Editing Safed: The Career of Isaac Gershon

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"Authors do not write books, they write texts that others transform into printed objects," wrote one of the leading historians of the early modern period in a celebrated essay that first appeared twenty years ago.[1] In the two decades since, the history of the book has emerged as one of the central practices of cultural history. With this transformation of the study of written culture has come renewed attention to the people – editors, censors, and patrons – who turned an author's text into a printed book. The history of Hebrew printing in the early modern period offers an astonishing array of figures who left traces in the margins of the book they edited, censored, and printed. Rabbis, preachers, converts, and censors, collaborated and competed in an effort to print classical, medieval, and contemporary Hebrew texts. As scholars are beginning to appreciate, the choices they made – which books to print, which manuscripts to use as the basis for their editions, which commentaries to print alongside a given classical text – had an enduring impact upon the shape of Jewish culture in the decades and centuries to come.[2]

This seems particularly true in the case of the Jewish culture of Safed. Over the course of a few decades in the middle of the sixteenth century, Safed became a center, if not the center, of early modern Jewish culture. The list of luminaries who migrated to Safed and flourished there is well known: Joseph Karo, Isaac Luria, Moses Alshekh, Solomon Alkabetz,

[1] Roger Chartier, "The World as Representation," in Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt *Histories: French Constructions of the Past* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 551. The essay first appeared in French several years earlier. See "Le monde comme representation," *Annales* 44:6 (1989) 1505–1520.

[2] See Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text: The Catholic Church and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon in the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Elchanan Reiner, "Beyond the realm of the Haskalah: changing learning patterns in Jewish traditional society," *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow Instituts* 6 (2007): 123–133. Zeev Gries, *The Book in the Jewish World: 1700–1900* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2007).

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and Moses Cordovero to name only a few of the most prominent.[3] The rapid acceptance of Karo's legal code, the *Shulhan Arukh*, completed in Safed in the early 1560s and printed for the first time in Venice in 1565, and the diffusion of Lurianic Kabbalah in the first half of the seventeenth century, constitute two of the most important avenues through which the culture of Safed spread far beyond the city itself.[4] Yet Safed's demise was as quick as its ascent. At the turn of the seventeenth century, the very same period when European Jews were adopting the *Shulhan Arukh* as a law code to govern their lives and turning to Lurianic Kabbalah as a theological system to make sense of the world, Safed had once again become the provincial backwater it had been in the late Middle Ages. The question of how Safed became Safed, that is how a few decades of writing, study, and creativity in a small town in the northern Galilee transformed the shape of Jewish culture throughout the Mediterranean and Europe, has long exercised scholars. Recent work has emphasized the centrality of Italy in general and Venice in particular as intermediary sites in this process of cultural transmission.[5] Not only did the Jews of Northern Italian cities shape the impact of Kabbalah and Halakah on Jewish societies in Europe, but the Hebrew printing houses of Venice served as the primary presses for Safed Jewish scholarship.

Printing a text written in Safed at a Hebrew press over fifteen hundred miles away in Venice was no simple matter. Numerous actors – editors, printers, booksellers, censors, and patrons – played roles in transforming an author's text into a printed book. These cultural inter-

[3] See the bibliography of recent scholarship on Safed that appears in Daniel Abrams, ed., *Kabbalat Ha-Ari: Osef Ma'amarim shel Gershom Scholem* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2008).

[4] For opposing views on the spread of Lurianic Kabbalah see Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), Moshe Idel, "'One from a Town, Two from a Clan,' The Diffusion of Lurianic Kabbala and Sabbateanism: A Re-Examination," *Jewish History* 7, no. 2 (1993). See also Zeev Gries *Sifrut ha-Hanhagot* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1989). Eli Yassif, "The conflict over the Myth of Safed, then and now," (Hebrew) *Mikan* 4 (2005): 42–79.

[5] Moshe Idel, "Italy in Safed, Safed in Italy: Toward an Interactive History of Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah," in *Cultural Intermediaries* ed. David B. Ruderman, (Philadelphia, 2003). Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "From Safed to Venice: The *Shulhan Arukh* and the Censor," in *Tradition, Heterodoxy, and Religious Culture: Judaism and Christianity in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Chanita Goodblatt and Howard Kreisel (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2006). Although not specifically about Safed, see Shifra Baruchson, "On the Trade in Hebrew Books between Italy and the Ottoman Empire during the Sixteenth Century," (Hebrew) in *Mi-Mizrah ume-Ma'arav* 5 (1986): 53–78.

mediaries left traces of their activities in the margins of the books they helped produce. Prefatory notes, detailed appendices, and handwritten signatures constitute some of the ways they shaped the texts that appeared as printed books. The frontispieces of the books they helped publish indicate their importance in the publication process. This study examines the career of one such figure, Isaac Gershon, as a means of analyzing the production and dissemination of Safed in Europe.[6]

Over a period of nearly twenty five years, between 1585 and 1608, Gershon worked in the Hebrew printing houses of Venice while simultaneously serving as a rabbi and preacher in Venice.[7] Over the course of these three decades, Gershon was involved in the production or publication of over fifty Hebrew works, a considerable number written by scholars associated with Safed including Joseph Karo, Moses Alshekh, Samuel Kohen Zedek, Moses Cordovero, and Eleazar Azikri.[8] Many of the books Gershon helped print describe him on the frontispiece as a *magiah*, which one might render as corrector or editor, or describe the work that he performed for the text as *hugah be-iyun rav*, which might be rendered as corrected or edited with great care. Gershon's career in Venice offers several instructive parallels with contemporary Italian editors or correctors of vernacular texts. In Italy the term "corrector" applied rather fluidly to independent editors as well as to publisher's employees.[9] During his time in Venice, Gershon worked for two different and competing publishing houses, Zanetti and Di Gara. Like his predecessors and contemporaries who worked in the editing of vernacular and classical texts, Gershon developed an independent reputation as a corrector.

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[6] On Gershon see Isaac Yudlov, "R. Isaac Gershon and R. Isaac Treves," (Hebrew) in *Kiryat Sefer* 59:1 (1984): 247–251. Elliot Horowitz "R. Isaac Ben Gershon Treves," *Kiryat Sefer* 59:1 (1984): 252–258. Meir Benayahu, "R. Isaac Gershon," (Hebrew) in *Asufot* 12 (2001): 9–89. The final third of Benayahu's article includes an annotated listing of the books edited by Gershon see 67–89.

[7] On Gershon in the Venetian rabbinate see the materials gathered in Benayahu cited in the previous note. On his preaching in the Venetian Jewish community see the evidence in *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena's Life of Judah* ed. and tr. Mark R. Cohen, 129. As the evidence from Modena's autobiography indicates, Gershon remained in Venice until 1625. However, he was not as active in Hebrew publishing for the last seventeen years of his stay as he had been earlier.

[8] See *Tur Orah Hayim* with Karo's *Bet Yosef* (Venice: Zuan di Gara, 1589); Samuel Kohen Zedek, *Ner Mitzvah* (Venice: Zuan di Gara, 1597); Moses Cordovero, *Asis Rimonim* (Venice: Zanetti, 1601); idem, *Sefer Gerushin* (Venice: Zanetti, 1602); Eleazar Azikri, *SeferHaredim* (Venice: Zanetti, 1601); Moses Alshekh, *Rav Peninim*, (Zuan di Gara,1598).

[9] Brian Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): Chapter 1.

Both of the presses boasted of his involvement on the frontispieces of the books that he edited.[10] Gershon worked in so many different capacities as a bookman – as anthologizer, advocate, and author – that he should be seen as a cultural impresario of Safed in print. His activities as a cultural intermediary between Safed and Venice enable one to reconstruct how information and knowledge produced in one center of Jewish life, Safed, were given material form as printed books in another center, Venice. As an impresario of print, Gershon practically invented the literary career of one of the most prominent Safed homilists and exegetes, Moses Alshekh, a figure who published little in his lifetime, but whose work appeared in print in the years after his death due to the efforts of Gershon and his contemporaries.

Gershon's migration to Venice from Safed offers an important counterpoint to the general migration pattern eastward of Jewish intellectuals in the sixteenth century. Movement from the western half of the Mediterranean towards points east has long been a commonplace for historians of the Jews in the early modern period. In the aftermath of the expulsions and forced conversions on the Iberian peninsula at the end of the fifteenth century, Sephardic Jewry went east, to cities on the Italian peninsula, to the Balkans, to North Africa, and to Palestine. They repopulated cities in the Ottoman Empire and exercised a form of cultural imperialism over other Jewish communities.[11] Unlike his teachers who had immigrated to Safed from Europe or elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, Gershon was born in Safed in the middle of the sixteenth century. He received his rabbinic education from the luminaries of Safed when its rabbinic culture was at its apex. Yet he did not remain in the town of his birth very long. After several years in the Ottoman Empire, including a prolonged stay in Istanbul, Gershon made his way to the eastern coast of Italy. He settled in Ancona for a time before making his way to Venice, where he lived and worked for nearly a quarter of a century.

In his trajectory from east to west, from Safed to Venice, Gershon was not alone.[12] The most important inquisitorial censor of Hebrew books in Italy in the late sixteenth century, Domenico Gerosolimitano, known as Samuel Vivas before his conversion to Christianity, followed a

[10] Anthony Grafton, "Correctores corruptores? Notes on the Social History of Editing," in *Editing Texts/Texte edieren* ed. Glen W. Most (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht): 54–76, 60.

[11] See Joseph Hacker, "The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth Century," in *Moreshet Sepharad* ed. by Haim Beinart (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992) vol. 2, 109–133

[12] See the evidence gathered in Meir Benayahu *Relations Between Greek and Ottoman Jewry* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1980).

similar migration pattern. According to his own testimony, Gerosolimitano was born in Jerusalem around the year 1555. He moved from Jerusalem to Safed at a young age where he studied rabbinic literature.[13] Eventually he made his way to Istanbul and later on in life dictated a remarkable account of his time in the Ottoman capital.[14] Gerosolimitano made his career as a censor of Hebrew books in numerous cities in Italy, including Mantua, Milan, and Rome. While in Mantua in 1596, Gerosolimitano wrote the first draft of a manual and index for censors entitled *Sefer ha-Zikuk*, a work that includes a list of principles of censorship followed by a discussion of over four hundred Hebrew books.[15] The work never appeared in print but circulated in manuscript in multiple versions.

Gershon and Gerosolimitano may not have known one another as students in Safed or as professional bookmen in northern Italy, where their careers ran parallel for several decades. While Gershon worked as an editor and proofreader in Venice, Gerosolimitano worked as a censor in Mantua, Milan, and Rome.[16] The two figures represent the two poles of early modern censorship of Hebrew books. As an editor and proofreader, Gershon functioned as an internal censor and expurgated passages critical of Christianity and the Catholic Church from the works he edited before they appeared in print.[17] For example, the sermons of Solomon Beit ha-Levi, a member of the rabbinic elite in Salonika, serve as an important witness to Gershon's work as an internal censor.[18] Beit

[13] On his conversion to Christianity see Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, "Domenico Gerosolimitano a Venezia," *Sefarad* 58 (1998): 107–115. On his work as a censor see Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text,* 120–175; Gila Prebor, "From Jerusalem to Venice: the Life of Domenico Gerosolimitano and his work as a censor," (Hebrew) *Peamim* 111–112 (2007): 215–242; eadem, "*Sefer ha-Ziquq* by Domenico Gerosolimitano," (Hebrew) *Italia* 18 (2008): 7–93; Shifra Baruchson-Arbib and Gila Prebor, "Sefer ha-Ziquq: the Book's Use and its Influence on Hebrew Printing," *La Bibliofilia* 109 (2007): 3–31.

[14] See *Domenico's Istanbul* tr. Michael Austin and ed. Geoffrey Lewis, (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 2001).

[15] See Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text*, Chapter Five; Prebor, "*Sefer ha-Ziquq* by Domenico Gerosolimitano."

[16] For Gerosolimitano's possible residence in Ferrara see Prebor, "From Jerusalem to Venice," 234. Raz-Krakotzkin raises the possibility that Gerosolimitano may have served for a certain period as a censor in Venice. See *The Editor, The Censor, and the Text*, 238, n. 45. On Gerosolimitano's censorship of works by Safed scholars see Prebor, "From Jerusalem to Venice," 219, n.18.

[17] On the notion of internal censorship see Isaiah Sonne, "Expurgation of Hebrew Books: The Work of Jewish Scholars," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 46 (1942): 975–1014; Raz-Krakotzkin, Chapter Three.

[18] Joseph Hacker, "Israel Among the Nations as Described by Solomon Le-Beit ha-Levi of Salonika," (Hebrew) *Zion* 34 (1969): 43–89, 64–67.

ha-Levi's work printed in Salonika contained numerous passages critical of Christianity; however, his *Divrei Shelomoh* (1596) that appeared in Venice lacks any such criticism.[19] Gerosolimitano, by contrast, represents the institutional authority of the Church, whose surveillance over the printing of Hebrew books ensured that any potentially heretical or offensive passages that had appeared in print or were about to appear in print were excised from the text.

Gershon and Gerosolimitano represent only two of the most prominent émigrés from Safed who populated the Hebrew print shops of Northern Italy. Hayim Alshekh, the son of the Safed preacher and exegete Moses Alshekh, also emigrated to Venice from Safed. In Venice the younger Alshekh collaborated with Gershon and arranged for the publication or republication of much of his father's writings. Their collaboration effectively enabled the elder Alshekh's literary career in the seventeenth century as an extremely popular exegete and homilist.[20] Moses Alshekh's commentaries to the Psalms and to the book of Daniel had appeared in his lifetime at Hebrew presses in the Ottoman empire. Hayim Alshekh and Gershon not only reissued these works in new editions but they also published a range of his other biblical commentaries as well as his responsa. In the case of Alshekh's commentary to the book of Psalms, printed in Venice as *Romemot El*, Hayim Alshekh's introduction to the work offers a curious insight into the circumstances of its reprinting. He complains that a manuscript of his father's commentary to the Psalms had been stolen from him and printed in an unedited version.[21] Presumably this a reference to *Tapukhe Zahav*, the title given to the edition of Alshekh's commentary on the Psalms printed in 1590 at a Hebrew press in Kuru Tshesme, a suburb of Istanbul. Hayim Alshekh complains that printers of the first edition of his father's commentary to the Psalms were making a profit under false pretences and underscores the importance of his republication of his father's work in a new edition.

Gershon's relationship with the Alshekh family extended beyond the publication and republication of the elder Alshekh's literary and homiletic work. It included an attempt to wage a public relations campaign on behalf of the Jews of Safed in the late sixteenth century. Gershon prepared for publication at the Di Gara press in Venice a work entitled

[19] Ibid. 64, n.123.

[20] On Alshekh as an exegete and homilist see Simon Shalem, *Rabbi Moses Alshekh* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1966).

[21] See the introduction by Hayim Alshekh to Moses Alshekh, *Romemot El* (Venice: Zuan di Gara, 1604), 2A.

Hazut Kasha, an essay by Moses Alshekh addressed to Jewish communities all over the world that contains an elaborate plea to offer financial assistance to the Jews of Safed. Although no printed copies of the work have ever been found, the work survives in a single manuscript.[22] While *Hazut Kasha* has served scholars as a source for the reconstruction of Jewish life in Safed at the end of the sixteenth century, particularly as a testament to the social and economic woes experienced by the Jewish community, the work also demonstrates the intensity of Gershon's continued ties to the town of his birth not only as a source of rabbinic scholarship but also as a Jewish community in considerable need.

The prefatory notes, frontispieces, and letters that constitute the Gershon's literary remains leave several important questions unanswered. How precisely did the manuscripts of Alshekh's work, his homilies and biblical exegesis as well as his responsa and communal propaganda, make their way from Safed to Venice? One can hypothesize that Hayim Alshekh brought with him to Venice what amounted to a family archive of his father's work. When he arrived in Venice, he may have sought out Gershon, who had been a student of his father's several decades earlier in Safed, and embarked upon a collaborative effort to secure funding and edit the elder Alshekh's writings for publication. However, until the discovery of new evidence this must remain a hypothesis. The larger point has to do less with Moses Alshekh or his writings than with the men on the ground in Venice and elsewhere in northern Italy who had personal, in some cases filial, relationships with leading rabbinic figures in Safed and elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire. It was through the active work of these figures in Venice that rabbinic writing from Safed and elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire took the form of printed books in Venice. Gershon and Alshekh worked between authors, both living and dead, and publishers. They secured manuscripts, corrected them for the press and marketed them to the appropriate printing houses. In a sense, Gershon was similar to the free-lance correctors in seventeenth-century Holland who functioned something like literary agents for a range of authors.[23] Correctors like Gershon not only read the proofs but also prepared the editorial apparatuses. He drew up indexes, inserted chapter divisions, and carried out the editorial work needed for an author's text to appear before the reading public. In this sense, Gershon

[22] Mordechai Pachter, "'Hazut Kasha' of Rabbi Moses Alshekh," *Shalem* 1 (1974): 157–195.

[23] Anne Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680–1750*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). As cited by Grafton, "Correctores corruptores? Notes on the Social History of Editing," 65, n. 37.

functioned in capacities very similar to contemporary correctors who worked in the Plantin-Moretus house.[24]

Figures like Gershon and Hayim Alshekh did not simply print the manuscripts they had brought with them to Venice or that had been sent to them. They played an active role in shaping the actual texts that appeared in print. As an editor Gershon left identifiable traces of his involvement in many of the books he corrected or edited and served as an intermediary between author and reader.[25] In some books, such as the manuscript version of *Hazut Kasha*, his name appears as the editor or corrector of the work only once, at the end of what would have been the title page to the book. In others his name also appears as the compiler of the reference matter appended to the beginning or, more frequently, the end of a book. The reference matter compiled by Gershon usually took one of three different forms: an index to the biblical and rabbinic citations used throughout the work, a table of contents describing the subject matter of the book, or a list of corrections to mistakes in the printed text. Gershon often appended his own note of explanation to the reader at the beginning of the index. From these notes, as well as the explicit testimony contained in the introductions to the books he edited, one can determine with relative certainty that Gershon compiled the index to specific works. Other books corrected by Gershon contain indices but lack any indication as to the identity of the index's compiler. Given that Gershon often worked in tandem with other editors such as Nissim Shoshan and Israel Zifroni, one cannot be certain that he compiled these indices himself. For the publishing houses, the editorial material added by figures such as Gershon added value to their product and were an attempt to make the works they produced more attractive to potential buyers.[26]

In 1601 Gershon edited Moses Alshekh's commentary to the book of Proverbs, *Rav Peninim*. Working with Hyyim Alshekh who wrote an extensive introduction to the work, Gershon composed parts of the index and included a note describing his work:

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[24] Anthony Grafton, "Correctores corruptores? Notes on the Social History of Editing," 65.

[25] On the editor as an intermediary between author and reader see Brian Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): Chapter 1. See also Paolo Trovato *Con ogni diligenza corretto: la stampa e le revisioni editoriali dei testi letterari italiani (1470–1570)* (Bolognia: Il Mulino, 1991).

[26] See the work by Paolo Trovato cited above. Trovato has demonstrated that sixteenth-century Italian publishing houses emphasized the editors and correctors involved in the publication of vernacular texts.

Indices refining the holy sayings of the book of Proverbs so that everyone may locate the issue he seeks according to the letters of the alphabet, each issue according to its root (Cf. Pr. 25:11). In explaining its organization according to the alphabet, he [the reader] will find many perspectives [Heb. *Rav Peninim*]. How the author built Houses and Rooms totaling the number 202, for many are his perspectives.[27] A House refers to his first explanation of a particular verse, a Room refers to his further explanation of the same verse following his initial one. For both of them he assigned indicative marks. Thus when he says in 'twenty-nine, thirteen,' that refers to House number twenty-nine and Room thirteen. Because the different Houses are well known, we simply indicated the page but did not indicate the column, for they are easy to locate; however, when it comes to the Rooms, in order that the reader should not be confused, we indicated the page as well as the column. Anyone who seeks respite for his soul should know that both the Houses and the Rooms are built according to principles. If he wants know something about the forefathers, he should turn to letter Aleph and look at the principle for forefathers…At the conclusion of the indices composed by the author of this holy book according to Houses and Rooms, which include the essence of his explanations, there will be indices of the explanations according to the biblical verses found therein in order that the reader may run to them.[28]

As Gershon indicates in his note, the indices to *Rav Peninim* are the product of several hands. Moses Alshekh divided his commentary on Proverbs into 202 sections, which he called Houses. Each of these Houses, in turn, was further subdivided into smaller sections that he called Rooms. As he informs the reader in his own note to the index, Alshekh himself composed a topical index to the book in alphabetical order. As an editor Gershon played two roles in the compilation of the index. The first consisted of refining the method of citation used by Alshekh in his topical index. The second involved compiling a list of biblical citations that appear in the work in a similar fashion to the type of index he compiled for *Ner Mitvah*, a collection of homilies and essays by Samuel Kohen Zedek.

This type of editorial activity, while not unique to Gerhson among early modern Hebrew editors, appears to have been one of his most important contributions to the shaping of the Hebrew books he edited. When viewed in a wider comparative framework it also stands in contrast to the activities of contemporary editors of vernacular Italian or classical texts.[29] As scholars have shown in recent years, much of the editorial work done by these editors consisted of purifying the Italian

[27] 202 is the numerical value of the Hebrew word *Rav*.
[28] *Rav Peninim* (Venice: Zuan di Gara, 1601) 181A.
[29] See the references to Richardson and Trovato cited above.

language or emending the classical texts for better readings. In the instance of *Rav Peninim*, Gershon plays a somewhat different role as an editor: he appends a little note to the author's own index that attempts to teach the reader how to read the book and compiles his own secondary index of the work arranged according to verses in the Bible.

Rav Peninim was hardly the only book for which Gershon performed this activity. In editing *Ner Mitzvah*, a collection of sermons by the Safed preacher Samuel Kohen Zedek, Gershon composed an index of biblical and rabbinic citations to the work. In a relatively long editor's note appended to the conclusion of the work, Gershon describes the process of printing and the different indices he composed to the work to facilitate a reader's use of the work. He blames the obvious mistakes in the printing on the typesetters, who are forced to work on the Sabbath eve and on festivals.[30] The editor's note to *Ner Mitzvah* includes abundant word play and rhymed prose as do many of Gershon's other notes and introductions.[31] Yet it also contains a lengthy discussion of a Talmudic story about Rabbah Bar Bar Hannah and a vision he had at sea, a story examined by Samuel Kohen Zedek in final sermon of *Ner Mitzvah*.[32] Kohen Zedek interprets the Talmudic story about Rabbah Bar Bar Hannah as a parable to avoid the pursuit of external sciences, or *hokhmot hitzoniyot*, associated with secular wisdom. Gershon mentions Kohen Zedek's interpretation, rejects its, and then proceeds to offer his own. For Gershon, the Talmudic passage is a parable about the attempt to grasp the secrets of divine wisdom that he associates with the term *Pardes*, a word for orchard frequently associated with esoteric knowledge. In Gershon's interpretation, the parable warns someone who, having filled himself with the bread and water of rabbinic literature, wants to enter the *Pardes* and obtain esoteric knowledge of God.[33] Gershon's editor note not only describes his work compiling the reference matter to the book and proofreading the work for errors, but offers a substantive analysis of a particular passage of rabbinic literature that the author of the book himself had chosen to conclude the book. Gershon's proprietary relationship to the work he edited extends not only to equipping the

[30] *Ner Mitzvah* (Venice: Zuan di Gara, 1597) 208A.

[31] See his note to Joseph Taitazak's commentary on Ecclesiastes, *Porat Yosef* (Venice: Zanetti, 1599), 75A; his introduction to Moses Alshekh's commentary on Job, *Helqat Mehoqeq* (Venice: Zuan di Gara, 1603), 2A; his note before the index to Solomon Beit Halevi's *Lehem Shelomoh* (Venice: Zuan di Gara, 1597), 1A. The index to this work has separate pagination following page 214B.

[32] Babylonian Talmud Bava Bathra, 73A.

[33] *Ner Mitzvah*, 208B.

reference matter of the work but also to a substantive comment on the actual content of the work.

If Gershon's comments to *Ner Mitvah* are clearly separated from the author's own interpretation through the device of an editor's note, his interventions in Eleazar Azikri's *Sefer Haredim* actually appear in the body of the text. Azikri, a kabbalist who lived in Safed in the second half of the sixteenth century, wrote an important popular manual of spiritual piety entitled *Sefer Haredim*.[34] The work appeared in print for the first time in Venice in 1601, the year after the author's death. The title page to the work indicates that the work was brought to press by Yehiel Luria Ashkenazi and edited and corrected by Gershon, further testimony to the fact that Gerhon collaborated with a wide range of individuals in his activity as a corrector and editor.[35] At two junctures in the text of *Sefer Haredim*, Gershon intervened to offer either a competing explanation or a source not cited by the author. In the first instance, Azikri exhorts his reader about the importance of concluding the performance of a given commandment.[36] A pious person should not be content to begin a commandment but must actually follow through and perform it in its entirety. As a prooftext, Azikri's cites the commentary of the medieval exegete Rashi to a verse about the creation of cities for refugees who committed manslaughter, "then Moses separated three cities on this side of the Jordan," (Deuteronomy 4:41). Rashi raises the issue that Moses would not be able to complete the creation of all six refugee cities given that three of them were to be established in the land of Canaan. Although he could not establish the refugee cities in Canaan, Rashi reasons that Moses thought that he should fulfill the part of the commandment within his power: the establishment of three refugee cities on the eastern side of the Jordan river.

In a parenthetical note included within the text of Azikri's *Sefer Haredim* that concludes with his initials as a form of signature, Gershon raises an objection to Azikri's use of Moses as an example. Gershon points to the problem of the burial of the remains of Joseph. Moses had taken Joseph's remains with him on his journey out of Egypt as described in Exodus 13:19. Moses was never able to fulfill his obligation to Joseph and bury his remains in the Promised Land. Gershon answers

[34] On Azikri see Mordechai Pachter, "The Life and Personality of R. Eleazar Azikri in light of his mystical diary and *Sefer Haredim*," (Hebrew) *Shalem* 3 (1981): 127–147; idem. "The Mystical Diary of R. Eleazar Azikri," (Hebrew) in *From Safed's Hidden Treasures* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1994).

[35] Gershon edited Ashkenazi's *Hekhal Adonai* (Venice: Zanetti, 1601).

[36] *Sefer Haredim*, (Venice: Zanetti, 1601), 6B.

his own question rather feebly and attempts to argue that Moses completed more than half of his obligation to Joseph and this should be considered as if he performed the commandment in its entirety. A similar instance of Gershon using a parenthetical insertion within Azikri's text to comment on the substance of his argument appears two pages later when Azikri's exhorts his reader not to pass up the opportunity to perform positive commandments.[37]

Like his contemporaries in Italy, Holland, and elsewhere Gershon served as something between a literary agent and copy editor. The Hebrew term most frequently associated with his activity, *magiah*, applies rather fluidly to a range of tasks he performed for a variety of books: correcting the proofs, compiling indexes and other para-textual materials, securing manuscripts for publication, marketing books to a reading public, and inserting his own interpretation to the subject matter at hand. Gershon's textual interventions were spread out over numerous stages in the preparation of a text for publication. Through the career of people such as Gershon, the homiletics, exegesis, Kabbalah, and Jewish law that was compiled and created in one of the most important centers of sixteenth-century Jewish life, Safed, were given the material form of printed books at the most important center of sixteenth-century Hebrew printing, Venice. Gershon's editorial packaging of Safed devotional literature may have been directed at a particular segment of the Hebrew reading public. The late sixteenth and early seventeenth century witnessed the rapid expansion of preaching among Jewish communities in northern Italy.[38] "The proper beginning for a Jewish sermon was a verse from the Bible," as described by the leading expert on Jewish preaching.[39] A sermon usually involved exposition of a biblical verse accompanied by citations of rabbinic literature. One might speculate that a possible audience for the devotional literature published by Gershon were the new preachers who began to populate the Jewish communities of Northern Italy.

[37] *Sefer Haredim*, 8B.

[38] See Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching: An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto* ed. David B. Ruderman, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

[39] Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching*, 63.