

Article

Jewish and Hebrew Books in Marsh's Library: Materiality and Intercultural Engagement in Early Modern Ireland

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Abstract: Marsh's Library in Dublin, Ireland, is an immaculately preserved library from the early eighteenth century. Founded by Archbishop Narcissus Marsh, the library has an extensive collection of Jewish and Hebrew books which includes Hebrew Bibles, Talmudic texts, rabbinic writings, and Yiddish books that date back to the early modern period. This study explores a cross section of the Jewish and Hebrew books in Marsh's collection, with particular focus on issues of materiality—that is, how these books as material artefacts can inform our understanding of early modern history, religion, and intercultural engagement. We suggest that these books, a majority of which come from Marsh's personal collection, are a valuable resource for reflection on (1) Christian engagement with Jewish culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, (2) the production, use, and travel of Jewish books in early modern Europe, and (3) snapshots of Jewish life in early modern Ireland and beyond.

Keywords: Narcissus Marsh; Marsh's Library; Judaism; Jewish books; Hebrew; Christian Hebraism; materiality; book history

1. Introduction

In a working-class area of Dublin, Ireland, beside St Patrick's Cathedral, is an eighteenth-century building that is home to Marsh's Library. The library was opened in 1707 and was the first public library in Ireland (Osborough 2009). It holds a collection of books from the early modern period that is remarkably well preserved, and which offers an important window into early modern Ireland (McCarthy 2003; McCarthy and Simmons 2004).

A closer inspection of the library reveals further surprises—among these, an extensive collection of Jewish books.¹ While there has long been a Jewish presence in Ireland, it has always been relatively small (Hyman 1972); a library tucked away in the south inner-city of Dublin is not where one would expect to find a trove of Jewish and Hebrew resources.² However, the founder of Marsh's Library, Archbishop Narcissus Marsh (1638–1713), was a clergyman and scholar with an abiding interest in the Hebrew language and Jewish tradition. Before coming to Dublin, Marsh studied Hebrew and near Eastern languages at Oxford, and during his time as Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, he championed

¹ Defining “Jewish books” is of course complex, and the parameters of this category have been the subject of considerable debate. On some of the issues involved, see (Schrijver 2007, 2017). For our present purposes we employ a broad understanding, encompassing books written by and for Jews, as well as Jewish texts specifically aimed at early modern Christian readers; more on the latter in Section 3.1.3, below.

² (Hyman 1972, p. 39) makes mention of a meeting of a number of Hebrew scholars at Marsh's in 1733, including one Abraham Judah—though the others said to have attended were Christian.

the study of Hebrew (McCarthy 2004, p. 30). This interest extended to his book collection, which was donated to the library after his death. The library contains more than 250 volumes representing Hebrew Bibles, Talmudic texts, rabbinic writings, and Yiddish books that date back to the early modern period, a majority of which come from Marsh's personal collection.³ These books, we suggest, are a valuable resource for reflection on (1) Christian engagement with Jewish culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, (2) the production, use, and travel of Jewish books in early modern Europe, and (3) snapshots of Jewish life in early modern Ireland and beyond.

In dealing with these issues—encompassing religious, historical, social, and cultural dimensions—this study draws on a number of different fields and disciplines. Historical work on the early modern era—including historical research in religious and Jewish studies—plays a significant role in contextualising the collection at Marsh's Library (Cameron 2001; Wiesner-Hanks 2013; Cohen et al. 2014). However, because of the focus on books and texts, book history plays a particularly important role in the present research (Dane 2012; Howsam 2015; Pettegree and der Weduwen 2019). Indeed, drawing on the “material turn” seen in the humanities and religious studies (Morgan 2010; Hutchings and McKenzie 2017), we suggest that giving specific attention to issues of materiality can inform our understanding of this collection. As can be seen in the examples outlined below, the materiality of texts has much to tell us about these books and their place in the world. Thus, particular attention is paid not only to the “semantic text” of the books in this collection, but to features that inform our understanding of the “social lives” of books—from production to travel, to the way in which readers have engaged with these texts through the years.⁴

Before turning to the books in the collection, we begin with an account of Archbishop Marsh and the library bearing his name.⁵

2. Archbishop Marsh and His Library

The English scholar and clergyman Narcissus Marsh (1638–1713) arrived in Ireland to take up the post of Provost of Trinity College Dublin in January 1679. He spent four unhappy years in the role, which brought with it such a heavy administrative burden that he felt he had no time for scholarship and intellectual enquiry (Gillespie 2003, p. 5). In 1683 he escaped to take up a bishopric in the diocese of Ferns and Leighlin. In 1691 he became Archbishop of Cashel, and three years later was appointed Archbishop of Dublin. In 1703 he became Primate of Ireland.

Narcissus Marsh's great passions were scholarship, books, natural philosophy, and languages. Upon his first arrival in Ireland he had been disappointed with the intellectual culture of the capital city, the limited nature of the items for sale in the small number of Dublin bookshops, and the lack of recourse for the public to a suitable repository in which to read books and manuscripts. As Provost, Marsh tried but failed to change the regulations in Trinity College Dublin which meant that outsiders using the college library had to be accompanied at all times by a Fellow of the college. It was then that he seems to have begun to envisage founding a library in Dublin which would cater for a serious-minded reading public.

Libraries are fragile plants. They cannot take root or thrive in societies suffering the scorching winds of political conflict, sectarian warfare, and economic instability (Casson 2001, pp. 1–50;

³ The library's extensive catalogue can be searched here: <https://www.marshlibrary.ie/catalogue/>.

⁴ For more on issues of texts, materiality, and the study of religion, see (Anderson 2020). On paratexts, consult (Genette 1997). Stern's (2017) study offers a stimulating example of how the study of materiality is crucial to the study of religious texts.

⁵ This research builds on important research done by two scholars who have explored the Jewish books in Marsh's Library. Professor Shlomo Berger, of the University of Amsterdam, curated an exhibit for the library in 2014–2015 entitled, “From Lublin to Dublin (by way of Amsterdam)”, shortly before his untimely death. For this research we have drawn on some of the valuable collation and observations that were made by Professor Berger (2015). In 2017, Dr Javier del Barco undertook three months of research on the Jewish books in Marsh's Library, in conjunction with the international “Footprints” project (<https://footprints.ctl.columbia.edu/>), which is tracing the history of Jewish books. Dr Del Barco made a number of significant discoveries and observations in his research, several of which are noted in what follows.

Ovenden 2020, p. 100). This explains why the first public library in Ireland only emerged after the great conflicts of the early modern period had finally been settled in favour of one side after the Battle of the Boyne. The settlement of the 1690s answered the long-contested question as to which group of men constituted the “public” and would control the state and all its appendages. As a senior member of the Church “as by law established”, the land confiscations of the period also provided Archbishop Marsh with the opportunity to accumulate lands in Co. Meath which would be used to generate ongoing funds to support the library.

There is a long-standing misapprehension that the library was founded in 1701. This belief is based on undisputed facts. In that year Marsh secured permission from St Patrick’s Cathedral to build a public library on a small piece of land owned by the Cathedral, and he also succeeded in 1701 in securing from the Crown an annual salary of £200 for his chosen librarian. Yet, work only began on the library building early in 1703, and in mid-December of that year the French refugee Élie Bouhéreau moved into the ground-floor apartment reserved for the librarian. In August 1705, Bouhéreau recorded spending “eight shillings on having my books carried to the library” (Léoutre et al. 2019, pp. 329, 409). Today, those 2200 books remain on the shelves in the library where Bouhéreau himself placed them. Archbishop Marsh bought 10,000 books for his planned public library from the estate of the English clergyman and polemicist Edward Stillingfleet (1635–1699). The books arrived in Ireland in 1705, but on 19 January 1706 Marsh remarked in a letter to a friend that he had them “in my own House in Dublin at the present where I intend to keep Them, until They are perfectly catalogu’d (which I am now about) and until the Ground & Other Things relating to the Government & management of the Library, be settled by Act of Parliament, for which I am now preparing a Bill” (Gillespie 2003, p. 58).

Stillingfleet’s books presumably did not enter the building until after the Act of Parliament which established the library “in perpetuity” was passed in late 1707. After Archbishop Marsh’s death in 1713, his personal collection of more than 3000 books was donated to the public library which bears his name, but his manuscripts, including many important Hebrew and oriental texts, went to the Bodleian, in Oxford (Wakefield 2004, pp. 76–84). A bequest of 2000 books arising from the death, in 1745, of John Stearne, bishop of Clogher, brought the last of the four collections which make up the historic core of Marsh’s Library.

Under the terms of the Act which established the library, it was not permitted to take any books or manuscripts off the premises. All reading matter had to be consulted on site under the supervision of the librarian or another member of staff. The lack of any significant accessions after 1745, combined with the prohibition of off-site borrowing has meant that the collections have been remarkably static over the past three centuries. All of the four historic collections encompass a broad range of scholarship across what we now term the humanities and sciences, but each has particular strengths and weaknesses which reflect the personal interests of the collector. Narcissus Marsh’s personal collection was particularly strong in near-Eastern languages and the apparatus of biblical scholarship, as well as in natural philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy. In what follows, we examine the Hebrew and Yiddish books which remain today within the Archbishop’s personal collection, inside his eponymous public library. Almost 1200 books were stolen from the library during the decades before 1863, when security was greatly improved (Leonard and McElligott 2017, pp. 1–12). The majority of the volumes that were stolen were travel books or science books in English, as well as cheaper editions of texts of ancient classical authors used by students in schools and universities. It is noteworthy that only eleven Hebrew books were taken from Marsh’s personal collection during the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries (Manuscript Shelflist of Books Stolen n.d., pp. 94–136). In other words, we know that the Archbishop’s collection of Jewish books exists now almost exactly as it was bequeathed to the library after his death, in 1713 (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The second gallery of the Library, including Narcissus Marsh’s books. Credit: Phyllis Berger.⁶

3. Exploring the Jewish Books in Marsh’s Library

The collection in Marsh’s Library offers important insights into intercultural engagement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—and in particular Christian engagement with Judaism, which was both enthusiastic and complex in this period. As noted above, the library contains more than 250 volumes representing Hebrew Bibles, Talmudic texts, rabbinic writings, and Yiddish books that date back to the early modern period. Over 150 of these resources can be traced back to Marsh’s personal collection.

In what follows we outline a number of ways in which the collection sheds a light on early modernity, including (1) Christian engagement with Jewish culture, (2) the production, use, and circulation of Jewish books, and (3) snapshots of Jewish life in early modern Ireland and beyond. We focus here on the earlier dimensions of the collection, in particular those that came from Marsh’s own personal collection of books.⁷

3.1. *Engagement with Jewish Culture: Christian Hebraism—And Beyond*

When examining the books in Marsh’s Library, it becomes immediately evident that the Archbishop, his colleagues, and his successors were particularly interested in Judaism and Jewish culture. Marsh and his collection can be seen as part of the phenomenon of Christian Hebraism that pervaded Protestant circles in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Christian Hebraism refers to the interest in—indeed, fascination with—Jewish culture and texts among primarily Protestant Christians in the early modern era, including biblical and post-biblical traditions (Parkes 1962; Katz 1982; Friedman 1983; Coudert et al. 1999; Glaser 2007; Burnett 2012). This “philo-Judaism” was facilitated by other developments that took shape around the time of the Reformation, including the rise of print culture, the study of the original

⁶ All images used with the kind permission of Marsh’s Library.

⁷ For more on the development of the library’s collection, see (McCarthy 1975). Beyond Marsh’s personal collection, other elements of the library also demonstrate a strong interest in Christian Hebraism, including volumes which came from Edward Stillingfleet and Isaac Casaubon. On Stillingfleet, see (Champion 1999); on Casaubon, see (Grafton and Weinberg 2011).

languages and a “return to the sources” of Scripture, and a broader interest in retrieving the origins of Judaism, Christianity, and other ancient traditions. As Horbury notes, “This scholarship ranged impartially over a vast sea of literature” (Horbury 2004, p. 258), and Marsh’s personal collection is no exception.

The motivation for the interest in Judaism in this period was multifaceted. There was among many—and in the spirit of the times—a genuine intellectual curiosity in Jewish culture and Hebrew texts. However, even “intellectual curiosity” is culturally and socially situated. Horbury notes a number of contemporaneous Christian texts in the library which “straddle the border between Hebrew study and Jewish-Christian relations” (Horbury 2004, p. 261). Authors such as Martini, Wagenseil, and Wuelfer “vary considerably in attitude and in ecclesiastical background, but they can suggest that Christian Hebraism was indeed a kind of collusion with western Christian mission to the Jews, and in this respect comparable with imperially related oriental study” (p. 261). Indeed, Marsh’s personal books point not only to an interest in Hebrew, but also to the engagement with texts in Aramaic, Syriac, and Arabic. In this sense, Marsh can be understood not just as a Christian Hebraist, but as falling more broadly into the realm of “Orientalism”, and so complicit in the various social and cultural complexities that accompany this, including Western colonialism (Said 1978; Horbury 2004).⁸ Others have indicated that we need to go further, suggesting that Christian Hebraism is more than a colonial project—it can and should be understood as anti-Jewish and, indeed, anti-Semitic (Coudert 1999).

Marsh’s own disposition on these matters is unclear; his surviving writings tell us little about his perspective on these issues. Nevertheless, as an Oxford-educated Protestant clergyman, Marsh was a prime candidate for membership in this unofficial club. His studies and later teaching in Hebrew and other ancient near Eastern languages indicate a strong personal interest in these materials, as well as an ability to engage with these texts in a meaningful way (see Marsh’s letter to Pococke, 1680 [Horbury 270]). Horbury calculates that between his studies and various posts, Marsh had “over twenty years of contact with Oxford Hebraists, above all Edward Pocock(e)” (Horbury 2004, p. 264).

Numerous texts in Marsh’s Library point to Narcissus Marsh’s interest in matters related to Judaism—and these interests would continue to be evident as the collection grew to include sources from other collections and under subsequent directors (see the essays in McCarthy and Simmons 2009). The examples outlined below give a flavour of the materials in the library that point to an extensive interest in Jewish texts and culture, and thus situate Marsh and his collection within the milieu of Christian Hebraism.

3.1.1. Bibles and Translations

The late medieval and early modern eras witnessed a staggering proliferation of Bibles, in diverse forms and languages (D’Avray 2004; Poleg and Light 2013); not surprisingly, similar cultural forces were at work in the production of Jewish sacred texts (Stern 2017). As one might expect, the collection at Marsh’s holds a significant number of Bibles in various forms, with over 2000 present across the four main collections in diverse languages. Within this, there are roughly 100 Bibles published prior to 1800 which contain the biblical text (or parts thereof) in Hebrew. Over fifty of these Hebrew biblical texts can be traced back to Marsh’s own personal collection, with numerous others belonging to the Stillingfleet collection.⁹

As noted above, scholars in the early modern period moved away from reading the Bible primarily in Latin and began to rediscover these texts in their original, ancient languages. An example of this in Marsh’s personal collection is a work that includes the Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy) in Hebrew

⁸ Marsh also collected ancient manuscripts from Hebrew, Arabic, and other near Eastern traditions. His manuscripts are now housed in Oxford; see (Wakefield 1994; McCarthy 2003; Gillespie 2009).

⁹ Upon his death Marsh bequeathed all of his remaining books to the library, except those already in the collection. As Stillingfleet’s collection was added before Marsh’s passing, it is possible—indeed, likely—that Marsh owned books which were already in the library and thus were not added to the collection (Gillespie 2003; Horbury 2004).

printed side by side with the Targum, an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew text. This well-preserved book—which has a beautiful brown leather binding, with metal clasps—was printed in Amsterdam in 1631 by Manasseh ben Israel, a Portuguese rabbi who was the founder of the first Jewish printing press in Amsterdam. It was owned by Marsh, and it is clear that he valued and used this volume: it has been annotated in several places, including inscriptions in Latin on the first page of Genesis that appear to be in Marsh’s own hand, with cross-references to other biblical texts (Figure 2).¹⁰ Along with the Hebrew and Aramaic, this volume also includes a section containing the *haftarot*, a selection of lectionary readings from the *Nevi'im* (prophets) that accompany the Torah readings in liturgical settings.



Figure 2. Torah in Hebrew, with Targum and Latin annotations; Marsh’s Library B.3.3.17.

The library also holds several versions of the *Sefer Tehilim*, the book of Psalms in Hebrew. Books containing only the Psalms (Psalter) were common in Christianity in the medieval and early modern era (Poleg 2020), and Hebrew versions were also common in Jewish contexts. One such volume in Marsh’s Library, published in Isny, Germany, in 1541, includes the biblical text along with commentary from the medieval rabbi David Kimḥi, also known as Radak (b. 1160) (Figure 3). A key aspect of Christian Hebraism was an interest in post-biblical traditions, and this work is an example of a combination of biblical text and rabbinic commentary (more on post-biblical traditions, below).

¹⁰ Marsh inscribed his personal books with his Greek motto, πανταχη την αληθειαν (“Truth everywhere”), normally in the upper right hand corner of the flyleaf or title page. This motto can be seen in a number of the images below.

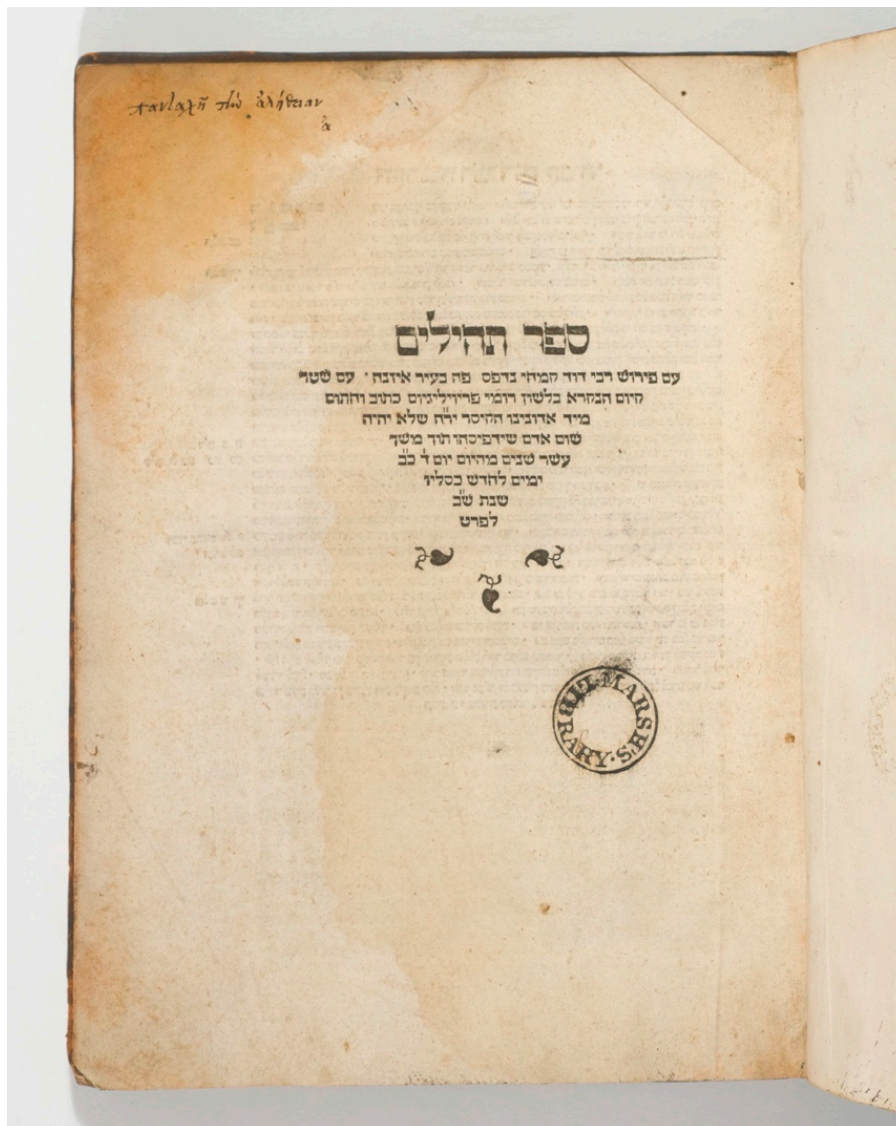


Figure 3. Sefer Tehilim with commentary from David Kimḥi; Marsh's Library B.3.3.1.

Other Hebrew texts in Marsh's Library point to the significance of these Bibles, while also raising further questions that remain, for the moment, unanswered. An example is a beautiful edition of the entire Hebrew Bible (or Tanakh) which was printed in Amsterdam in 1635 by Menasseh ben Israel, noted above. The volume includes the use of red ink for both design and rubrics, as can be seen in the depiction of Genesis 1 (Figure 4). An interesting feature of this volume is that there are several annotations in Arabic (see Figure 5). At the end of several sections we find the phrase *al-ḥamdu lil-lāh* (praise be to God), though we do not know in whose hand it is written.



Figure 4. Tanakh (Hebrew Bible); Marsh’s Library B.3.3.13.

There are, then, numerous biblical texts in the library, and specifically in Marsh’s personal collection, which point to the broader interests of Christian Hebraists of the early modern period. These include editions of the Torah in Hebrew and Aramaic, full copies of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), as well several copies of *sefer tehilim* (psalters). The number of such texts in Marsh’s Library signifies the growing desire to engage with the ancient languages of biblical texts during this period.

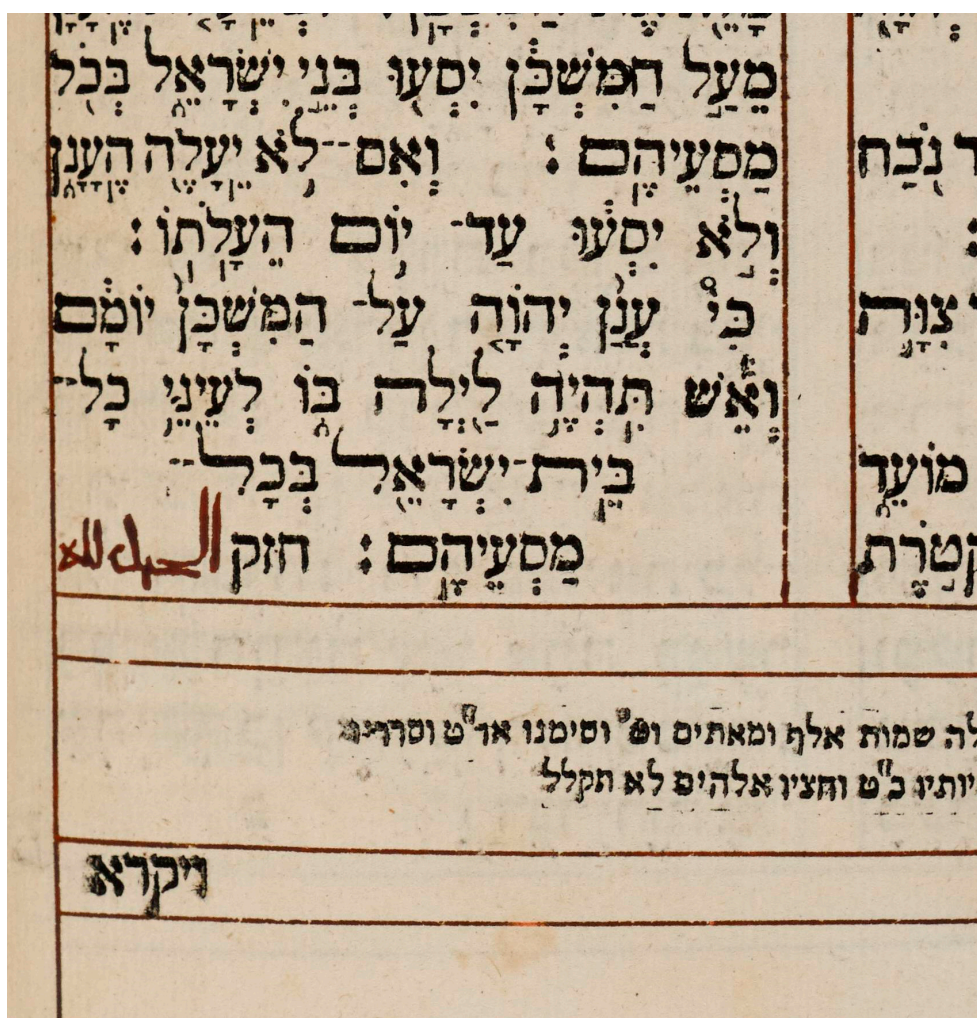


Figure 5. Detail of Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), with Arabic annotation; Marsh's Library B.3.3.13.

3.1.2. Rabbinic Texts and Commentary

Along with being drawn to biblical texts in Hebrew and other ancient languages, Christian Hebraism also exhibited a strong interest in post-biblical Jewish traditions, notably traditional rabbinic texts and commentary. Again, Marsh's personal collection demonstrates a similar concern for these texts and traditions.

The Talmud is one of the most significant collections in Judaism, incorporating teaching, instruction, and theology from the ancient rabbis dating back to the first centuries of the common era (Wimpfheimer 2018). Marsh's Library holds over 12 volumes that contain the Talmud in Hebrew, in part or in full, with examples of both the Babylonian and Jerusalem editions. One particular edition of the Jerusalem Talmud (also known as the Yerushalmi or Palestinian Talmud) in the library was printed in Krakow in 1609, and was part of Narcissus Marsh's own collection. An annotation states that he acquired it in 1690, while Bishop of Leighlin and Ferns, thus pointing to his continued acquisition of books while in Ireland, even after his time as Provost of Trinity had come to an end (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Talmud Yerushalmi; Marsh's Library B.3.2.25.

Along with the Talmud, Marsh's Library has a number of examples of midrashic texts. Midrash is a type of biblical interpretation that emerged in ancient Judaism, a method used by the rabbis that draws out and explores the various ways in which biblical texts can be understood (Fishbane and Weinberg 2013). Marsh's Library has eight volumes that present collections of *midrashim*. With the advent of printing, the printed forms of the midrash on the Torah became known as the *Midrash Rabbah* ("the great midrash"); some early printed versions of this collection were called the *Sefer Rabbot*, which is the title given to one of the volumes in Marsh's collection, printed in Frankfurt in the early 1690s. The woodcut title page has several interesting images, including Moses holding the Ten Commandments, and is similar to ornate woodcuts found in Christian Bibles and made famous in Luther's Bibel (Figure 7; on illustrations in Luther's Bibel, see Campbell 2019). These *midrashim* include commentary, folklore, and stories from the rabbis that offer a unique interpretation of the first five books of the Bible (Figure 8 displays Bereshit [Genesis]).



Figure 7. Sefer Rabot (Midrash Rabbah); Marsh’s Library C.3.1.11.

The number of Talmudic and midrashic texts in Marsh’s Library again points to the complex engagement with Judaism by Christian Hebraists of this period. As Sutcliffe notes,

Protestant attitudes to the study of Hebraica in the early modern period were characterised by a profound ambivalence. This uncertainty was rooted in a long-standing structural tension within Christianity between opposing impulses of intellectual curiosity and theological repudiation towards rabbinical literature. (Sutcliffe 2000, p. 319)



Figure 8. Sefer Rabot (Midrash Rabbah), Bereshit (Genesis); Marsh’s Library C.3.1.11.

This curiosity (even if laden with apologetic concerns) can also be seen in the Christian interest in the commentary of the great interpreters of the rabbinic tradition in the medieval era—including Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Radak, amongst others. This interpretive tradition is also well represented in Marsh’s Library. A fine example of this is a volume containing several books from the Old Testament’s Minor Prophets (or Book of the Twelve Prophets), one of three such texts in the library. This particular volume contains Hosea, Joel, Amos, and Obadiah. Along with the Hebrew text of these prophetic works, it also includes the Aramaic Targum, as well as commentary on these books from Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Radak (Figure 9). This volume was printed in Geneva in 1556 by the well-known printer Robertus Stephanus (Robert Estienne) and modelled on the great Rabbinic Bible, which was first published several decades earlier (Levy 1991; Armstrong 1954).

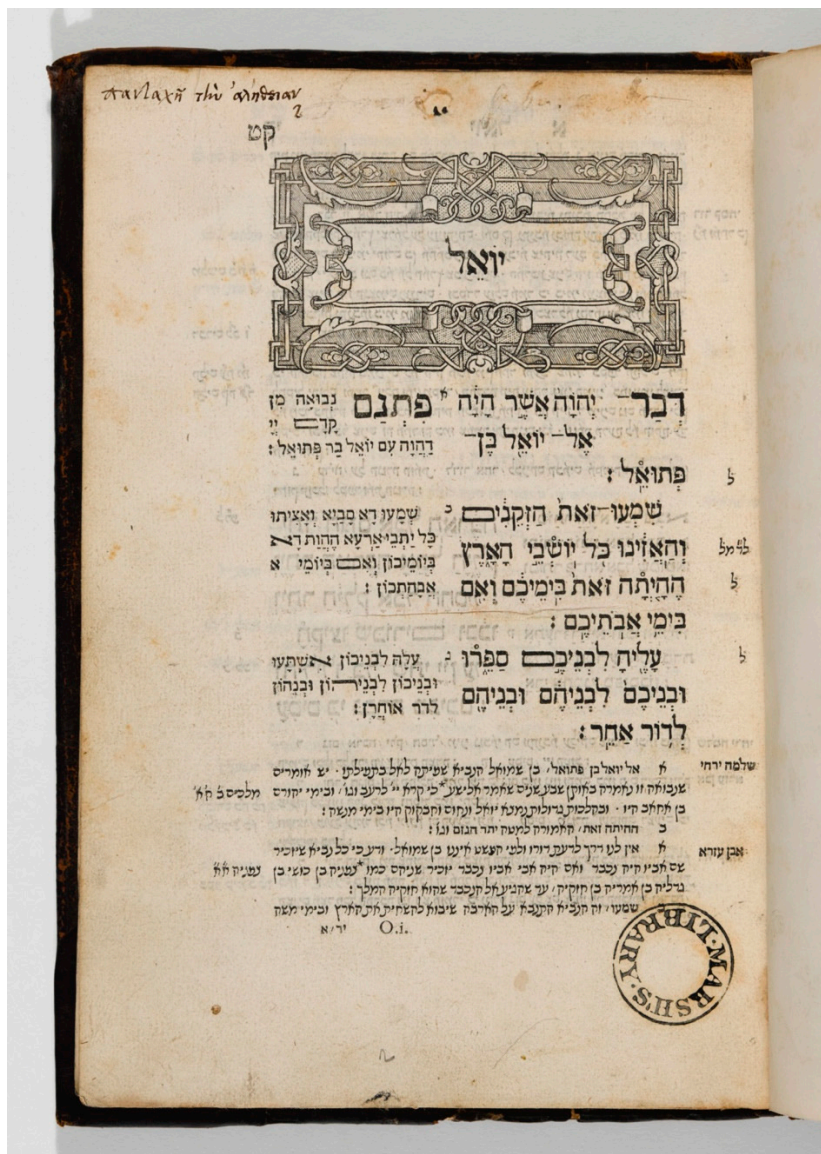


Figure 9. Hebrew Minor Prophets with Targum and Rabbinic Commentary, Book of Joel; Marsh’s Library B.3.3.6.

The library also has a number of standalone commentaries on the Bible from these commentators, often focusing on the Torah. An important example is a volume authored by Moses ben Nachman—also known as Nachmanides or Ramban—one of the most important rabbinic figures in medieval Judaism (b. 1194) (Yaakov 2000). This volume (Figure 10), printed in Lisbon in 1489, contains Ramban’s commentary on the Torah (on the transmission of this commentary, see Zwiep 1999). The decorative border on the title page, originally cut in metal, is attributed to Alfonso Fernández de Córdoba (Heller 2004). The volume also has hand-written homiletical texts at the front and back, written in a cursive Hebrew script, indicating use in a Jewish context prior to its incorporation into the collection at Marsh’s (Del Barco 2017a) (Figure 11).¹¹

¹¹ This volume was unaccounted for in the library until 2017, when Dr Javier del Barco (re)discovered it during his research at Marsh’s Library. See (Del Barco 2017a).



Figure 10. Commentary on the Torah, by Moses ben Nachman; Marsh's Library C.3.1.26.

Another of the library's commentaries on the Torah comes from Isaac Abravanel (or Abarbanel, b. 1437), a medieval Jewish philosopher and commentator on the Bible from Portugal, who was well known for his wide-ranging writings as well as his involvement in affairs of state (Angel 2009). This volume, entitled *Perush HaTorah*, is a commentary on the first five books of the Bible, using Abravanel's method of listing particular questions or difficulties in the text which he then addresses. This volume was printed in Venice in 1579, and may be from the first printing of this famous work (Marsh's Library, C.3.2.3).



Figure 11. Handwritten notes in Commentary on the Torah, by Moses ben Nachman; Marsh’s Library C.3.1.26.

Finally, the library holds a number of grammatical and lexical works, including a volume from the medieval rabbi David Kimḥi, or Radak (b. 1160), a prolific writer and commentator from France. This volume is a printed version of Kimḥi’s lexicon or dictionary of Hebrew terms from the Bible, which became very influential in medieval and later Judaism (*Sefer ha-Shorashim*, “Book of the Roots”). It was printed in Venice in 1511 by Daniel Bomberg, the well-known Christian printer who played an important role in printing Hebrew books in this era (Figure 12).

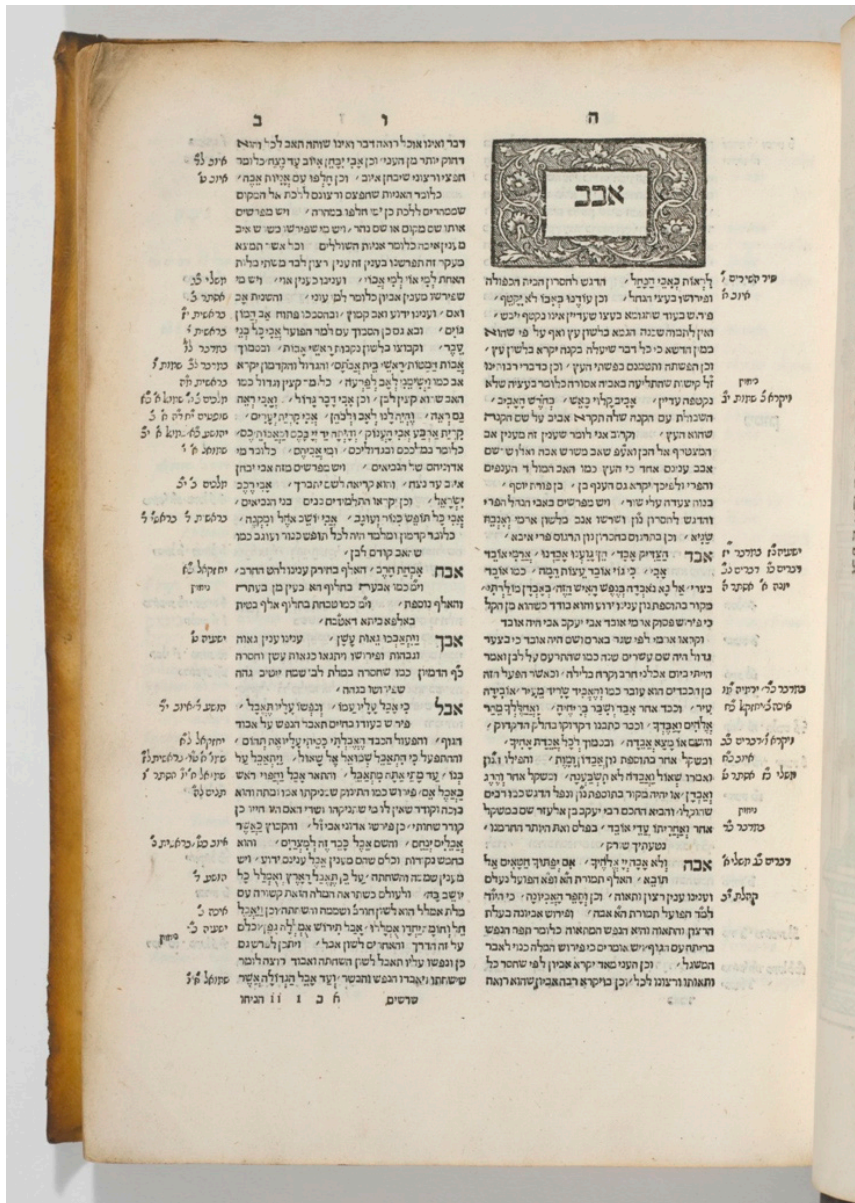


Figure 12. David Kimḥi, Sefer ha-Shorashim; Marsh’s Library R.2.1.34.

3.1.3. Jewish Texts Aimed at Christian Readers

Along with these various scriptural and rabbinic texts, another aspect of the collection at Marsh’s that points to Christian Hebraism are the Jewish texts that are clearly aimed at Christian readers. An important example, of which the library holds several important editions, are polyglot Bibles.¹² Polyglot Bibles enabled the incorporation of several ancient languages in one place to facilitate study and comparison—again pointing to the desire to return to the sources and explore the transmission of the biblical text (Miller 2001). One example from Marsh’s Library is the Walton Polyglot (sometimes called the London Polyglot), created and printed in London in 1657 under the leadership of Brian Walton, an Anglican priest (see Figure 13).

¹² The library also holds an edition of the famous *Biblia Polyglotta*, or the Complutensian Polyglot; see (McCarthy and Sherwood-Smith 2001, pp. 18–19).

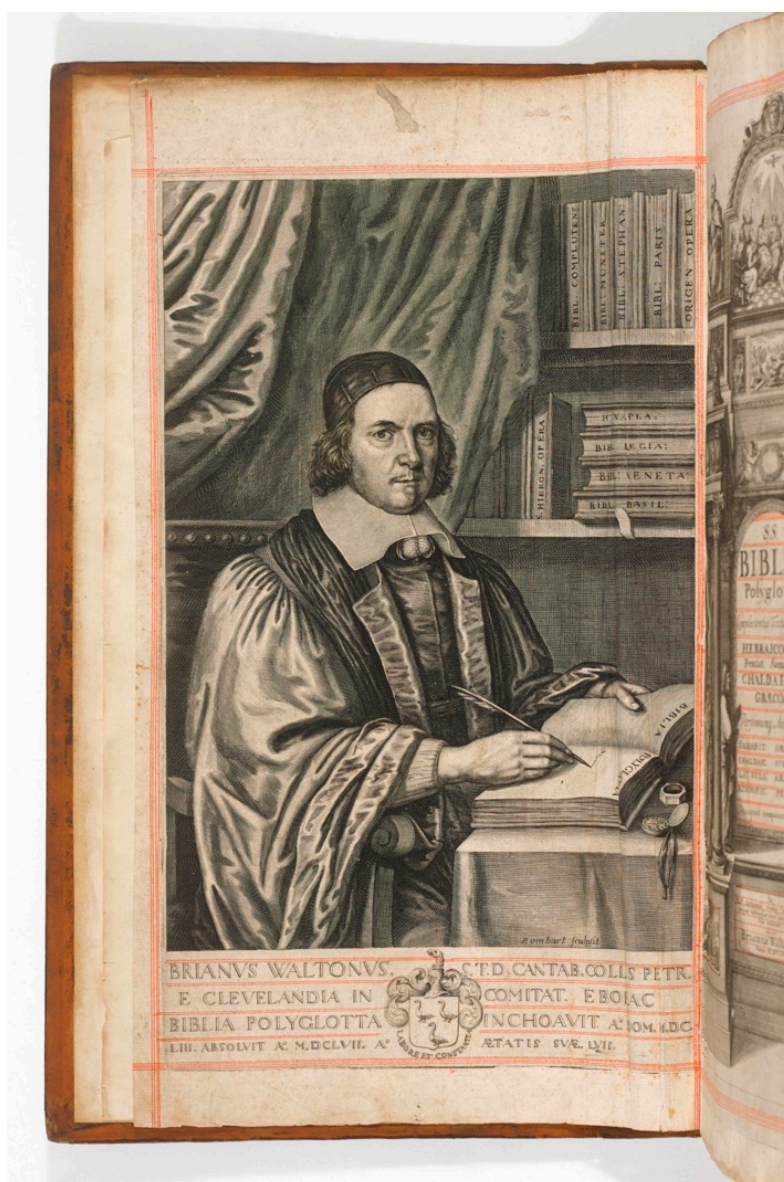


Figure 13. Image of Brian Walton, from Walton Polyglot; Marsh’s Library A.2.2 (Stillingfleet collection).

Assisted by many others—including James Ussher and John Lightfoot—Walton’s monumental work runs to six volumes and presents the Old Testament in nine languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, Samaritan, Syriac, Arabic, Persian, Ethiopic, Greek, and Latin (Van Staalduine-Sulman 2018). Not only were the polyglots of this era impressive works of scholarship, but they are beautifully presented and creatively formatted (Figure 14). This particular edition was extremely influential among the Christian Hebraists of Narcissus Marsh’s day—and though this copy comes from the Stillingfleet collection, there is little doubt that Marsh was familiar with it, and indeed influenced by the scholarship that went into it. Several of Marsh’s teachers and colleagues from Oxford and Ireland were involved in the project (Horbury 2004).



Figure 14. Walton Polyglot; Marsh’s Library A.2.2.

At a very early stage the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into other languages, notably Greek and Aramaic. The translations into Aramaic (Targums; Heb. *targumim*) became very important in Judaism, particularly in rabbinic Judaism (Flesher and Chilton 2011). The text pictured below (Figure 15), printed in Strasbourg in 1546, is a Latin translation of one of the Targums of the Pentateuch (Targum Onqelos). The first page of text, showing the initial verses of Genesis, has a detailed illustration of the creation scene in the Garden of Eden (although this particular scene is drawn from Gen 2). The work is ascribed to Paul Fagius, a German Renaissance scholar of Hebrew from the sixteenth century (Van Rooden 1989; Burnett 2005). The translation of the text into Latin clearly points to its intended use by a wider non-Jewish readership—most likely Christian scholars.

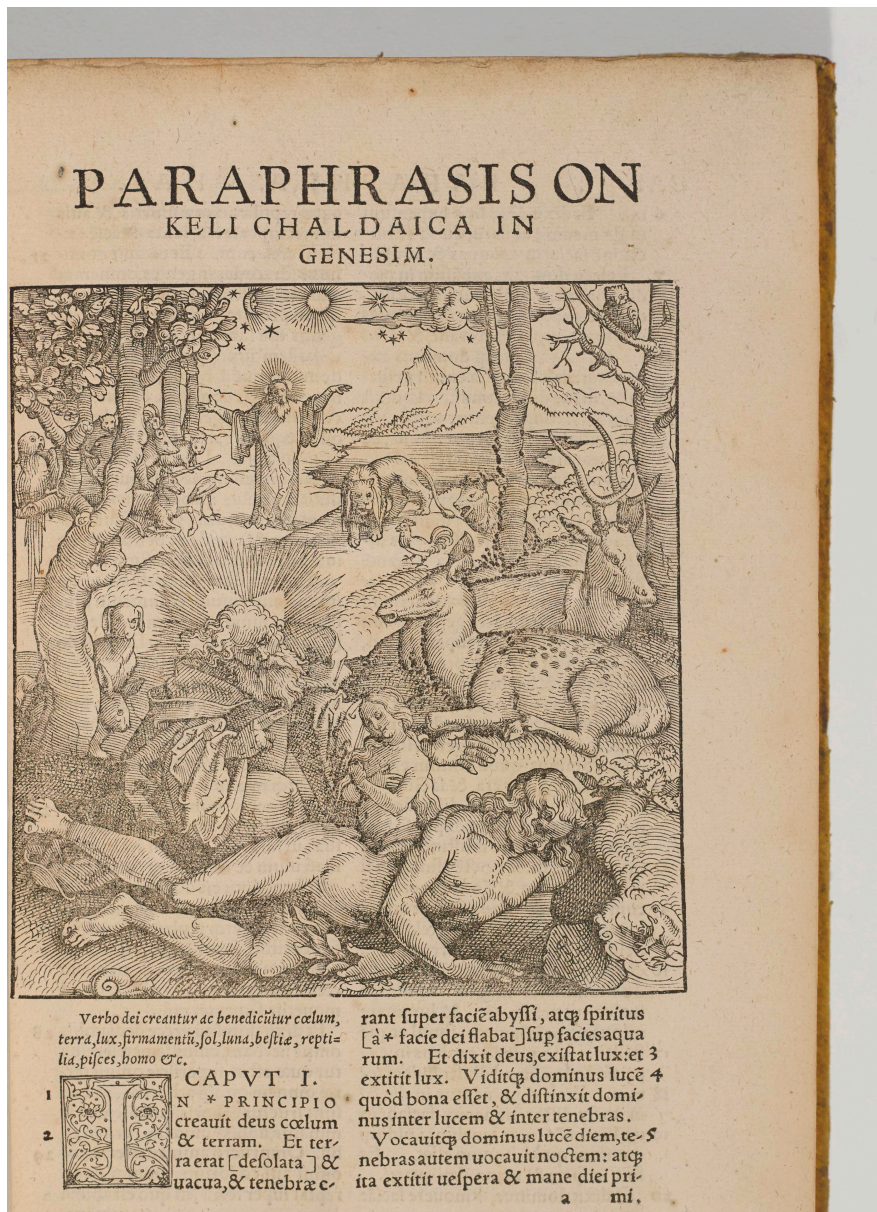


Figure 15. Targum translation in Latin; Marsh’s Library R.5.3.23 (Bouhéreau collection).

Similar issues can be seen in the library’s copy of Saadia ben Joseph Gaon’s work entitled *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. Saadia, who was a key figure in early medieval Judaism (Gordis 1942), originally composed this important volume in Judeo-Arabic in 933 (see Figure 16). This work is considered one of the first systematic accounts of Jewish beliefs and became a significant text in later Judaism. Among other things, the work defends rabbinic Judaism from various criticisms, particularly those of the Karaite Jews, who had rejected the oral Torah (Talmud and Mishnah), focusing instead on the five books of the Torah. This edition, which was printed in Amsterdam in 1647, follows the Hebrew translation made by Rabbi Judah ben Tibbon in the twelfth century. This is a further example of a volume which contains both Hebrew and Latin title pages, suggesting a wider readership was now intended for these printed works (Figure 17). The library also holds an earlier version from 1562.



Figure 16. Sefer emunot ve-de'ot (The Book of Beliefs and Opinions); Marsh's Library B.3.4.9.

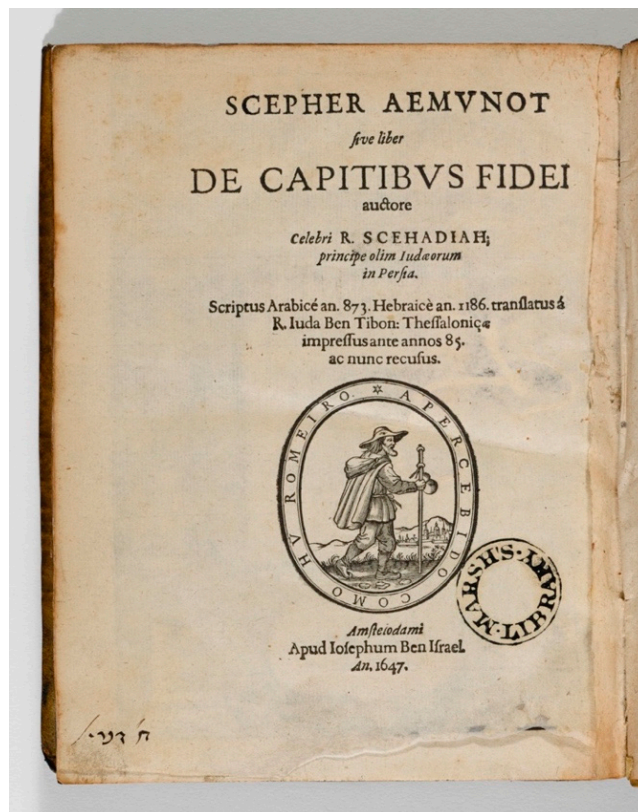


Figure 17. Latin title, Sefer emunot ve-de'ot (The Book of Beliefs and Opinions); Marsh's Library B.3.4.9.

Taken together, an examination of the Jewish books in Marsh's Library unsurprisingly demonstrates that Narcissus Marsh and some of his contemporaries were embedded in the culture of Christian Hebraism that had emerged in the early modern era. A return to the sources is evident in the collection of Hebrew Bibles, as well as in texts representing the Scriptures in other ancient languages and translations. There is also evidence of engagement with rabbinic texts and traditions, including the Talmud, midrashim, and the interpretive works by the great commentators of the rabbinic tradition. Finally, the library has numerous example of Jewish texts that were printed for Christians in this era.

While the presence of these texts is to be expected, as is set out below, the collection at Marsh's Library bears witness to an interest in Judaism that goes beyond these well-known texts and traditions.

3.1.4. Jewish Texts—Beyond the Usual Suspects

Along with the major publications outlined above that one would expect to find in any serious collection of Jewish books, Marsh's Library also holds numerous examples of Jewish literature that point to a deeper interest in the Judaism of the early modern period, as well as Marsh's ability to procure a wide-ranging array of Jewish books and materials.

By way of example, the library has a number of texts that represent different traditions within Judaism, including prayer books (*seder tefilot*). Figure 18 highlights a prayer book printed in Amsterdam in 1696, and was aimed at Yiddish speaking Ashkenazi Jews. The prayers, drawn from the Psalms and other ancient traditions, are printed in Hebrew, but the instructions and title page are given in Yiddish (Berger 2004).



Figure 18. Seder Tefilot, Ashkenazi Prayer Book; Marsh's Library C.3.4.2.

Another small prayer book in the collection (approx. 4 inches or 10 cm tall) follows the traditions of Sephardic Judaism. It was printed in 1627 by Menasseh ben Israel. The small size of this book indicates that it was intended for personal use (Figure 19).



Figure 19. Seder Tefilot, Sephardi Prayer Book; Marsh's Library B.3.5.47.

Other volumes in the collection point to an awareness of, and interest in, contemporary Jewish communities and their texts. The library holds a number of books in Yiddish, including a volume which presents the entire Hebrew Bible in Yiddish. This book was printed in 1687 in Amsterdam, and was the second edition of the translation by Yosef ben Alexander Witzzenhausen (Stern 2017; Berger 2004, pp. 54–55) (Figure 20). The book has a Latin inscription in Marsh's own hand noting the content of the book as a Yiddish Bible (Figure 21).

Another volume which points to an interest in Yiddish is entitled *Sefer HaMagid*. This work (housed in three volumes) is a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Yiddish by Yaakov ben Yitschak. It includes the Hebrew biblical text, a Yiddish translation, and a paraphrase of Rashi's commentary on all the Hebrew Scriptures apart from the Torah (see Figure 22). This work was first printed in Lublin in the 1620s, and a later printing was made in Prague—the library holds the 1692 Prague edition. This particular volume has several annotations, including a note indicating one owner or reader, Yaakov bar Gedaliah, from Lublin (Figure 23). Several other books in the collection are connected to the family of one Gedaliah, suggesting that Marsh acquired a number of volumes from this family.

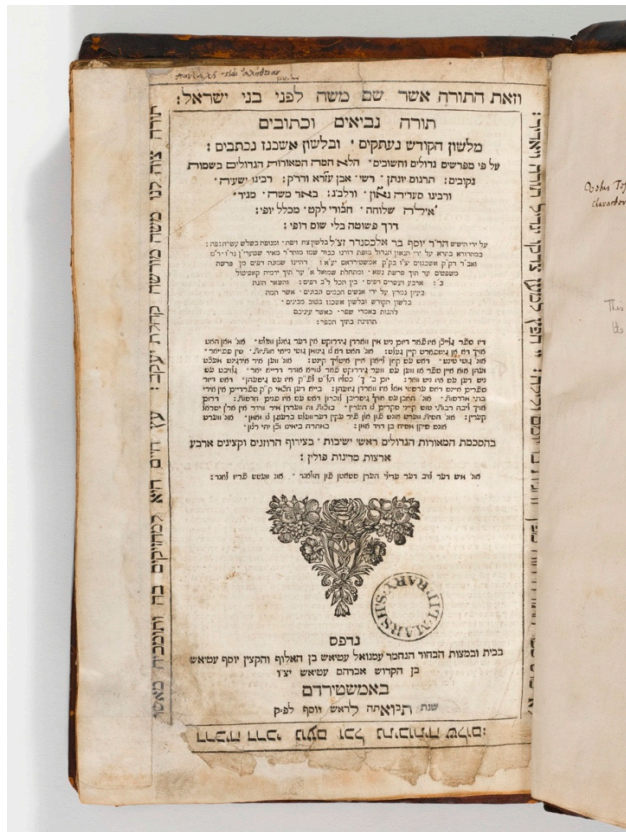


Figure 20. Yiddish Bible; Marsh’s Library C.3.2.25.

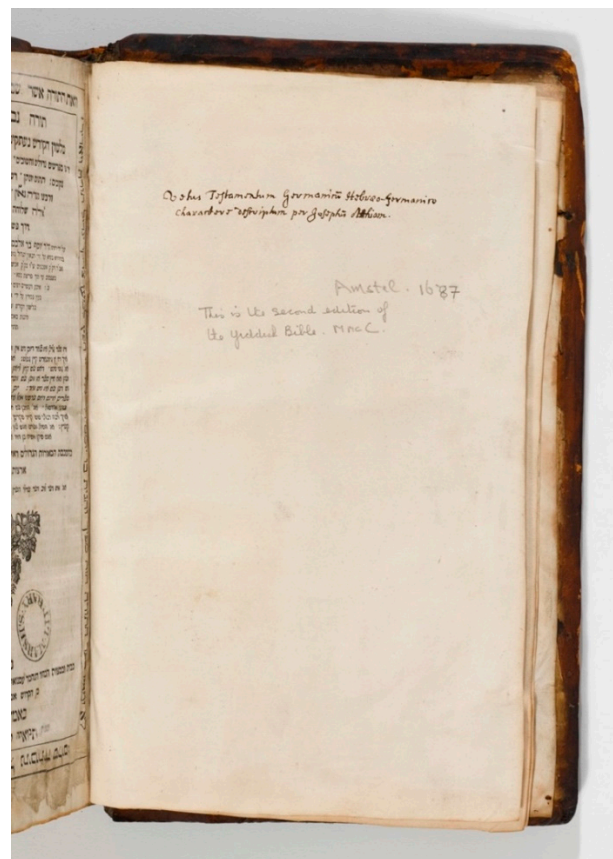


Figure 21. Inscription on Yiddish Bible; Marsh’s Library C.3.2.25.



Figure 22. Sefer HaMagid, Marsh's Library C.3.1.19.



Figure 23. Inscription on Sefer HaMagid, Marsh's Library C.3.1.19.

Along with contemporary traditions in Judaism, Marsh's collection shows an awareness of authors and works that were significant in Judaism, even if less well known in early modern Christian contexts. An example from the library is a work entitled *Giveat Shaul*, or Saul's Gibeah. The author of this volume, Shaul Levi Mortera, was a rabbi of the Jewish community in Amsterdam in the mid-seventeenth century. Significantly, Mortera was also a teacher of Baruch Spinoza (b. 1632), one of the leading thinkers of the early modern period. *Giveat Shaul* is a book of sermons from Shaul Levi Mortera, and the title is a play on the biblical king Saul, who was from a place called Gibeah (Altmann 1972, p. 3) (Figure 24). This volume was printed in Amsterdam in 1645.



Figure 24. Giveat Shaul, Saul's Gibeah; Marsh's Library B.3.3.38.

Likewise, the library holds a copy of *Sefer Lekah Tov*, a popular volume written by Abraham Jagel in 1595 that resembles a catechetical work. *Lekah Tov* is framed as a conversation between a rabbi and a follower about how to live a meaningful religious life, and seems to have been influenced by Christian writings of the day (Meyer 1967, pp. 125–27). The edition in Marsh's personal collection was printed in Amsterdam in 1658 and includes some decorative elements, as can be seen in Figure 25.



Figure 25. *Sefer Lekah Tov*; Marsh's Library B.3.5.29.

Taken together, the materials in the collection suggest that Marsh and his colleagues in Oxford and later in Ireland were firmly situated in the tradition of Christian Hebraism that was prevalent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, the collection in the library points to an interest in the texts and traditions of Judaism that go beyond the “canonical” texts of rabbinic Judaism. Indeed, the texts in question point to an awareness of diverse traditions within Judaism, various linguistic traditions, as well as the engagement with key thinkers who were less well-known in Christian circles, but who nonetheless played a significant role in shaping early modern Jewish thought.

3.2. The Production, Use, and Travel of Jewish Books in Early Modern Europe

By the time Narcissus Marsh began to buy and collect books, printing with moveable type had been flourishing for almost two centuries across Europe (Pettegree and der Weduwen 2019). The growth in publishing had ancillary benefits, such as the rise in interest in bibliographic work, including the cataloguing of works that pre-dated the advent of the press. The library holds an early and important example of such endeavours in the area of Hebrew texts: *Sefer sifte yeshanim*, first published in 1680 by Shabbethai ben Joseph Bass (b. 1641), lists over 2200 Hebrew works arranged alphabetically by title, along with other details including author and date, and includes a brief summary of each work. This catalogue was a monumental achievement and was the first detailed Hebrew bibliography to be published (Figure 26). This volume also points to interesting religious and cultural developments in this period, as Berger notes:

It is imperative to recall the co-operation between Sephardim and Ashkenazim in the book industry. Sephardim produced Yiddish books and Ashkenazim printed texts for the Sephardi community. Consequently, an Ashkenazi from Prague arrived in Amsterdam, worked in rich private Sephardi libraries and published in 1680 the first ever Hebrew bibliography, *Sifte yeshanim* (2015, p. 2).



Figure 26. *Sefer Sifte Yeshanim* (Bibliographic work); Marsh's Library B.3.4.11.

By the mid-seventeenth century, both Jewish and a number of Christian printers were committed to making Jewish and Hebrew works available to a wider readership (Katz 1999, p. 79; Ruderman 2010; Idel 2014). The title pages of the Jewish books in Marsh's personal collection point to the wide-ranging nature of printing in this era, with publishers based in Amsterdam, Constantinople, Prague, Venice, Krakow, Mantua, and Frankfurt, amongst others (see Figure 27).



Figure 27. Place of Publication—Amsterdam, Constantinople, and Prague; examples from Marsh's Library.

The majority of Marsh's Jewish books were published in Amsterdam, which was the centre of Jewish printing in this era (Pettegree and der Weduwen 2019). Marsh had buyers who acquired books for him, including one Aaron Moses, who helped move books between Amsterdam and London or Dublin (McCarthy 2003, pp. 62–66; Horbury 2004, p. 271). However, inscriptions found in various books also make clear that some volumes travelled via other places, such as Lublin (see Figure 22). Marsh's collection points to the production and circulation of Jewish books and situates his library within the book culture of early modern Europe.¹³

The books in Marsh's Library also highlight the way in which texts were created and produced in this era, giving insight into issues ranging from the way in which works were combined in printed volumes to the materials used in production and the artistry on display in the illumination of printed works.

¹³ The Footprints Project traces the movement of Jewish books after the rise of print and includes data on a number of works in Marsh's Library: <https://footprints.ctl.columbia.edu/>.

The library holds a number of volumes that combine disparate yet important works in one bound volume (on the phenomenon of composite volumes, or *Sammelbände*, see Dane 2012, pp. 171–76). Some of these display evidence of separate publications subsequently rebound (for example, with separate title pages and publication details), while the bibliographical origins of others are less clear. One interesting example combines the rabbinic text *Pirke de-rabi Eli'ezer*, a late midrashic text that offers exegetical comments and retellings of stories of the Torah, with a copy of the *Haggadah*, the traditional text that commemorates Israel's exodus from Egypt, and which is read at the Passover Seder. This copy includes images that illustrate topics discussed in the text; see Figure 28. It seems that the *Haggadah*, published in Amsterdam in 1662, was appended to the copy of *Pirke de-rabi Eli'ezer*, printed in Prague in 1661. Both were significant and popular texts, though used for different purposes—here they are brought together in one bound volume.



Figure 28. Illustrations from Haggadah; Marsh's Library B.3.4.18.

A similarly interesting combination brings together a small prayer book and the rabbinic text *Pirkei Avot* (Chapters of the Fathers). The prayer book, printed in Amsterdam in 1644, shows evidence of extensive use (Figure 29). *Pirkei Avot*, meanwhile, is a famous text that compiles ethical reflections from the rabbis of antiquity and has often been studied alongside other rabbinic texts. Thus, this volume brings together prayers with ethical reflections, an unusual combination.

Along with the combining of printed works, the collection at Marsh's Library gives us some insight into materials used in the production of books, and in particular the reuse of older material. One such example is a copy of Isaac ben Jacob Alfasi's (b. 1013) commentary on *Seder Nezikin*, a section of the Mishnah. This edition was printed in Basel in 1602. However, what makes this particular book interesting is that printed waste has been used in the binding of the book (Dane 2012, p. 181). Specifically, the printers used sections from the book of Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth) printed in Yiddish, as

can be seen in Figure 30. It is somewhat surprising to find a biblical text re-used for printing purposes, even if in translation.



Figure 29. Small Prayer Book with Pirkei Avot; Marsh’s Library B.3.6.5.



Figure 30. Reused Yiddish Bible (Commentary on Seder Nezikin); Marsh’s Library B.3.4.47.

Finally, Marsh’s personal collection points to the creativity and artistry that was common in the production of books in the early modern era, whether in the use of illustrations or the inclusion of paratextual features. A number of examples have already been noted, including the intricate border

on the cover page of Nachmanides' commentary to the Torah (Figure 10) and the illustrations in the Passover Haggadah (Figure 28). The collection also contains works with more elaborate artistic renderings, as seen above on the title page of *Sefer Rabbot* (Figure 7). Another such volume, printed in Amsterdam in 1701, contains a reprinting of a famous medieval work known as *Menorat Ha-Ma'or* (Candelabra of Light) by the Dutch, Sephardic rabbinic writer Isaac Aboab (Efros 1919). Inside the cover is a detailed woodcut which illustrates a large menorah, underneath which is listed in Hebrew the place of publication, Amsterdam (Figure 31).



Figure 31. Menorat Ha-Ma'or (Candelabra of Light); Marsh's Library C.3.4.28.

Paratextual elements also feature in a number of texts. This can be seen in the *Sefer Masoret ha-Masoret*, authored by Elijah Levita (b. 1468), a Jewish philologist and grammarian who was born in Germany but spent much of his life in Italy (Aranoff 2009). In this volume Levita offers an explanation of the biblical *masorah*, those signs and comments that were added to the Hebrew texts of the Bible over

time. One of Levita’s remarkable observations was that the vocalization and accents in the Masoretic tradition did not go back to Moses and the revelation at Mount Sinai, as was assumed in the rabbinic tradition. This edition was printed in Basel in 1539 and has a number of unique features, including the use of manicules—symbols in the shape of a pointing hand that highlight a particular portion of a text, serving as reading aids (Sherman 2008). The use of manicules was common in manuscript culture, and we see here the reproduction of these paratextual features in print culture (Figure 32).



Figure 32. Sefer Masoret ha-Masoret, with Manicule; Marsh’s Library C.3.4.40.

Taken together, a close inspection of the Jewish books in Marsh’s Library, and in particular the material dimensions of these texts, points to a number of interesting observations about the production,

use, and travel of these books in early modern Ireland. The diverse places of publication point to the vibrant print culture of Jewish books in this era, as well as the network that would have allowed Marsh to acquire such a varied collection, both before coming to Ireland and after his arrival. A number of volumes also point to the way in which books were combined and bound together, as well as giving us insight into the types of materials that went into printed volumes (including printed waste). Finally, the library testifies to the creativity and artistry that went into the production of Jewish books in this era—from intricate illustrations to paratextual features meant to function as reading aids.

3.3. Snapshots of Jewish Life in Early Modern Ireland and Beyond

Along with the issues noted above, the Jewish books in Marsh's Library point to broader social, cultural, and political aspects of Jewish life in the early modern era—in Ireland but also further afield (for more on Jewish culture in this era, see [Cohen et al. 2014](#)).

One of the most striking examples of this in the collection is the work *Sefer olat tamid*. This volume (Amsterdam, 1681) is significant not because of its content, but because of the handwritten inscriptions in the front and back, which add to our picture of Jewish life in early modern Dublin. The handwritten note in the front mentions the name of the owner, Yaakov (Jacob) son of Gedaliah (Figure 33).

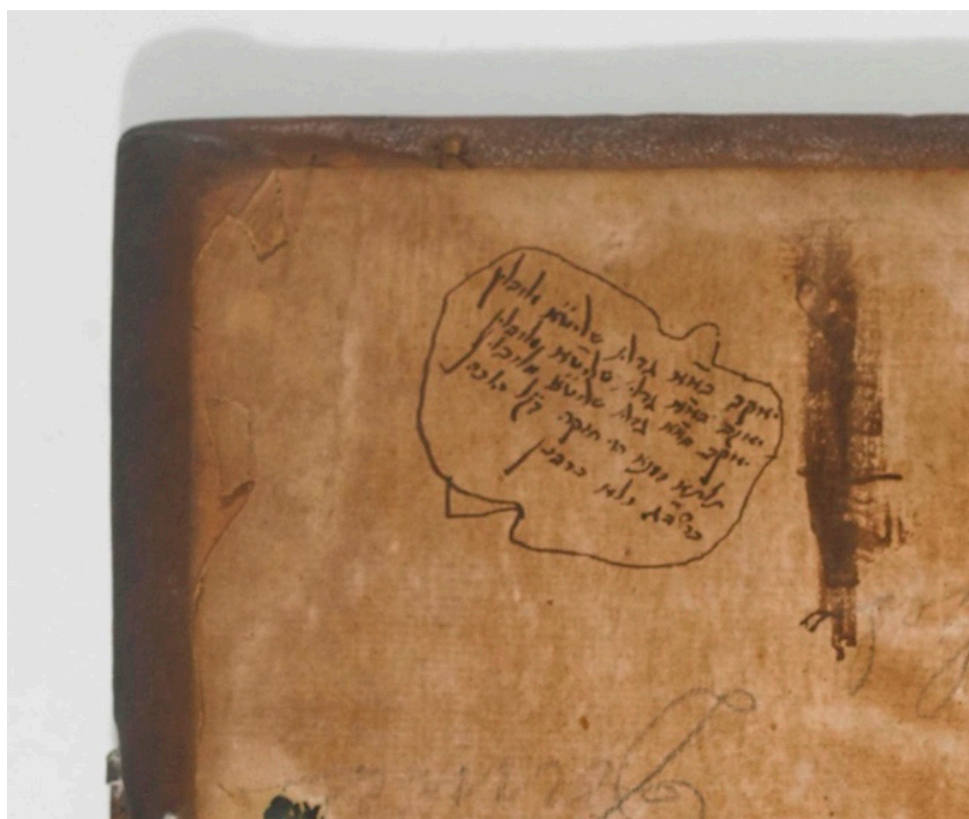


Figure 33. *Sefer olat tamid*, with name of owner; Marsh's Library C.3.1.18.

The end of the book has a longer inscription which mentions Dublin (Figure 34). The text reads: "I weep and my eyes overflow with tears on my father, Gedaliah son of Jacob/of the holy community of Lublin who died./I weep and my eyes overflow with tears on my brother Hirsh son of Gedaliah/who died on the second day of Passover in the year 5464 (=1704) and was buried in Dublin in the land Ireland" (trans. Marsh's Library catalogue for C.3.1.18). As Shlomo Berger noted in his exhibition "From Lublin to Dublin",

The mixed Hebrew and Yiddish inscription, which is based on Lamentations 1:16, mentions that Hirsh died on the second day of Passover 5464 (=1704) and was buried in Dublin, Ireland. It can be surmised that, for whatever reason, both brothers were in Dublin and after 1704 (Hirsh's death) the book was sold to Archbishop Marsh, or came into his possession in another way. This is probably the oldest copy of a book with a glimpse into a Jewish Dublin *couleur-locale* (Berger 2015, p. 3).

As other volumes in the collection mention a Gedaliah (see Figure 22 above), it is plausible that Marsh acquired a number of books from a Jewish family that came from Lublin to Dublin.

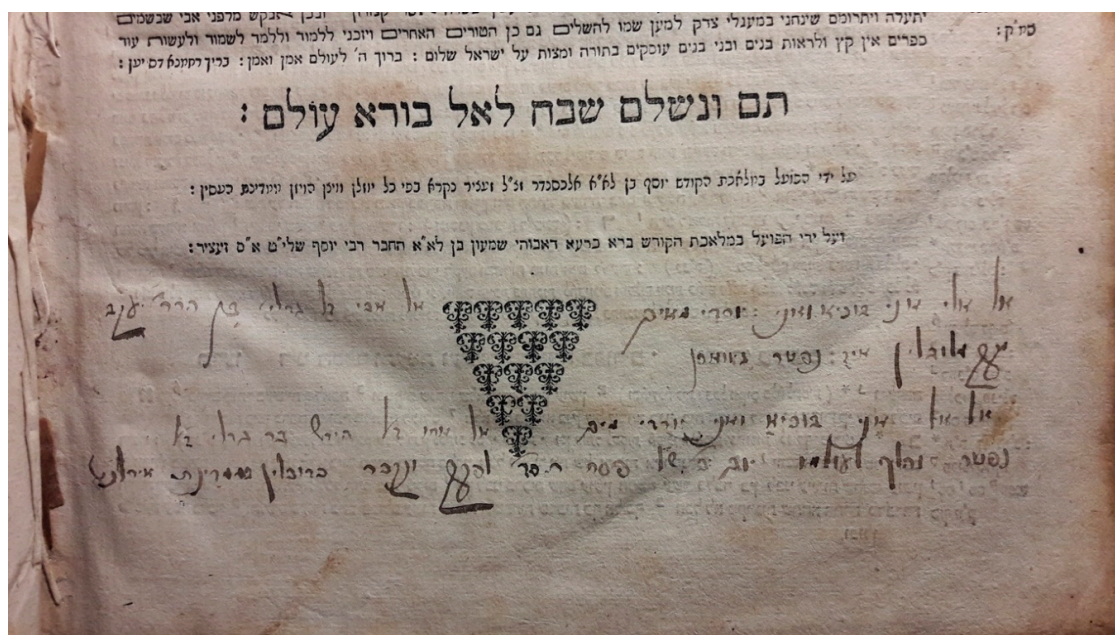


Figure 34. Sefer olat tamid, with reference to Dublin, Ireland; Marsh's Library C.3.1.18. Photo courtesy of Dr Javier del Barco.

While the long history of Jewish persecution was well-known prior to the early modern period, the rise of print culture allowed for a more systematic account of the mistreatment of Jews. An example of this is found in a volume in the library known as *Shevet Yehudah*, or Sceptre of the Jews (Figure 35). This volume was written by Solomon ibn Verga (b. 1460), a Jewish historian and physician from Spain. Verga witnessed first-hand the persecution of Jews in Spain and Portugal, and so wrote *Shevet Yehudah* as a history of the persecution of Jews in various places throughout history, offering 64 different examples. First published in Constantinople, this edition was printed in Amsterdam in 1655.



Figure 35. Shevet Yehudah (Sceptre of the Jews); Marsh's Library B.3.5.11.

Paratextual features in a number of Marsh's volumes point to challenges which Jewish people continued to face in the early modern period—in particular, a number of books originated in parts of Europe where censorship of Jewish texts was in effect.¹⁴ Two examples from Marsh's collection are worth noting. In the fourteenth century, the Jewish writer Levi ben Gershom (b. 1288) penned a volume known as *Milhamoth ha-Shem*, or *The War of the Lord*, a work that combines theological, philosophical, and astronomical reflections. This edition was printed in Riva di Trento, Italy, in 1560—the first and only printed edition of Gershom's work until 1863. This copy of the book contains evidence of both Hebrew annotation and Catholic censorship, citing the names of well-known counter-reformation censors from this period in Italy, including Domenico Irosolimitano (Figure 36).

¹⁴ On censorship of Jewish texts in this period, see (Hacker 2011; Francesconi 2009; Raz-Krakotzkin 2007; Raz-Krakotzkin 2014).

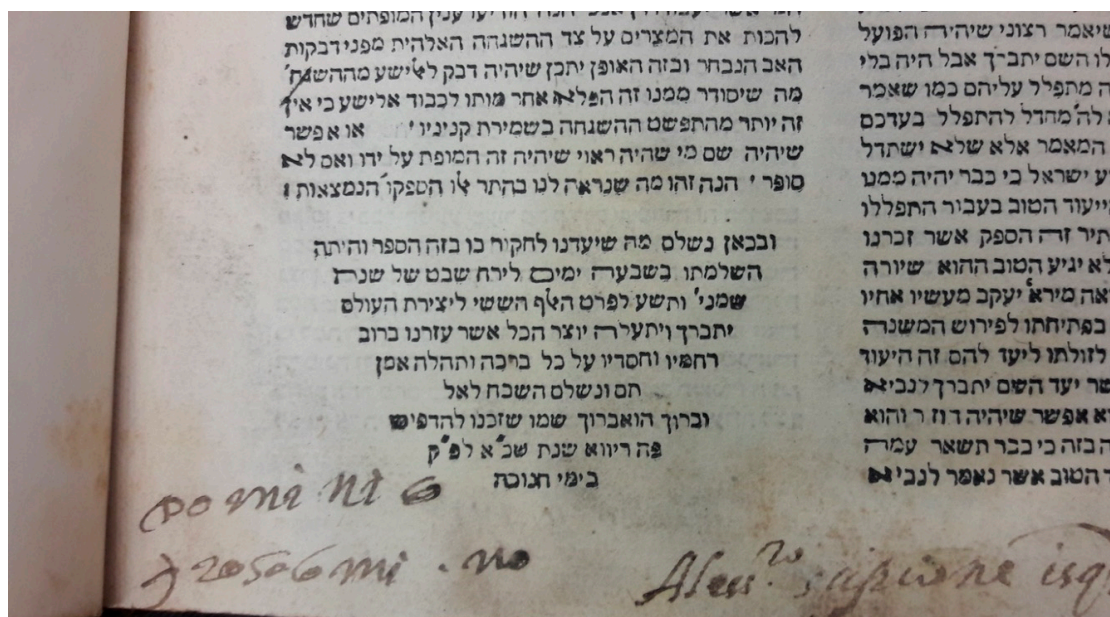


Figure 36. Detail of *Milhamoth ha-Shem*, War of the Lord, Marsh's Library B.3.3.2. Photo courtesy of Dr Javier del Barco.

Commenting on this volume, del Barco notes:

At the end of the work we find the signatures of three different censors. In the last page, we read “Domenico Irosolomi.no”, “Alessandro Scipione 1597” and, in the previous page, “visto per me Gio domenico carretto 1618”. From this single book copy, one can learn much about not only the reading habits of Jews, but the censorship regime of the Counter-Reformation Catholic Church in Italy in the late sixteenth century. The well-known Domenico Irosolimitano worked with Alessandro Scipione and Laurentius Franguellus, all of them apostates, in the Mantuan censorship commission from 1595 to 1597 ... Jews took their books to be censored in great numbers, probably in fear of the penalty for having uncensored books in their possession. After looking at the books and censoring them accordingly, censors would sign at the end of the book and add the date to their signatures ... Thus Irosolimitano's and Scipione's signatures together and the latter's addition of the date—1597—leaves no doubt that this copy of *Milhamot ha-Shem* was under the scrutiny of the Mantuan commission in 1597. Yet, bearing a censor's signature did not free the book's owner from the obligation of bringing the book to subsequent censorship commissions. This is the case with this copy, as attested by the signature of Giovanni Domenico Carretto dated to 1618, who worked censoring Hebrew books also in Mantua from 1617 to 1619. This footprint then situates this copy in Mantua still in 1618, where it had probably been since 1597 or earlier. ... Printed in Riva di Trento by Jacob Marcaria in 1560 under the sponsorship of the bishop of Trento, this copy tells us about actual collaboration and exchange between Jews and Catholics in a cultural and intellectual endeavour such as printing books in Hebrew in Northern Italy. This was possible only before the Council of Trent was finished in 1563, as the consequences of Counter-Reformation largely affected relationships between Jews and Catholics. This can be observed very well in this book, as it was censored twice in Mantua, in 1597 and in 1618, following the establishment of censorship commissions. (Del Barco 2017b)¹⁵

¹⁵ Another example is a work entitled *Sefer Hovot ha-levavot* (Duties of the Heart), which again comes from Marsh's personal collection (Marsh's Library C.3.3.30; the library also holds the 1692 edition). Penned in the eleventh century by the Jewish

Beyond Jewish and Hebrew texts, there are other aspects of the collection in Marsh's Library which show that Archbishop Marsh and others who contributed to the library were aware of issues relating to Judaism and Jewish people in the seventeenth century. One such example is a broadside published in London in 1656 by the Quaker William Tomlinson, entitled "A bosome opened to the Jewes holding forth to others some reasons for our receiving them into our nation" (Figure 37). Tomlinson argues that Jews should be re-admitted to England, and this assertion was made on both theological and patriotic grounds. Jews had been expelled from England at the beginning of the thirteenth century, an edict that was only overturned in 1657 (Singer 1964; Menache 1985). This broadside was published during Marsh's time as a student in Oxford, and it may have accompanied him on his travels to Ireland.

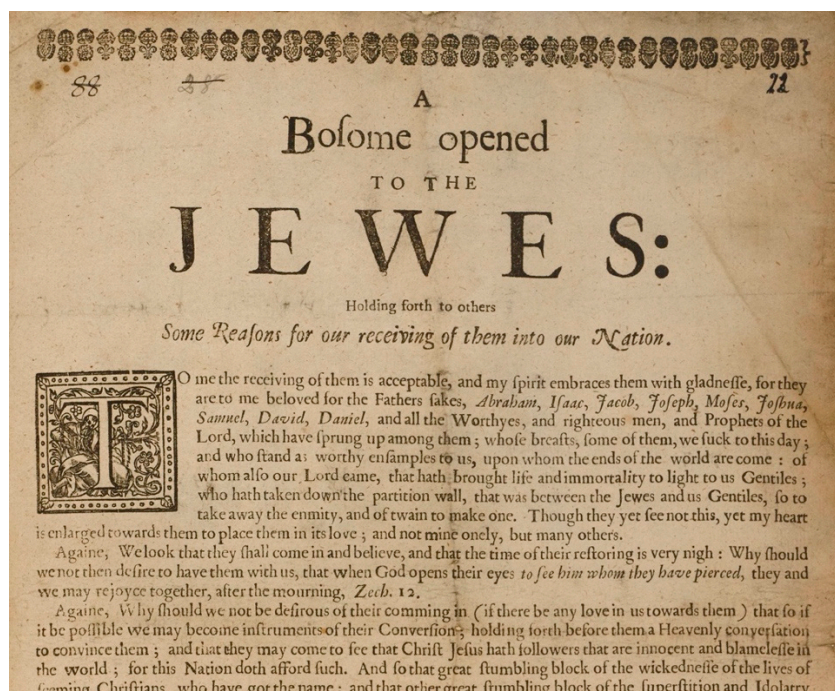


Figure 37. A Bosome Opened to the Jewes; Marsh's Library Z.2.1.6.22.

The collection at Marsh's Library thus points to social, cultural, and political issues relating to Jews in the early modern period, particularly with annotations and other paratextual features. We are given a glimpse into Jewish life in seventeenth century Dublin; books bearing witness to censorship taking place in Europe in this era; and political texts pointing to an awareness of persecution which Jews faced in England and elsewhere during this period. Thus, beyond a collection of books, these artefacts open a window onto the reality of lived experience for Jews in early modernity, in Dublin and further afield—as well as suggesting an awareness of this reality among Christians such as Marsh.

4. Conclusions

This essay has explored the wide-ranging collection of early modern Jewish books in Marsh's Library, Dublin, and in particular those books from Narcissus Marsh's personal collection. We have argued that the books highlighted above are a valuable resource for reflection on (1) Christian engagement with Jewish culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, (2) the production, use, and travel of Jewish books in early modern Europe, and (3) snapshots of Jewish life in early modern

rabbi Bahya ben Joseph ibn Paḳuda, this printed edition was created in Mantua, Italy, in 1559, and also bears evidence of censorship; an inscription on the final page reads "visto per mi fra Luigi da [Bologna] 1601".

Ireland and beyond. Within this, we have suggested that books as material artefacts have much to contribute to our understanding of history, religion, and intercultural engagement.

While this study has only scratched the surface of what is a complex and multifaceted collection of Jewish books, there is a silver lining: there are many more stories waiting to be told.

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