

# Workshop

## Abravanel Latinus. An Untold Story.

### Jewish Texts, Christian *Dissertationes*, and other Hebraic Writings

The Hebrew-Jewish tradition captivated early modern European intellectuals, fueling Christian Hebraism, a phenomenon that emerged in the sixteenth century. Jewish theological, mystical, and philological texts became essential tools, complementing the Christian tradition and expanding scholarly methods. This shift towards Jewish post-biblical sources is a key marker of early modernity, illuminating the complex dynamics of religious scholarship, despite historical pressures such as expulsions and the Inquisitions.

In the previous century, Hebrew studies had already complemented the humanistic curriculum alongside Greek and Latin, positioning the language as a tool for delving deeper into Christian scripture. With the Reformation, Hebrew studies intensified within Protestant academia, where the original Old Testament became vital. Hebrew and Jewish texts entered university curricula across Protestant Europe, enriching theological and intellectual discourse.

In this context, Christian scholars found renewed interest in the writings of Don Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508), whose biblical exegesis and philosophical works offered a unique blend of Jewish and Christian thought. His writings, in Latin translation, shaped theological and secular debates alike, influencing studies in politics, history, and law. Notably, Abravanel's works continued to circulate across Europe, interpreted within various intellectual traditions. This workshop, "Abravanel Latinus," seeks to bridge gaps in modern scholarship by exploring Abravanel's multifaceted influence across Catholic and Protestant circles, highlighting his role in shaping early modern intellectual discourse.

#### Convenors

- Guido Bartolucci (University of Bologna)
- Cedric Cohen-Skalli (University of Haifa)
- Giuseppe Veltri (University of Hamburg)

#### Participants

- Chiara Adorisio (University La Sapienza, Rome),
- Asaph Ben-Tov (University of Hamburg),
- Maria Vittoria Comacchi (University of Venice)
- Yehuda Halper (Bar-Ilan University),
- Eric Lawee (Bar-Ilan University),
- Claude Stuczynski (Bar-Ilan University),

#### Venue

University of Hamburg | Institute for Jewish Philosophy and Religion | Jungiusstraße 11c | 20355 Hamburg | 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Room C319

# Programme

Wednesday, 4 December 2024

10:00	Registration
10:15–10:40	<b>Welcoming remarks</b> Giuseppe Veltri (University of Hamburg), Cedric Cohen-Skalli (University of Haifa), and Guido Bartolucci (University of Bologna)
10:40–12:00	<b>First session</b> Chair: Giuseppe Veltri (University of Hamburg)
10:40–11:20	<b>The Human Factor in Prophecy: Abarbanel’s Portrait of Jeremiah and His Early Modern and Enlightenment Critics</b> Eric Lawee (Bar-Ilan University)
11:20–12:00	<b>Abravanel’s Use of Averroes and Its Early Modern Reception</b> Yehuda Halper (Bar-Ilan University)
12:00–13:00	Lunch
13:00–15:30	<b>Second session</b> Chair: Guido Bartolucci (University of Bologna)
13:00–13:40	<b>The Reception of Abravanel’s Political Thought in the Age of Hobbes and Spinoza</b> Cedric Cohen-Skalli (University of Haifa)
13:40–14:20	<b>Daniel and the Turks: The Fortune of Isaac Abravanel’s Messianism in Guillaume Postel’s Venice</b> Maria Vittoria Comacchi (University of Venice)
14:20–14:50	Coffee break
14:50–15:30	<b>Echoes of Abravanel’s Historical and Political Visions among Ex-Convert New Jews: Samuel Usque and Isaac Cardoso</b> Claude Stuczynski (Bar-Ilan University)
19:00	<b>Dinner</b> Restaurant “Lam Vegan”   Kleiner Schäferkamp 14   20357 Hamburg

Thursday, 5 December 2024

**9:30–13:00 Third session**

Chair: Cedric Cohen-Skali (University of Haifa)

**9:30–10:10 Jewish Philosophy, Abravanel, and the *Dissertationes***

Giuseppe Veltri (University of Hamburg)

**10:10–10:50 Abravanel and the Political Debate within Lutheran Universities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries**

Guido Bartolucci (University of Bologna)

**10:50–11:20 Coffee break**

**11:20–12:00 Some Notes on Protestant Scholars and the Rabbis in Seventeenth-Century Germany: The Case of Theodoricus Hackspan (1607–1659)**

Asaph Ben-Tov (University of Hamburg),

**12:00–12:40 Isaac Abrabanel and Salomon Munk's *Esquisse historique de la philosophie chez les juifs***

Chiara Adorisio (University La Sapienza, Rome)

**12:40–13:00 Conclusion**

**13:00 Lunch**

## Abstracts

(in alphabetical order)

Chiara Adorisio (University La Sapienza, Rome)

### **Isaac Abravanel and Salomon Munk's *Esquisse historique de la philosophie chez les juifs***

Salomon Munk (1803–1867), one of the first historians of Jewish philosophy in the nineteenth century and the translator of Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed*, dedicates only a few words to the Jewish philosopher and theologian Isaac Abravanel in his historical sketch of philosophy among the Jews, which was translated from French and published in English in 1881, after Munk's death. According to Munk's view of Jewish philosophy— a perspective that became standard for many scholars in the nineteenth century— Abravanel is regarded as the last vestige of a scholastic tendency within the Jewish world. This tendency involved attempts to reconcile Judaism with philosophical rationalism, the most successful of which occurred in the twelfth century through the work of the great Maimonides. As a philosopher straddling the Middle Ages and the early modern age, and as a product of the humanist era— a view also shared by Leo Strauss, following Munk's analysis— Abravanel incorporated both Jewish and Christian elements into his works. For this reason, Munk considered Abravanel to be a figure who no longer belonged to the original era of Jewish philosophy, but rather as someone who, alongside the Arab philosophers, contributed to preserving and disseminating philosophical knowledge during the centuries of barbarism. Abravanel's work, in Munk's view, played a role in exerting a civilising influence on the European world. A re-evaluation of Abravanel's philosophical work and political thought was made possible only in the twentieth century, thanks to Leo Strauss. In his essay "*On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching*" (1937), Strauss revisited and critiqued Munk's position.

Guido Bartolucci (University of Bologna)

### **Abravanel and the Political Debate within Lutheran Universities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries**

Isaac Abravanel was extensively cited by Lutheran Hebraists throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His writings were essential not only for theological and biblical scholarship, but also as a significant reference for assessing Judaism's broader influence on European culture, especially in political theory and philosophy. Lutheran universities played a major role in promoting Abravanel's ideas, with Hebrew professors incorporating his insights into their teaching and supervising student dissertations on these themes. Abravanel's interpretations were commonly applied to analysis of the Jewish political tradition and its connections to contemporary political issues. This paper will examine an example of such an application: the Hebraist Johannes Frischmuth's *De rege eligendo*, which uses Abravanel's texts to critique the republican results of the English Revolution, ultimately advocating for monarchy.

Asaph Ben-Tov (University of Hamburg)

### **Some Notes on Protestant Scholars and the Rabbis in Seventeenth-Century Germany: The Case of Theodoricus Hackspan (1607–1659)**

The widespread interest in Isaac Abravanel among Protestant scholars comes against the backdrop of a broader Christian interest in rabbinical writings, both ancient and recent. To a great extent, this was an ambivalent scholarly undertaking. This paper focuses on Theodoricus Hackspan (1607–1659), a professor of Oriental languages and theology at the Lutheran university of Altdorf. Though mostly forgotten today, Hackspan was a highly respected representative of academic Oriental studies in his day and enjoyed a scholarly reputation extending far beyond his academic milieu. In a sense, he makes for the ideal case study: erudite and creative enough to be interesting, but also typical enough of broader trends to be instructive.

While many *professores linguarum orientalium* of the seventeenth century were essentially instructors in Biblical Hebrew, Hackspan's interests were broader. Apart from a mastery of Arabic and his systematic theological analysis of the Qur'an, *Fides et leges Muhammaedis* (1646), Hackspan was also known among contemporaries for his study of both Biblical and later Hebrew (*lingua rabbinica*) and his interest in rabbinical writings. This led to his publication of Yomtov Lipmann of Mühlhausen's anti-Christian and anti-Karaite *Sefer Nizzahon* (ca. 1399) in 1644, which had previously circulated among Ashkenazi Jews in manuscript. To this edition, Hackspan appended his own "On the Uses of Jewish Writings in Theology," a book-length treatise on the importance and uses of rabbinical writings for Christian scholars. A consideration of this treatise in its broader context of Lutheran interest in rabbinical writings in the seventeenth century stands at the centre of this paper.

Cedric Cohen-Skalli (University of Haifa)

### **The Reception of Abravanel's Political Thought in the Age of Hobbes and Spinoza**

The Portuguese royal Cortes of 1481 to 1482 became a theatre of political change when King João II cancelled the traditional ceremony in which the monarch made an oath in front of the Cortes. To justify this new affirmation of royal power over the nobility and the Cortes, João II sent Dr Vasco Fernandez de Lucena to open the Cortes with a speech on the oath to the king whose central part was devoted to questioning whether the monarch also had to make an oath to the three estates at the Cortes. Lucena said: "All the things that the vassal promises to his Lord in the allegiance, the Lord also has to promise to his vassal. Yet there is a difference between the two: the vassal must promise under oath, whereas the Lord promises to his vassal without submitting himself to the oath." In Abravanel's famous antimonarchic commentary on Deut 17 from 1496, one finds a clear echo of Lucena's speech. After explaining the political and theological reasons why monarchy is a bad and dangerous regime, Abravanel deals with the question of whether the people have the right to "rebel against the king and to remove him from kingship." He advances two arguments to defend the proposition that the people have no right to remove a king: first, "the people, in the ceremony of coronation, [make] a covenant with the king to obey his orders and commandments. And

this covenant and this oath is unconditional, the contract there is absolute.” The proximity between Abravanel’s commentary on Deut 17 and Lucena’s argumentation on the transcendence of royal power reveals a complex argument. By defending the republican and theocratic regimes against monarchy, Abravanel was attacking the new transcendence granted to the king; yet by defending the thesis of the radical asymmetry between the monarch and his subjects, he was revealing his knowledge of the new absolutist conception of kingship in the Iberian Peninsula and strengthening his critique of the monarchic regime by pointing at the absolute right of the king as a divine punishment.

In this paper, I study the fortune of Abravanel’s theological-political thought by taking into account his reception of (reaction to) Lucena’s justification of João II’s absolutist coup, and also its later Latin translation and influence in the new historical and intellectual context of seventeenth-century political philosophy.

Maria Vittoria Comacchi (University of Venice)

### **Daniel and the Turks: The Fortune of Isaac Abravanel’s Messianism in Guillaume Postel’s Venice**

Completed at the end of the sixteenth century, Isaac Abravanel’s commentary on the book of Daniel, *Ma’aynei ha-yeshu’ah* (*Fountains of Salvation*), was first printed in Ferrara, Italy, in 1551. Followed by other messianic writings that also interrogate the role of Ottoman power in the anticipated future redemption of the Jewish people, this text serves as a polemical response to Christian interpretations of Daniel, while intertwining elements of the humanistic consolatory genre, biblical exegesis, and historical accounts. As such, Abravanel’s messianic work echoes the complex interrelations among different monotheistic traditions within the sixteenth-century flourishing of eschatological and apocalyptic thought across the entire Mediterranean region.

As Abravanel himself drew upon non-Jewish apocalyptic sources and examples, did his messianism, either directly or indirectly, resonate within Christian circles and influence Christian views of the conquering Ottomans in return? This paper seeks to use textual and historical analysis in order to address these questions through the example of the French scholar Guillaume Postel, a well-known Christian kabbalist and translator of Jewish kabbalistic texts who was active in Italy, specifically in Venice, at the time of Abravanel’s publication. More broadly, it explores the Italian cultural context and that of Venice— a crossroads between Latin, Byzantine, Jewish, and Ottoman eschatological and soteriological traditions.

Yehuda Halper (Bar-Ilan University)

### **Abravanel’s Use of Averroes Its Early Modern Reception**

Isaac Abravanel made idiosyncratic *and* use of Averroes, whom he called “Aristotle,” and often used his statements for purposes that were somewhat at odds with their context in Averroes’s works. Here, we shall look at three examples from Abravanel’s commentaries on

the Bible. (1) In his discussion of *Shirat Hayam* in his *Commentary* on Exod 15, Abravanel introduces a discussion of poetry and its uses for praising and condemning certain actions. Though attributed to Aristotle, the discussion is taken from Averroes's *Middle Commentary* on Aristotle's *Poetics* and was heavily influenced by Moses ibn Tibbon's *Commentary* on the Song of Songs. (2) In his *Commentary* on 1 Sam 25, Abravanel attributes to Aristotle the view that God takes pleasure in grasping the intelligible, relying on Averroes's *Middle Commentary* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 12. (3) In his *Commentary* on 1 Kgs 3, Abravanel presents an entire system of reasoning and inferring intelligibles from sensibles and constructing science that is loosely reliant on Averroes's commentaries. In all three of these cases, Abravanel's use of Averroes reflects his readings of Hebrew translations and commentaries and his manipulation of those sources for ends that their authors did not intend. A comparison with the Latin translations of the texts to which Abravanel refers highlights that these readings are not really possible for Latin readers. In light of this, I will suggest that the reason why Abravanel's use of "Aristotle" was typically left out of his Latin translations, or else significantly muted, was that it did not reflect a recognisable Aristotle or even Averroes to Latin readers. Abravanel's scientific and philosophical content thus remains an inherent part of the Hebrew tradition, and is so idiosyncratic as to be usually ignored.

Eric Lawee (Bar-Ilan University)

### **The Human Factor in Prophecy: Abarbanel's Portrait of Jeremiah and His Early Modern and Enlightenment Critics**

This presentation explores early modern responses to a startling manifestation of Abarbanel's exegetical humanism: his claim that Jeremiah's oral and written discourse suffered from infelicities and errors. This teaching reflected a novel view of the origins of scriptural "written" and "read" forms. The first response came from Jacob ben Hayyim ibn Adoniyahu, editor of the second "Rabbinic Bible." Its contents and setting reflect key elements that shaped Hebraic studies at the dawn of modern times: the enhanced appeal of Kabbalah, diverse attitudes to historical thinking, and anti-humanist tropes such as those attested in assessments of Erasmus of Rotterdam. A second critic was the period's leading Ashkenazic theologian, Judah Loew (Maharal), who deemed Abarbanel's teaching on Jeremiah to be at odds with rabbinic doctrine on the Masorah's Sinaitic origins. In this case, a larger context shaping this Jewish critique is Christian hostility to rabbinic literature in Counter-Reformation times. These two receptions of a humanist dimension in Abarbanel's biblical scholarship, along with a third more fleeting one from the sixteenth-century grammarian Elijah Levita, open a window onto the complex interconnected history of Jewish and Christian teachings on the human side of scripture in early modern times.

Claude Stuczynski (Bar-Ilan University)

**Echoes of Abravanel's Historical and Political Visions among Ex-Converso New Jews: Samuel Usque and Isaac Cardoso**

Departing from the claim that the life and writings of D. Isaac Abravanel paved the way for understanding the diasporic condition of Sephardic exiled Jews, Iberian Conversos, and ex-Converso "New Jews" after the mass conversions and expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, in terms of history, Divine Providence, political power, dispersion, and religious heterogeneity, I will analyse two notorious examples in which the ex-Converso- Sephardic-New Jews, Samuel Usque in the sixteenth century and Fernando/Isaac Cardoso in the seventeenth century, both consciously and inadvertently adopted and internalised Abravanel's ideas for their own aims.

Giuseppe Veltri (University of Hamburg)

**Abravanel and the Philosophical Debate within Lutheran Universities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries**

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Isaac Abravanel was frequently cited as a key Jewish intellectual by Lutheran Hebraists. His works not only shaped theological and biblical scholarship, but also extended to broader debates on Judaism's place within European intellectual and cultural realms, notably in political theory and philosophy. Lutheran universities were instrumental in promoting Abravanel's influence, as Hebrew professors integrated his ideas into their lectures and encouraged students to engage with his themes in their dissertations, thereby enhancing his reach in academic discussions. This paper aims to present several examples of how Abravanel's works were utilised within Lutheran discourse on Jewish thought.