rossi Jud. Germ. 2), now [856], 10r.

⁴⁵ Fram (2007:156–157, chapter 1 and 264–265, chapter 104).

⁴⁶ Fram (2007:160–161, chapter 1 and 264–265, chapter 105).

⁴⁷ Fram (2007:264–265, chapter 104). Fram translated ‘moralistic books’.

⁴⁸ Fram (2007:306–307, chapter 139).

In the manuscript of the Judeo-Italian version, on 3v, we find a list of forbidden books:

איט אסאי אנקו מאלי פרה קי ליינו קוויסטו קי איל אריוסטו איל אינאמורימינטו איל צינטו נווילה אמאדיש די גאולה איט סימיל ליברי פרופאני קי נון סיהא ליציטו די ליירלי אל שבת קומי דיצי רבינו משה פרלאנדו די קווסטי ליברי קי קוויילי קי לי אני קומפוסטי איט קי לי אסטמפאטי איט קי לי משימו אל שבת מיריטארבינו די איסיר טוטי אינסיימי ייטאטי גיל פוקו אינסיימה קון לי לור ליברי פיר קי די קוויילי נון סי אימפרה סי נון מאליצי איט קוסי וואני איט וויטה לאסיווה קי אל פני טוטי קונדוצי אל גיהנם מה קוויסטו ליברטו ווי מוסטרה לה סטראדה איט ווי קונדוצי אלה פורטה דיל גן עדן איט ווי אינסיימה איל בין וויוירי איט ביל מורירי

And he who reads Ariosto, the *Innamoramento*, the *Cento novelle*, *Amadis di Gaula* and similar profane books will act very badly: it is not permitted to read them on the *Shabbat* as our *rabbenu Moše* [Moses our teacher] says while talking about these books, [saying] that those who composed them and those who printed them and those who read them, especially on *Shabbat*, should deserve to be thrown all together in the fire, together with their books, since from them one cannot learn anything but maliciousness and vain things and a lascivious life, which leads everybody to *Gehinnom* (Hell), but this booklet shows you the [right] way and leads you to the door of *Gan 'Eden* (Garden of Eden) and teaches you to live well and to die well (literally: beautifully).

Compared to the printed version, the manuscript is more violent in his blaming the 'profane' books: fire and *Gehinnom* will disappear from the Venice edition.

In the printed copy of the 1616 edition the introduction has the following passage:

[. . .] & così prego à voi deuote Madonne, & matrone non vi rincresca di leggerlo, una, & più volte, che uoi ui chiamarete sempre più contente con utile uostro del corpo, & beneficio del Anima per che non è solo per sapere li uostri tre precetti di חלה הדלקה ma ci sono ancora altri buoni documenti di guardarsi del mal opperare & far del bene, & תפילה תשובה צדקה in somma quest'opere beato chi la leggerà & beattissimo, chi oßeruarà tutto quello che esorta di fare, & ancora li huomeni, che sonno occupati, & che non hanno tempo di studiare, ò che non intendono bene li דינים in li ספרים debbano leggerlo ancora loro perche ci sono delli documenti ancora per loro, & non dispregiarlo per eßer volgare & à donna intitolato, che leggendo ritrouarano la verità del fatto, & voi Signore Madone & Matrone ui esorto, che il שבת & il מועד & quanto avete aggio dovete trastularvi in questo libretto e li vostri figliuoli, & ancora che siano citelli che non sono ancora כליות lo debbono leggerlo perche vi sono bene delli פרקים che possono legger senza trattar di נידה & טבילה ci sono li דינים di חלה & de הדלקה & il primo capitolo fin al terzo decimo & ultimo della prima parte son tutte cose sante, & pij che trattano del culto Divino, & assai māco male sarà che leggano questo libretto, che l'Ariosto le cento novelle, Amadis di Gaula, & simil libri profani che non è lecito leggerli al שבת come dice משה רבינו è che da quelli non s'impara se non lasciuità e cose vane ma questo libretto ui mostra la via, che ui conduce alla porta del גן עדן & ui insegna à ben viuere, & ben morire e, come leggendo vederete, e questo ò tradotto de lingua todesca nella volgare à beneficio di voi altre Signore Matrone, che non intendete il Todesco [. . .].⁴⁹

49 *Precetti* (1616:5–6).

[. . .] and thus I pray you, devout women, you should read [this book] once and more times, so that you will define yourself more and more satisfied with advantage for your body and benefit of the Soul, since it is not only meant for knowing your three precepts *nidda hadlaqa halla* [menstrual purity laws, lighting of the candles, dough offering], but there are more good teachings on how to beware of evil behavior and do good, and *tēfilla tēšuva šēdaqa* [prayer, penance, almsgiving], in sum, these deeds. Happy he who will read it and happiest he who will observe all that the book exhorts you to do, & also men who are busy, & do not have time to learn, or who do not understand well the *dinim* [laws] in the *sēfarim* [holy books], they have to read it—since there are teachings for them as well—and not despise it for being *volgare*⁵⁰ & dedicated to women, since reading it they will find the truth of the fact. And you, Ladies, I exhort you, when you can, to enjoy yourselves with this booklet on *Shabbat* and on *Mo'ed* [festivals], and your daughters, even if they are not yet betrothed and are not yet *kallot* [betrothed women], should read it, for it contains *pērakim* [chapters] which they can read, without dealing with *nidda* [purity laws] and *tēvila* [ritual bath]. It contains the *dinim* [laws] of *halla* [dough offering] and *hadlaqa* [lighting of the candles] and the first chapter to the thirteenth and the last one in the first part are all holy and devout things dealing with the divine service. And it will be less harmful to read this book than Ariosto, *Hundred Novellas* [*Novellino* or *Decameron*], *Amadis di Gaula* and other such profane literature which it is forbidden to read on the *Shabbat*, as *rabbenu Moše* [Moses our teacher] said, that from them one can only learn obscenity and vanity, but this booklet shows you the way that leads to the door of *Gan 'Eden* (Garden of Eden). And this is translated from Yiddish into Italian for the benefit of you ladies, who do not understand Yiddish [. . .].⁵¹

The theme appears also in chapter 102, where it is said that the present booklet is not a lie or a *ciancia*,⁵² as are the other *libri volgari* (books in Italian), *historie* (stories) and *esempi*,⁵³ written in order to pass the time, and therefore should be read at least once every month from the beginning to the end.⁵⁴ The argument continues in the following chapter, 103:⁵⁵

Se il tuo marito non fosse troppo dotto di saper meldar farai che ancor lui debba leggerlo così come tu, & leggilo sovente

50 The term *volgare* probably indicates the language of the book, that is Italian, or in general the languages of the vulgarizations in juxtaposition with the Holy Tongue.

51 Part of this passage is translated in Shmeruk (2003:180, note 77). I revised it to bring it closer to the source.

52 For this term see footnote 42 above.

53 The term *esempio* in Medieval Italian means first of all 'didactic story', usually of religious character. See TLIO, s.v. Here perhaps it is rather a translation of the Hebrew *mašal*, which appears in Yiddish as well, usually with the meaning of 'fable'. Collections of fables such as the *Kū-bukh* (Verona 1595) appear in the introduction to the first edition of *Mayse-bukh* (Basel 1602) among the books that should not be read.

54 *Precetti* (1616, capitolo 102); Fram (2007:262–265, chapter 104).

55 *Precetti* (1616, capitolo 103).

If your husband is not cultivated enough to study (the Torah), you will have him read it (the booklet) as you do, and read it often

Towards the end of the book, in chapter 137, Heilprun again added a passage on the same topic:

Le donne deuono essere auuertite di legger questo libro, & tenerlo in grandissima veneratione [. . .] & in cambio dell'Ariosto, e cento nouelle, & altri libri profani debbano legger questo nel giorno del שבת & altri מועדים perche di quelli non ne ponno acquistare se non vitij, & cose dishoneste, & da questo solo virtù, & moralità.⁵⁶

Women should be instructed to read this book and to hold it in great esteem [. . .] and instead of Ariosto, and the *Hundred Novelle*, and other profane books they should read this book on *Shabbat* and the other *Mo'adim* [festivals],⁵⁷ since from them they cannot learn other than vices and dishonest things, while from this book [they can learn] only virtue and morality.

These passages are relevant since, in listing what should not be read, we learn about what was read:

1. Chivalry books in Italian: *Orlando Furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto, *Innamoramento di Orlando*, known mostly under the title *Orlando innamorato* by Matteo Maria Boiardo, and *Amadis di Gaula*, which circulated in many versions and was one of the most popular books of chivalry in Spain and in Italy, among Jews as well.⁵⁸
2. *Novelle*, in particular the most popular collections: either the *Novellino*, usually known as *Le cento novelle antike*, whose *editio princeps* came out in Bologna in 1525, or Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which was printed several times in Venice during the sixteenth century.

In this connection it is important to underline that, while in the Yiddish books the works that should not be read are other Yiddish works, in the Judeo-Italian books the works designated as forbidden are in literary Italian. This detail shows that for Jews in Italy it was common to read Italian literature, to get the books, to understand them, to enjoy them. And we do know that Jews in Italy read and owned Italian books, as well as Latin ones.⁵⁹ Perhaps Heilprun had to insist more on this point precisely because it was more difficult to control the cultural life of his readers in Italy than it was for the Jews in Poland. Besides, the last quotation

⁵⁶ *Precetti* (1616:101); (1625:113).

⁵⁷ On the question of reading chivalry literature on Sabbath and the Jewish Festivals, see Rosenzweig (2015:58–64) and the bibliography quoted there.

⁵⁸ Sholod (1982); Minervini (1997). A Hebrew version of this chivalry matter was composed by Jacob di Algaba and printed in Constantinople in 1541. See Malachi (1981); Ashkenazi (2018).

⁵⁹ See in particular Bonfil (1991a); Baruchson (1993:especially 180–184); Guetta (2022).

opens with the command that “women should be instructed,” which suggests that this duty was meant for men, fathers and husbands, and perhaps also for teachers, *daršanim* or rabbis, who were responsible for women’s education.

3.5 What to Eat

The part on the *ḥalla*, especially chapters 118 and 119 of Slonik’s *Miṣwot Našim*, is rich with references to *realia*, such as names of foods—including *lokshn* and *shmalts kreplekh*—and cooking instructions for them. The same is true for the corresponding chapters in Heilprun’s *Precetti* (117–118),⁶⁰ where, along with the mention of *lasagne*, *tagliatelli*, *maccaroni*,⁶¹ *pizzi*, *tortelli*, we find an addition:

& io mi ricordo mia madre עליה השלום, & mia nonna ע"ה sempre quando faceva delle pate, ò cassetta⁶² coceva una fugacetta di sopra via nella padella, ò sotto la cenere sul fogolare, & io la mangiaua, credo che non fosse per altro saluo che per leuar la חלה di quella pasta per חייב come si è detto.

And I remember my mother may she rest in peace, and my grandmother may she rest in peace, always, while making some dough or preparing a pan for the bread, she used to cook a small *focaccia* either in the pan, or under the ash in the fireplace, and I used to eat it, I believe this was done for no other reason than in order to take the *ḥalla* [dough offering] from that dough as a *ḥiyyuv* [obligation] as it has been said.

This personal memory inserted by Heilprun offers a rare glimpse of his family’s kitchen, and the image of two women preparing food for *Shabbat*.

⁶⁰ Cf. JTS MS R1054, 20v.

⁶¹ On this term see Mayer Modena (1985:94–95, note 278).

⁶² Probably *casetta* is a variant of It. *cassetta*, a pan for baking the bread. See Battaglia (1994–2002), s.v., especially definition 9, *pane in cassetta*. I am grateful to Prof. Mayer Modena for her suggestions on this term. See also Mayer Modena (1985:94–95, note 278).

3.6 What to Fear

There are several passages in Slonik's book that do not appear in Heilprun's version.⁶³ The most important ones are those mentioning the Kabbalah⁶⁴ and the *Book of the Zohar* as, for instance, in chapter 73 of the Yiddish text; or the passage about the soul of every sleeping person ascending nightly to heaven and if that soul has sinned, the angels of destruction will gain power over it;⁶⁵ or the description of impure spirits and demons in chapter 138.⁶⁶ The *Sefer ha-Zohar* is quoted by Slonik also while mentioning that the night "is a time of good will":

איך וויל דיר ניט גנץ ספֿר הזוהר שרייבן לערן עש דא ווערשטו עש ווישן ווארום עש איז די זעלביג צייט בויליגונג

"I will not write the entire Book of the Zohar for you. Study it and then you will know why this very time is a time of good will"⁶⁷

Heilprun refrains from suggesting the study of the *Zohar*, and just writes:⁶⁸

& nel ספֿר הזוהר sono assai ragioni perche questo tempo [meza notte] sia più proportionato che altro

and in the *Sefer haZohar* there are many reasons for why this time [midnight] is more appropriate than other times

Another passage which is missing in the Judeo-Italian version is the one mentioning women's 'original sin': "women have caused death with their eating of the apple and with their piety that they observe [. . .] they will again cause death to cease."⁶⁹

⁶³ For example: Chapter 52 of the Yiddish corresponds to chapter 54 in the Judeo-Italian, but the latter is shorter, since the stories about Sarah, Leah and Rachel are missing. A reference to a custom of French and Ashkenazic Jews, mentioned in chapter 66 of the Yiddish version, is missing in the parallel chapter 68 of the Judeo-Italian version. The mention of the Karaites (Fram 2007:126–127, 248, chapter 99) is missing in the Judeo-Italian version.

⁶⁴ Fram (2007:218–19, chapter 73).

⁶⁵ Fram (2007:260).

⁶⁶ Fram (2007:306).

⁶⁷ Fram (2007:250–251, chapter 102).

⁶⁸ *Precetti* (1616:66, capitolo 100).

⁶⁹ Fram (2007:272).

4 Final Remarks

The sixteenth century seems to be a period in which wide production of the popularization of halakhic content took place in Ashkenazic culture. While in the fifteenth century the Maharil could still oppose these kinds of works about *mišwot* being published in Yiddish, in fear that they could diminish rabbinic authority and control and cause transgressions,⁷⁰ the following period saw a change in practice, among other factors also because of increasing literacy and the diffusion of print. According to Max Weinreich, women were the excuse for publishing Yiddish books on such topics as *mišwot*, *minhagim* and books of *musar*: “a kind of legal fiction was created”,⁷¹ “the woman provided a kind of permission for Yiddish in writing.”⁷² Yiddish is, in this case, the major medium of transmission of rabbinic knowledge for both men and women, as it is often written in the paratexts.⁷³

4.1 Yiddish and Judeo-Italian

Yiddish and Judeo-Italian are not only two languages of the Jews in Italy during the Renaissance: in many texts they come in contact, and in some manuscripts they even meld; the two languages meet and interact in Northern Italy during the Renaissance in many ways, especially in the communities where Ashkenazic and Italian Jews meet, such as Padua and Venice.⁷⁴ In fact, Judeo-Italian gradually becomes one of the languages of Ashkenazic Jews. Heilprun’s *Precetti* are in Judeo-Italian, even Judeo-Veneto, and not in Italian, because—apart from the many Hebrew words printed with Hebrew letters—there are many words an Italian non-Jew would not understand: *scola* for ‘synagogue’, *meldar* for ‘learning (Tora)’, and even *somen* (< H. *šuman*) for ‘fat’, which we know from other Judeo-Italian sources as well. Terms like *pistor* (from Latin *pistor*, -is) for ‘baker’ are Italian, but usually common in Veneto, and would not have been understood in other parts of Italy. Concerning the use of Latin letters, this became more and more common among Italian Jews, particularly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as Bonfil noted also in

70 Satz (1977:92–94, section 93); Romer-Segal (1986:38–39); Fram (2007:12–15).

71 Weinreich (2008, vol. 1:274 and A262–A265).

72 Weinreich (2008:277).

73 Romer-Segal (1986:38–39, 56 and endnotes 2, 3 and 4); Fram (2007:XIX and 12–14). On Yiddish and the transmission of knowledge in the Early Modern Period see also Weinreich (2008) and Turiansky (2008).

74 Yiddish terms enter Judeo-Italian Languages, and the opposite is true as well. See for example Mayer Modena (2013). There are also a few bilingual texts in Yiddish and Judeo-Italian. See Rosenzweig (2023) and the bibliography quoted there.

other genres of Jewish writings, such as letters and even *pinqasim* (registers of the community).⁷⁵ The use of Hebrew letters for Hebrew words and expressions is a definitive sign that the audience was expected to read and understand them.

In order to attempt a short summary of the salient differences between Slonik's Yiddish version and Heilprun's Judeo-Italian rewriting that I have presented, I would say that Heilprun's version, in comparison with the source, has no references to magic, to spirits and demons and angels of destruction, and contains more about clothing, food, reading, and tenderness in sex. There is also, as I have already mentioned, a sort of softening of anti-Gentile feelings, perhaps also because of fear of censorship.

A lot of research remains to be done on this genre. Books of precepts in Jewish Languages are important sources for the history of everyday life, of women, of conceptions of the body and sexuality in the Jewish culture of the Early Modern period.⁷⁶ Reading the *Precetti* does not help those who are looking for women's voices: the *donne devote* are not heard, perhaps just glimpsed while looking at themselves in the mirror, or cooking in the kitchen, and, of course, trying to read 'forbidden' chivalry romances and stories on *Shabbat*. *Frauen-büchlen* are not simply literature FOR women, but rather OF women and also ON women, that is: women are the content. Many times in Slonik's book we see that the author addresses men or husbands openly and directly, or says that the women readers should ask their husbands.⁷⁷ The same is true for the Judeo-Italian versions: the genre is MAINLY for women, and for men as well, especially the parts concerning the precepts of *nidda*. The atmosphere of danger and terror, as I mentioned in one of the quoted examples, even if partly softened in Heilprun's Judeo-Italian version, suggests that women's behavior, and above all women's body, have to be firmly controlled. That is why, if today I should find a new title for our *Miṣwot Našim*, I would choose to call it: *Jewish Women: Instructions for Use*.

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⁷⁶ Weinstein (2007:especially 151).

⁷⁷ See also Fram (2007:XV–XVI, especially note 12).

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