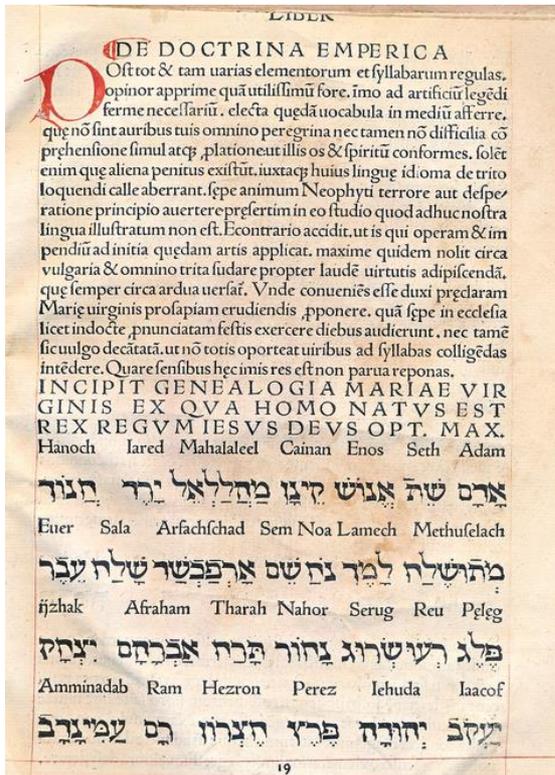
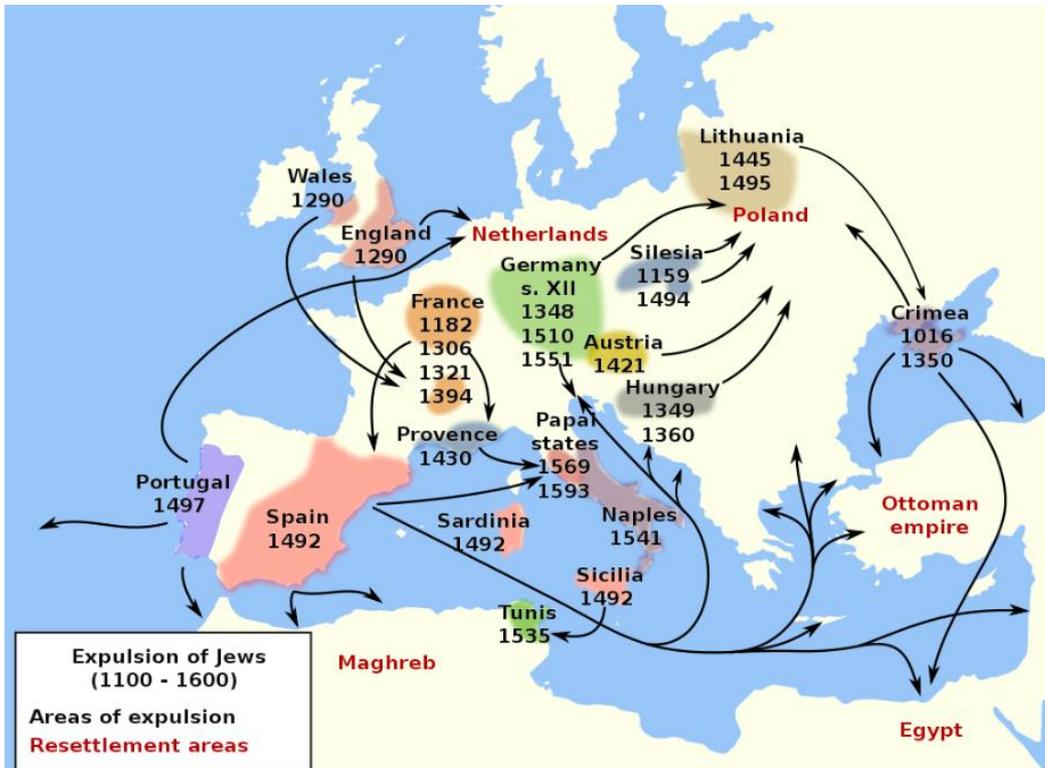


JEWES AND CHRISTIANS: A TANGLED HISTORY

Rabba Dr Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz

Session 8: An Unexpected Hero: Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522)



Left: Reuchlin, *De rudimentis hebraicis* (1506)
 The section on ‘empirical learning’, i.e. practice for deciphering Hebrew script – illustrated here by a genealogy of the Virgin Mary

David Price, *Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books* (2011), p. 59

The ‘discovery’ ... of Hebrew, which for all intents and purposes was previously unknown to Christians, created new connections between the bifurcated theological worlds of the two faiths, and, as such, would eventually form a new context for Christian-Jewish coexistence.

Johannes Reuchlin, *Rudiments of Hebrew* (1506)

Indeed, I am aware of the deplorable plight of the Jews in our own time. They have been expelled not only from Spain but also from the borders of our Germany, forced to find homes for themselves elsewhere and even to emigrate to the Ottoman Empire. Therefore we can expect that the Hebrew language, along with a great loss of Holy Scriptures, will disappear and vanish from our midst. For this reason, in order to bring knowledge of the Hebrew language to Christians, I have decided to lay the first foundation with this book, as is provided for in the Constitutions of Pope Clement V [at the Council of Vienne, 1312].

Johannes Reuchlin, *Letters*

I revere St Jerome as an angel, and I respect Nicholas of Lyra as a great teacher, but I worship the [Hebrew] truth as God.



Johannes (Josef) Pfefferkorn (1469-1523)

Converted to Christianity about 1505

Wrote *Der Judenspiegel* ('Mirror of the Jews') in 1507, demanding that Jewish books be confiscated and destroyed

Persuaded the Emperor Maximilian to issue a decree confiscating Jewish books in 1509

Continued to write pamphlets against the Jews

Pfefferkorn, *The Enemy of the Jews* (1509)

'The Jews cause many Christians, learned and unlearned, to doubt their faith ... Thus there is much heresy where Jews live. ... Now God will no longer save them or hear their prayers because they have committed greater sins than their forefathers who killed the prophets. They have killed the son of God ... They must do all kinds of menial work, such as cleaning the streets or sweeping chimneys or emptying the cesspools of toilets and removing dog manure. And in the meantime, as I have often said, we must not allow them to keep the false books of the Talmud, and we should leave them nothing except the text of the Bible alone. If that is done, they undoubtedly will adopt a different mind and heart. And then they will abandon their false beliefs and follow the truth of our faith.'

Timeline of the Reuchlin Affair

1507 Pfefferkorn publishes the *Mirror of the Jews*, urging the confiscation and destruction of all Jewish books except the Bible, and finds allies among the Franciscans

1509 *August*: The Emperor Maximilian issues a decree ordering all Jews in the Holy Roman Empire to hand over their books to Pfefferkorn for inspection

- *September*: Pfefferkorn confiscates 168 books from Frankfurt synagogue
- Archbishop Uriel protests and is appointed by Maximilian to be in charge of the book project, overseeing a commission of Pfefferkorn, 4 university professors, Victor von Carben, the Inquisitor Hoogstraeten, and Reuchlin
- *December*: Book confiscations resume in at least 6 German cities

1510: *March*: Frankfurt city council object and seek to annul the decree

- *April*: Pfefferkorn seizes about 1,500 Jewish books in Frankfurt
- *May*: Maximilian agrees to return the books if the Jews renegotiate a major loan to his military ally, Duke Erich
- *July*: Maximilian orders an assessment of the legality and desirability of confiscating the Jewish books
- All the commissioners except for Reuchlin report confiscation and destruction are both legal and desirable
- Reuchlin publishes his *Recommendation*, basing his objection on ecclesiastical and civil law, including the fact that we and [the Jews] are fellow citizens of one and the same Roman empire', and denying that Jewish books are either heretical or blasphemous

1511: Pfefferkorn publishes a new attack on the Jews and on Reuchlin, the *Magnifying Glass*, but the book campaign subsides

1513-16: Hoogstraeten pursues a heresy trial of Reuchlin, first at the Mainz Inquisition and later at Rome; Reuchlin is finally acquitted



Humanism

- Started around 1400 in Italy, spread northwards
- Characterized by educational reform, with 5 main subjects: Latin grammar, rhetoric, poetry, moral philosophy, and history
- Prized classical, not mediaeval, forms of Latin
- Main principle: *ad fontes!* (back to the sources!), for all texts, including the Bible, which should be studied in their original languages
- Interested in the history of the early Church
- Underlay Christian Hebraism

Left: Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466?-1536), the 'poster boy' of humanism, painted by Hans Holbein

Christian Hebraists

David Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (2010), p. 174

Hebraists ... were significantly transformed by their encounter with Jewish sacred texts so that their own Christian faiths were enriched, revitalized, reshaped, and even attenuated ... [they] often came away with a deeper understanding of themselves and their own beliefs.



Left: Andreas Osiander (1498-1552)

A pupil of Reuchlin, who published a version of the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible, corrected by using the Hebrew text

- Paul Fabius (1504-49), translated *Pirkei Avot* into Latin, published an edition of Targum Onkelos, and a Yiddish-Hebrew-Latin-German dictionary with Elia Levita
- Sebastian Münster (1488-1552), published a Hebrew Bible with Latin translation, a Hebrew grammar, and a translation of the Gospel of Matthew into Hebrew
- [Elia Levita (1469-1549), taught Hebrew to many Christian scholars, published dictionaries, author of *Bovo-Bukh*]

Left: Johannes Buxtorf I (1524-1659)
Right: Johannes Buxtorf II (1559-1664)

Translated classic Jewish works on philosophy into Latin



Left: William Surenhusius (c. 1664-1729)

Published the Mishnah in Hebrew accompanied by a Latin translation, with a commentary

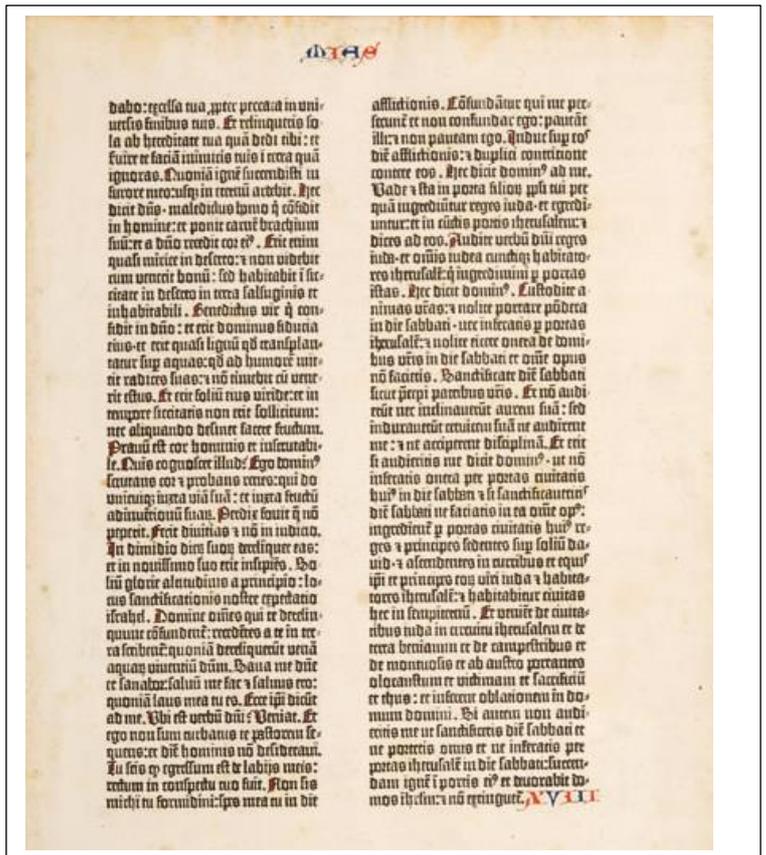
The Influence of Printing



The Gutenberg Bible, 1455

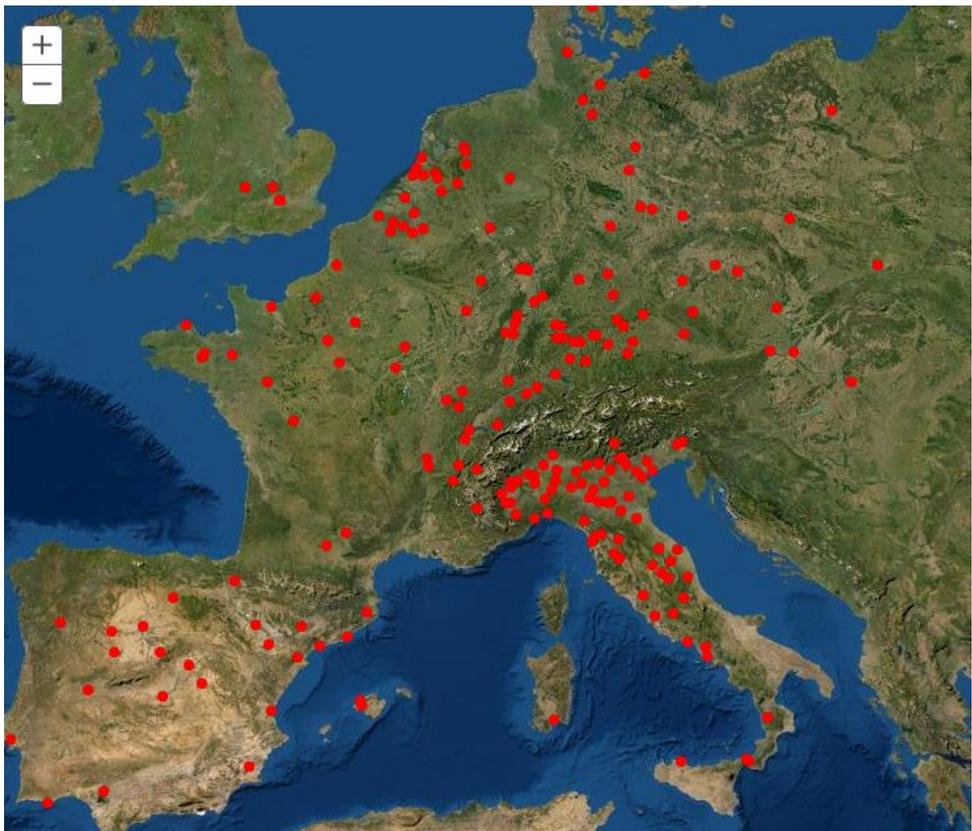
Left: the first page, decorated by hand like a traditional manuscript

Below: an inner page, from the book of Jeremiah





Red dots represent the location of printing presses in 1470



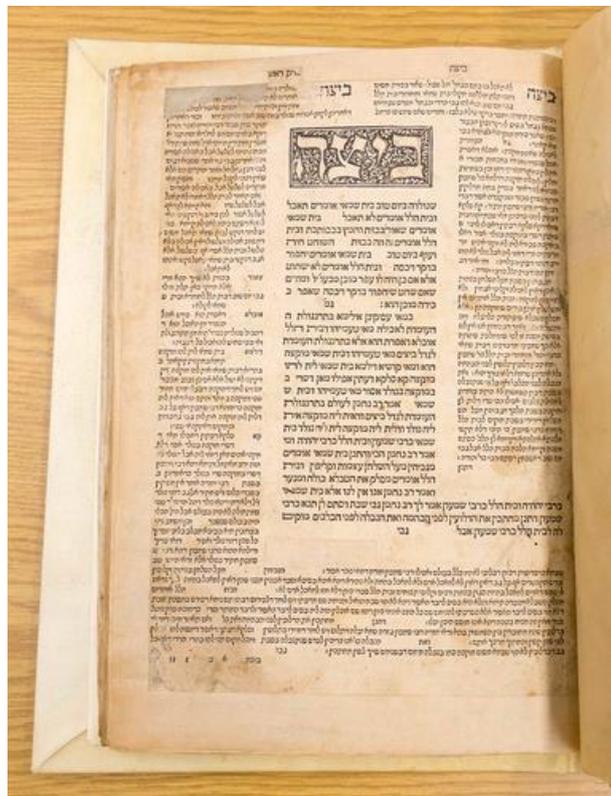
Red dots represent the location of printing presses in 1490

(maps from the Atlas of Early Printing, University of Iowa, <https://atlas.lib.uiowa.edu/>)

Daniel Bomberg (c. 1483-c. 1549), a Christian, was one of the most important and productive printers of Jewish books, working in Venice:



Left: The first page of the book of Isaiah, from Bomberg's Second Rabbinic Bible (1525-6)



Right: The first page of tractate *Beitzah*, from Bomberg's Talmud (1519-23), the first complete printed Talmud