



Armenian-Jewish Connections in the Light of Pre-Modern Armenian Polemical Literature from Iran and Its Wider Context

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ABSTRACT The reconstruction of Armenian-Jewish relations in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries is not an easy task due to the scarcity of historical material. Both peoples underwent resettlement, segregation, coercive conversions under Muslim rule (fighting the side-effects of religious policies for social disciplining), political agendas, the influx of Catholic missionaries, and interstate wars throughout the Safavid to Qajar periods. The current article attempts to revisit the perceptions about Jews and Armenians within inter-confessional debates by examining the early modern polemical literature from the Iranian Armenian context and by employing textual material from the Ottoman Armenian milieu that complements the Iranian case. It further aims to reveal the specifics of the Armenian-Jewish connections in the Persianate Muslim environment and detect the reasons for the ambiguous silence in the Armenian literature from the period in question.

KEYWORDS Armenian-Jewish connections, early modern Iran, polemical literature, confessional age, Tridentine Catholicism, Jewish-mindedness, conversion

Introduction

Armenian historical and polemical sources on Iranian Jews in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries are in short supply. To explain this lack of sources, one needs to keep in mind the cohabitation patterns under Islamic rule. After the forced resettlement of Armenians to Iran by Shah Abbas I (1581–1629) in 1603/4, and shortly after their segregation in the New Julfa neighbourhood near Isfahan in 1655 by the order of Shah Abbas II (1642–1666) (Ghougasian 1998; Landau and van Lint 2015, 308–33), Armenians, as the main Christian community in Iran, struggled towards organizing their community in the face of two vital threats: post-Tridentine Catholic missionaries¹ and Shi'ite Muslims. Tridentine missionaries such as

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1 Tridentine Catholicism represents Catholic doctrine and practice, mainly Holy Mass, reformed in the Council of Trent (between 1545 and 1563) as a reaction to Protestantism. The Council's decrees became imposed on Catholics of all orders to reduce the polyphony in faith and practice.

Augustinians from Goa (1602), Discalced Carmelites (1607), Capuchins (1628), and Jesuits (1647) flooded Safavid lands with the purpose of proselytizing Muslims and especially Eastern Christians (O'Malley 2000; Flannery 2013; Windler 2018b, 2018a; Tiburcio 2020, 18–24). This situation forced the miaphysite (non-Chalcedonian) Armenian Apostolic Church to delineate the boundaries of the Armenian faith, slowly switching to stricter strategies in attempting to reaffirm the Armenian orthodoxy (Windler 2018a, 205–34; Ohanjanyan 2020, 8–13, 47–48). Meanwhile, Armenians struggled to survive the intermittently recurring forced conversions to Shi'a Islam. Despite the lenient royal policy towards Armenians of New Julfa, in particular privileges that the wealthy merchants and *khojas* enjoyed under the auspices of the Queen Mothers (Ghougassian 1998, 60, 195),² forced conversions, instigated by the Shi'ite *ulema*, affected many Armenians, mainly those in Hamadan, Shiraz, and the peripheries of Iran (Ghougassian 1998, 71–76). No wonder that under such circumstances, the lion's share of Armenian literature from the period is dedicated to the elucidation of relations with the Iranian administration, debates with European missionaries and Armenian converts to Catholicism, as well as accounts of the Afghan and Russo-Persian wars (Titanian 1965, 211–22).³

Nevertheless, a few Armenian texts speak about Jews in Safavid Iran, of which the most reliable is the *Book of History* of the seventeenth-century author Aṛak'el Davrižec'i (d. 1670) (Davrižec'i 1990; Bournoutian 2005–2006). Davrižec'i left a massive account about the forced resettlement of Armenians by Shah Abbas I to Iran, where he also described the relocation of Jews to inhabit the towns of Isfahan, Kashan,⁴ Farahabad, Tabriz, Shiraz, Kum, Ardabil, Lor, Kazbin, Bandarik, and several small villages. He also described the segregation of Jews in the remote suburbs of Isfahan during the reign of Shah Abbas II, and imparted essential details about the coercive mass conversion of Jews to Islam in 1656, who, he said, in reality remained *anusim* (forced converts) clandestinely professing Judaism (Davrižec'i 1990, 357–72).⁵

It seems that Jewish sources are equally scarce when it comes to the Safavid period. The Judeo-Persian chronicle by Babai ibn Lutf titled *Kitāb-i anusī* (*The Book of a Forced Convert*) narrates the history of Jewish persecutions between 1617 and 1662 (Moreen 2018, 1050, 1981), whereas, as Vera Moreen states, Jewish sources contain little information on the Iranian Jews between 1662 and 1722 (Moreen 2018, 1050). In 1686 a Jewish polemicist from Kashan, Rabbi Yehudah ben El'azar, warned against the messianic sect of Sabbateans infiltrating into the Jewish communities (Moreen 2003, 157–68). Sabbateans troubled Armenian historiographers, too. Indeed, Aṛak'el Davrižec'i, and another Armenian author, Zak'aria K'anak'erc'i (1627–1699), dedicated chapters to the spread of Sabbateanism (Davrižec'i 1990, 490–99; K'anak'erc'i 1870, 1:55–56).

The rise and dispersion of Sabbateans that profoundly influenced the further development of Judaism in the Ottoman Empire, Europe, and beyond, is a separate topic of research that goes beyond the scope of this article.⁶ Nor does the article intend to study the inner life

2 Given that New Julfa was considered the property of the Queen Mother, the Armenian merchants enjoyed her royal protection and high social profile in Iranian society.

3 For the Persian-Russian wars, see Öjnek'i M4331. Henceforth Armenian manuscript sources are cited according to Bernard Coulie's system in *Répertoire des bibliothèques et des catalogues de manuscrits arméniens. Liste des sigles utilisés pour désigner les manuscrits*. Association Internationale des Études Arméniennes. Edition revue: 2002.

4 According to Tavernier, there were around one thousand families of Jews in Kashan and six hundred in Isfahan in the second half of the seventeenth century who "boast themselves particularly of the Tribe of Judah" (Tavernier 1678, 30).

5 On this incident and Aṛak'el Davrižec'i's account, see Paolo Lucca's contribution in this volume.

6 For more about Sabbateans in Armenian sources, see Lucca (2010, 197–206). See also Amanat (2011, 37–59).

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or the history of conversions of Iranian Jews that has been thoroughly covered by scholars of the field (Moreen 1987; Spicehandler 1975). It instead aims to outline the available Armenian polemical literature from pre-modern Iran supported by texts produced within the Ottoman context,⁷ and analyze the Armenian-Jewish connections in the interfaith disputations that intensified within the Muslim environment. It further attempts to trace the transfer and appropriation of fashionable genres, ideas, and argumentations from Western polemical literature, as much as the extant Armenian sources from the Safavid to Qajar periods allow us to observe.

Cohabitation under Muslim Rule

Despite the abundance of Armenian historical accounts from the period, most of them speak evasively about Armenian-Jewish interactions. What we know for sure is that as *dhimmi*, Armenians and Jews were embedded into a multicultural and multi-religious environment composed of Greeks, Latins (i.e., Europeans), Ethiopians, Indians, Tajiks, Syrians, Uzbeks, Georgians, Albanians, Lezgins, various Caucasian ethnic groups professing many types of Christianity and Islam, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, and representatives of other religious beliefs (Ĵulayec'i 1905, 136–37).⁸ Persians and Jews ran the internal trade while Armenians were in control of foreign commercial traffic, according to a contemporary European traveler (Tavernier 1678, 234).⁹ Although Armenians and Jews were expelled from the center of Isfahan and segregated as “impure” (*nejasat*) on the outskirts of the city, cross-communal exchanges were inevitable (Chardin 1711, 1:78).¹⁰ Cohabitation in a deeply diversified society implied that both groups had general knowledge of each other's beliefs, rites, and customs. However, there might have been certain ‘non-knowledge’ of serious specifics of the other community's actual beliefs (Zwierlein 2016, 117–18). Such ‘non-knowledge’ is well-exposed in Yehudah ben El'azar's polemical treatise against Sabbateans, Muslims,¹¹ and Christians titled *Hovot Yehudah* (*Duties of Judah*).¹² Yehudah lived in Kashan and practiced medicine. The treatise, written in 1686, was in Judaeo-Persian, except for the epilogue, which was in Hebrew. In *Hovot Yehudah*, the author referred to all Christians as “Armenians” (Moreen 2003, 163; Tiburcio 2020, 58). Yehudah's generalization suggests that for Iranian Jews, Armenians, as the majority Christian group in Iran, encapsulated general qualities of all Christians. Iranian Armenians, in their turn, at least the literate members of the community, were somewhat informed of actual Jewish rites. An example of this is Davrižec'i's story about the apostate Jew

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7 The textual material from the Ottoman context incorporated in this article is exclusively complementary in character to support the Iranian case. It gives only a glimpse into the literary tendencies reflecting Jewish-Armenian relations beyond the Iranian context. Thereby, the complete reconstruction of the Ottoman case requires separate, more detailed research.

8 Seconding Zak'aria K'anak'erc'i, Armenian historiographer Xaç'atur Ĵulayec'i reiterates the anecdote about Shah Abbas I's universalistic experiment. Similar to his notion of universal religion nourished by the same universalist strategies injected into the economy of the Empire, the Shah attempted to create a universal language. He ordered to place the toddlers of all the peoples of Isfahan under one roof and raise them together without the surveillance of their mothers. Albeit a complete failure, this experiment reveals the demographic picture in Safavid Iran of the time. K'anak'erc'i (1870, 1:55–56); Ĵulayec'i (1905, 136–38).

9 For the trade network of New Julfan merchants, see Aslanian (2011).

10 In 1672–1673, Jean Chardin recalled the fair on the feast day of St. George (September 14) when Jewish, Armenian, and Georgian merchants gathered together at the village of *Siporias* to participate in the fair.

11 For an overview of Jewish polemics with Shi'i Muslims, see Tsadik, Daniel. April 7, 2008, “Polemics Between Shi'ites and Jews.” In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Accessed September 24, 2021. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/polemics-i-between-shiites-and-jews>.

12 For the edition and English translation of *Hovot Yehudah*, see Netzer (1995); also Moreen (2003).

Avadia's (Obadiah) assassination by three vengeful Jews who threw Avadia's dead body in the square to be discovered by his wife. Explaining their actions, Davrižec'i provides details about a Jewish custom according to which the widow (or a close relative) had to identify her husband's dead body so that it became possible for the widow to enter a levirate marriage¹³ (Davrižec'i 1990, 367). Davrižec'i learned the details about this custom by asking around among Jews and wrote down what they had told him,¹⁴ which testifies to communication between Davrižec'i and learned Jews in Isfahan as well as to knowledge exchange through questioning and answering (Zwierlein 2016, 147–57).

Based on Armenian sources, one might assume that despite the historical tension between Jews and Christians, mutual compassion between Armenians and Jews was at play in a common attempt to survive under Islamic rule. Periodically renewed oppressive measures aimed at the social disciplining of indigenous Christian *dhimmis* equally affected Iranian Jewish communities. While the ban on public drinking intermittently imposed on the Christian population (Matthee 2014) during the reigns of Shah Suleyman (1666–1694) and Sultan Husayn (1694–1722) did not crucially affect the Jewish community, accusations that Armenians and Jews caused the drought in 1678 led to heavy fines against both communities. Jews paid an extremely high price as their rabbis were brutally murdered and “their corpses, thrown out into the great royal square, called Maidan, lay for a week unburied,” until a tax of four *tumans* was levied for each corpse (Chick 1939, 408; Matthee 2005, 31). Armenians had a privileged position and a higher profile in the commerce of the Empire. Thereby, through the intervention of the Queen Mother, whose property was New Julfa (Ghougassian 1998, 60), this time Armenians avoided bloodshed and martyrdom, which was not always the case. Although Shahs Abbas I, Safi I (1629–1642), and Abbas II to a certain extent refrained from imposing mass conversion on the Armenians in New Julfa (Matthee 2019, 14–18),¹⁵ in 1628, not long before his death, Shah Abbas I confirmed Shaykh al-Islam of Isfahan Baha al-Din Amali's decree. According to it, any Christian subject who converted to Islam would inherit the property of his Christian relatives (Chick 1939, 288).¹⁶ The decree was reaffirmed around 1657 under Shah Abbas II, apparently through the efforts of the grand vizier Muhammad Beg (Matthee 2019, 15). Besides Christians, it affected Iranian Jews, a fact reflected in Davrižec'i's story about Avadia threatening his Jewish uncle Samson in order to put his hands on the latter's property after his death “according to the Persian law” (Davrižec'i 1990, 368). Davrižec'i felt for the Jews and saw them as co-destined with the Armenians to carry the hardships of Islamic rule; therefore, his accounts are saturated with compassion. Other Armenian historiographers remain silent about Iranian Jews or Armenian-Jewish interactions; meanwhile, the travelogues and memoirs of European merchants, ambassadors, painters, and priests add little material,¹⁷ stating mainly the wretched conditions the Jewish communities were forced

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13 Deut. 25:5–10.

14 “We interrogated many Jews about why they acted in such an incautious and improper way by not concealing the [dead] body in a secret place after they killed him, instead of leaving it openly on the road. They all gave the same reason that there is a law among Jews, when a man dies, his wife has to eyewitness her husband's death,” and so forth (Davrižec'i 1990, 367, translated by the author).

15 All three shahs were mostly lenient towards the Armenians; however, they pursued their conversions to Islam under the pressure of religious leaders (Matthee 2019, 14–18).

16 For the text of the *fatwa* of Shaykh al-Islam, see Ghougassian (1998, 221–22).

17 A good example of such attitude is found in Cornelis de Bruyn's travelogue. De Bruyn traveled to Iran in 1704 and rode through Ardabil, Kum, Kashan, and Isfahan, never mentioning Jews inhabiting those towns (Bruyn 1737, 1:160–246).

to live in within Iranian society. The silence of the sources compels one to consult polemicists in order to determine whether polemicists contribute to the understanding of the matter.¹⁸

The Armenian-Jewish Connections in Christian Inter-Faith Polemics

Armenian inter-confessional polemical literature from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries is abundant. It reflects larger processes, such as the confessionalization that engulfed post-Reformation Europe.¹⁹ The influence of confessionalization²⁰ reached as far as the Armenian communities in Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and Iran. Numerous inter-confessional polemical treatises were being composed to counter the aggressive proselytizing of Tridentine Catholicism among Eastern Christians, and to demarcate the boundaries of Armenian orthodoxy. There are but a few polemical and apologetical works against Shi'a Islam and Muslims, while polemical pieces against Judaism and Jews were extremely few. Even so, the seeming lack of information about Jewish-Armenian relations is not so stark as it first appears. References to Jews crop up in Armenian inter-confessional theological literature, allowing us to reconstruct a critical yet subtle aspect of Jewish-Armenian connections that has to do with Chalcedonian Christians' misperceptions about Armenians as representatives of an ancient Oriental Orthodox Church. [7]

In medieval Christian polemics on Christological issues between miaphysite Armenians and dyophysite Byzantines and Latins, Jews appear as deicides²¹ in the debates on the sufferings and death of Christ. In theological debates, dyophysites accused miaphysite Armenians of 'crucifying God' when insisting on the 'one nature in Christ.' Miaphysites objected against the dyophysite position with the argumentation that if it was merely about the death of Mary's Son on the Cross, then in vain Jews had been called deicides (*astuacaspan*; god-killers), as in that case, they should have been considered mere homicides.²² In the inter-confessional polemics from the early modern age, this same argumentation was still widely utilized. Now it was Catholic missionaries, more specifically the Armenian Catholics—the so-called *aktarmas* (Trk. lit. converted)—with whom Armenian Apostolic theologians would enter into intel- [8]

18 About polemicists, particularly convert-polemicists as bridges for transmission of knowledge, see Tiburcio (2021).

19 German historian Ernst Walter Zeeden suggested the hypothesis of confessionalization or confession-building (*Konfessionsbildung*) for the Reformation and Counterreformation period in search of common models of confessional, social, political development and the ways of upholding confessional identities. Decades later, Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling argued that confession-building had socio-political implications beyond theology, resulting in the processes of state-building in the early modern era (Zeeden 1985; Reinhard 1989; Schilling 2004).

20 About the modification of confessionalization as a historical paradigm and its usefulness, see Puff (2018); "Forum" ("Forum" 2014); Rodrigues (2017).

21 Jews as deicides was a *topos* popular in Christian patristic literature. To vindicate Christianity, the Church Fathers often resorted to the term in their apologetical works (see Werner 1966). For Byzantium, see Fishman-Duker (2011). For Latin tradition, see Cohen 1983. An overall study on the topic is provided by Cohen (2007). For a discussion on medieval Syriac and Arabic texts, see Griffith (1988, 74). In the Islamic tradition, an equivalent concept to that of deicides was 'prophet-killers' (Reynolds 2012).

22 An example of such an accusation and a response to it is found in the twelfth-century author Pōlos Tarōnac'i's polemics with his Orthodox rival (see Tarōnac'i 1752, 30). A good example of pre-modern debates on the topic is Gēorg Mxlayim Olli's (1681/85–1758) polemics with the Orthodox Metropolitan of Caesarea in 1713 (Mxlayim M2080, 112r–116v). For further discussion on the topic, see Pogossian (2016); Bowman (1985); Kolbaba (2020).

lectual debate. The Armenian Catholicos in Ējmiacin,²³ Alek'sander Ĵuļayec'i (1706–1714), was hardly an exception. In his *Book of Oratorical Disputation*, penned on account of a great intra-communal turmoil between the Apostolic and Catholic Armenians at the turn of the seventeenth century, Alek'sander insisted on his miaphysite position about the crucifixion of God by referring, among others, to the 'deicide' argumentation. He goes as far as to include it in a brief creed quoted beneath:

Jews became *deicides* because they abjured his [Christ's] Deity saying, "You, a mere man, claim to be God," therefore, they crucified him. [9]

And following the truth, we are not deceived by intricate ideas. We confess [that] God born from the Virgin endured the cross of sufferings, tasted death, and by so doing dissolved death. Therefore, we confess [that] the one who gave birth [to Him] is Theotokos, and the one who was born is God, we confess [that] the sufferings, and [that] the cross belonged to God, and [that] the one who was crucified was God, we confess the sepulcher of God, and that He who died [on the cross] was God, [we confess that] Jews are *deicides* and [that] the one who was assassinated is God. (Ĵuļayec'i 1783, 109, 111) [10]

Another specific yet sensitive aspect of Jewish-Armenian connections within Christian inter-faith polemics is the 'Jewishness' or 'Jewish-mindedness' of which Armenians have been often accused, based on the speculation that the Armenians retained a close attachment to the Old Testament for some rites.²⁴ After the Council of Chalcedon in 451, Orthodox and Catholic dyophysites saw 'remnants of Judaism' in Armenian Christianity, targeting these perceived 'weak spots' in their polemics regarding the 'true faith and practice.' The charges traditionally referred to the religious customs of *matał*,²⁵ the use of the unleavened bread for the Eucharist and abstinence from unclean animals in the Armenian Apostolic Church. [11]

Since the Council of Chalcedon up to modern days, *matał* has become a stumbling stone for Armenian polemicists. It is a religious custom of blessing the salt for a slaughtered animal—a rite performed on the Easter feast, dominical feasts, saints' feast days for the commemoration of the dead, and as alms for the poor. Chalcedonian Christian polemicists usually linked it to the Jewish animal sacrifice for the Passover (Kolbaba 2020, 125; Pogossian 2016, 187). From the Middle Ages, Armenian polemicists attempted to prove the Christian roots of *matał* to refute the accusations of being like Jews. A twelfth-century theologian, later the Catholicos of the Armenians based in Cilicia, Nersēs Šnorhali²⁶ (1166–1173), dedicated pages to the [12]

23 The Mother Holy See of the Armenian Apostolic Church is located in the city of Ējmiacin near the modern-day capital Yerevan. The Catholicos in Ējmiacin was (and remains) the pontiff of all Armenians all over the world, in contrast to the Catholicos of Cilicia in Armenia Minor, whose authority carried local character. Some Catholicoi enjoyed the patronage of the Shahs, allowing them to renovate the belfry of the Ējmiacin Cathedral and the exceptional right to place and ring the bells (Davrižec'i 1990, 267–72).

24 For some hints on the 'Jewishness' of Nestorians (Church of the East), of which they were accused due to their Mariological views, see Becker (2016, 190–94). For the 'Jewish' argumentation applied to Saint Thomas Christians for their Passover meal and prayers as well as some elements of liturgy, see Ross (1979, 82); Vellian (1973).

25 *Matał* (մատաղ) is a contested custom of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The word *matał* lit. meaning 'young,' 'tender' apparently referred to milk-fed calves. In the Armenian theological literature, it has long been interpreted as *mato ał* lit. 'offer salt,' and has been interpreted as the blessing of the salt for the meat of the mortuary festival for the poor. It has also been interpreted as an *agape feast*. A detailed discussion on *matał* may be found in Sharf (1995, 190–222).

26 Although widely cited and accepted, in the early modern period some of Nersēs Šnorhali's works became dubious in the eyes of Armenian Apostolic clerics due to the Armenian Catholic usage of those texts. Follow-

custom of *matał* that became an exemplary text for addressing the issue (Šnorhali 1788, 242–53). Šnorhali focuses on the blessing of the salt and the charitable function of *matał*. He also refutes the ‘Jewish origin’ of *matał* by highlighting the differences between the Armenian and Jewish customs of animal sacrifice (Šnorhali 1788, 243). There was a misperception about *matał* among unlearned Armenians, apparently influenced by the Old Testament narrative, as Šnorhali reproached those who marked the doorposts of their houses with the lamb’s blood, as Jews did on the Passover of Exodus (Šnorhali 1788, 251).²⁷

Another Armenian theologian, Nersēs’s contemporary from the Taron province in Great Armenia, Pōłos Tarōnac’i, while debating with his Orthodox opponent named Theophistus, sets to justify *matał*: [13]

Again we hear from you this thing that we perform our Pascal *matał* by slaughtering sheep. Many times you have reminded of and reproached us for this matter, and you have said that it belongs to the Old Covenant and resembles Jewish [animal sacrifices] ... The Jewish [sacrifice] is not like our [*matał*]; theirs was a different custom, and symbolized a different [thing] and [had] a different meaning, while our [*matał*] is carried out for the sake of a meal, as [generally it is the case for] all meals, and means just “blessed food,” as it is not suitable to approach unclean food after taking Communion with the body and blood of our Jesus Christ, and it is obligatory to bless and eat salted meat, then approach other [types of] food. (Tarōnac’i 1752, 278) [14]

Importantly, Pōłos Tarōnac’i’s polemical treatise against the Orthodox became popular in the eighteenth century, when a copy of it was discovered by archimandrite Margar Apuč’exc’i and published in Constantinople in 1752. The famous Apostolic polemicist Gēorg Mxlayim Ołli was the editor of the book, approving it for print. He considered Tarōnac’i’s polemics a ‘unique’ and ‘utterly orthodox’ text to fight against dyophysites in general, and Catholic Armenians in particular (Tarōnac’i 1752, 2–8, 356), since the same set of accusations against Armenians was inherited into the early modern inter-confessional debates. [15]

European missionaries and Armenian Catholic converts used cliché argumentations against the rite of *matał*. Interestingly, after the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the missionaries retained some of these clichés in their polemical debates, but the Armenians’ ‘Jewish-mindedness’ was not a primary issue for Catholic polemicists to address in theological debates. The choice of argumentation depended on the purpose of polemics and the personal approach of missionaries from a particular Catholic order.²⁸ Whatever the case, the immediate refutation from the Armenian side was a traditional reaction in early modern Armenian theological literature. To mention but one author from the Armenian Iranian context one may cite Catholicos Łazar Ĵahkec’i (1737–1751), who rejected the idea that *matał* had any [16]

ing the Teatine missionary Clemente Galano (1611–1666), Armenian Catholics claimed Šnorhali to be keen on dyophysitism—a way to legitimize the emergence of Armenian Catholicism. They published Šnorhali’s writings in the underground print of Constantinople in ‘catholic manner,’ which led to the ban of Šnorhali’s poem *Jesus the Son* (apparently not the poem itself, but its Armenian Catholic edition) in Constantinople around 1703. See K’ēōmiwrčean BNF Arm. 196, 36r–v.

27 Exodus 12:13–28.

28 Missionaries from various Catholic orders competed among themselves to ‘soul-hunt’ Eastern Christians in all possible ways (Muntan 2021). Jesuits, generally keen on accommodating Eastern Christians’ customs, would be more lenient toward the latter’s ‘transgressions,’ which would lead to the practice of *communicatio in sacris* (common worship with Armenians). See Santus (2019). In contrast, the response of Discalced Carmelites to the theological ‘deviations’ of the Armenians, for instance, would be stricter (Windler 2018a). On the Jesuits’ *accommodationist* strategies, see Županov (2005); Perczel (2018).

connection to the Jewish animal sacrifice. Ĵahkeć'i resorts to the traditional argumentations about the dissimilarity between the Armenian *matał* and the Jewish sacrifice inherited from previous ages; meanwhile, following Šnorhali, he greatly elaborates on the social aspect of commemorating the dead through *matał* as an offering to the poor and an act of charity.

[*Matał*] was not [established] by the Jewish Law, God forbid! Whoever observes it in [Jewish] manner, let he be condemned! And hence, whoever performs *matał* for Easter or Commemoration of the departed in Christ in accordance with the Jewish Law, is not only despicable but also wicked and harmful, as such a person reveals that he is not redeemed from his sins through the blood of Christ, but he is [still] a servant of the shadowy (*stuerayin*) [i.e., Old Testament] Law.²⁹ (Ĵahkeć'i 1735, 415) [17]

My working hypothesis is that intra-Christian debates on *matał* escalated within the Muslim context because of the practice of *Id-i Qurban* or *Kurban Bayramı* (Feast of Sacrifice).³⁰ *Id-i Qurban*, celebrated with great festivity, might resonate with the Jewish and Armenian respective customs,³¹ and prompt cross-cultural exchange.³² Catholicos Łazar seems to have been well aware of the conflicts periodically occurring between the Armenian Apostolic and Catholic faithful on *matał*. Above all, it was due to the exorbitant forms the *matał* rite took in the hands of semi-literate priests in the remote villages of Iran,³³ against whom the Catholicos warned his flock in an effort to establish uniformity (Ĵahkeć'i 1735, 420). [18]

A more elaborate debate between miaphysite–dyophysite positions focused on the use of the unleavened bread for the Eucharist as practiced by the Armenian Apostolic Church. The ‘Jewish’ argumentation was introduced to the debate through the first oration of Pseudo-Isaac³⁴—allegedly an Orthodox monk—dated to the mid-eleventh century.³⁵ The author labeled the [19]

29 The last sentence is a verbatim quote from Nersēs Šnorhali’s passage on *matał*. Šnorhali (1788, 243).

30 On the festival of *Id-i Qurban* in pre-modern Iran, see Blake (2013, 77–78).

31 For the exegesis on Abraham’s sacrifice in the light of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions, see Firestone (1998).

32 Cross-communal similarities are apparent here. Slaughtering animals on the Muslim feast day of *Id-i Qurban* (Pers.) or *Kurban Bayramı* (Trk.), standing for Abraham’s sacrifice, could have affected popular Christianity. According to it, the meat of the animal had to be shared in three equal parts—for family, relatives, and the poor. In Safavid Iran, the animals for *Id-i Qurban* were camels and rams, while the poor settled for roosters (Blake 2013, 78). De Bruyn called the festival *Bayram Korbat*, describing disorders it usually caused as everyone strove to get his share (Bruyn 1737, 1:189–90). Tavernier mentioned the distribution of “large alms to the poor” during the festival (1678, 163). In the case of Jews, *Id-i Qurban* could resonate with *kapparat* (lit. expiation), a custom practiced by some Jews on the eve of *Yōm Kīpūr* (Day of Atonement). During the *kapparat* ritual a rooster or a hen was slaughtered and donated to the poor (Lauterbach 1951, 354–76).

33 In many cases, the lack of education among rural priests would take extreme forms while performing *matał*, such as pulling red covers upon the animal and binding colorful threads to its horns. Eremia K’ēōmiwřčan (1637–1695) reports on the same phenomenon within popular Christianity among Armenian villagers in Ottoman lands. He introduces instances of polyphony in the practice of *matał*. One such instance happened in Merdegöz (modern-day Avcı Köy), a village near Izmit. The semi-literate priest covered the animal with his chasuble, attached lit candles on its horns and took the embellished animal inside the church (K’ēōmiwřčan V317 (1841), 114r–114v).

34 Grumel attributed Pseudo-Isaac’s first oration to Euthymios of Peribleptos, a mid-eleventh century monk of Peribleptos monastery (Grumel 1956, 174–94). See also Garitte (1950). Tia Kolbaba follows Grumel’s argument (Kolbaba 2020, 157–58).

35 Melikset-Bek argues that Pseudo-Isaac’s orations were penned by the author of an eighth-century anti-Armenian writing titled *Narratio de Rebus Armeniae* (Melikset-Bek 1956). For *Narratio de Rebus Armeniae*, see Garitte (1952). Troitskiy dates Pseudo-Isaac’s orations to the first half of the eleventh century (Troitskiy 1875, 248, and note 1). Following Grumel, Kolbaba dates the first oration to the mid-eleventh century (Kolbaba 2020, 155). Interestingly, the scholars agree that before Pseudo-Isaac’s first oration, the Byzantine

unleavened bread that the Armenians traditionally used for the Eucharist as a “Judaic practice” that Armenians had been performing for centuries as “the seal of their Jewishness” (Isaacus Magnae Armeniae Catholicus 1864, 1175–80).³⁶ The same author accused Armenians of performing “Judaic sacrifice,” by which he meant the rite of *matał* (Isaacus Magnae Armeniae Catholicus 1864, 1181–6). Pseudo-Isaac’s oration became a yardstick against which anti-Armenian Orthodox polemics were measured after the eleventh century, when such authors as Euthymios Zygabenos (d. after 1118) abundantly utilized Pseudo-Isaac’s argumentations (Zigabenus 1865, 1173–90). Armenians, for their part, consistently opposed these allegations by pointing to the unleavened bread that Christ distributed at the Last Supper as it was commonplace among the peoples of the East. Thereby, they claimed the early Christian roots of using unleavened bread for the Sacrament of Eucharist.³⁷ The seventeenth-century Teatine missionary Clemente Galano (1611–1666), author of the seminal book *Unity of the Armenian Church with Rome*—another yardstick against which the Tridentine anti-Armenian polemics was now measured³⁸—refuted the allegations of Pseudo-Isaac’s oration, labeling them groundless (Galano 1658, 2, part 1:5). As a Catholic who utilized unleavened bread for the Eucharist, Galano considered the Eucharist with unleavened bread to be “the old and true tradition of the [early] church of the Apostles” (Galano 1658, 2, part 1:9).

Armenian polemics regarding Orthodox Christianity was minimal in early modern Iran due to the miserable condition of Greek and Georgian communities in Iran. Meanwhile, the issue of unleavened bread never bothered Catholic missionaries. On the contrary, it became ‘something in common’ with the Armenians, a similarity easing the endeavors toward the union with Rome; thereby, it ceased to be a priority topic of debates in the inter-faith polemics of this time. Some authors, such as the prominent Yovhannēs Mrk‘uz (worthless) Ĵuļayec‘i (1643–1715) from New Julfa, never touched upon the topic in their works (Ĵuļayec‘i 1688),³⁹ others spoke of it in general terms referring to the Old Testament custom, which proved Jesus to have broken unleavened bread as it was the eve of the Passover (Ĵahkec‘i 1735, 336–38).⁴⁰ Instead, some other customs of the Armenian Apostolic Church occupied the attention of Catholic polemicists, and hence were pushed to the foreground of the polemical stage.

The most intensified theological debate in the early modern period revolved around the fasts of the Armenian Apostolic Church, observed with extreme abstinence. The Oratorian

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anti-Armenian polemics was milder, and that ‘Jewish’ argumentation came to be widely circulated around the mid-eleventh century.

36 For the medieval anti-Armenian polemics related to the unleavened bread of Eucharist, see Kolbaba (2013).

37 In terms of theological speculations, miaphysite Armenian theologians, along with other traditional argumentations, pointed to unleavened bread as symbolizing the body of Christ. Leaven in the bread would mean corruption of Christ’s body; furthermore, it would insert duality in His one nature. For instance, see Aygekc‘i (1998, 251–65).

38 Oratorian priest Richard Simon (1638–1712), who was acquainted with the Armenian *vardapet* Oskan Erewanc‘i (1614–1674) and engaged in conversations with him in Paris, exercised caution while describing the customs of Armenians. He also criticized Clemente Galano’s statements about Armenians, as “because he [Galano] was an Emissary and wrote in Rome, we must not, before we have examined him, give credit to all he said” (Simon 1685, 124–25).

39 Yovhannēs speaks of the unmixed chalice for the Eucharist but omits the topic of unleavened bread, as he polemicized with Catholics who use unleavened bread but mix water with wine in the Eucharistic chalice.

40 In the Ottoman context, where the Orthodox Rums were the largest Eastern Christian community, and where Armenians had serious conflicts with Greeks regarding the dominion over the monasteries and Holy Sites in Jerusalem, the Armenian polemics also revolved around the extended disputative topics with Greeks. The Patriarch of Constantinople, Yakob Nalean (1741–48, 1762–64), dedicated a lengthy chapter to *azyme* against the Greek (*yoynk‘*), his main argumentation being the Old Testament narrative proving that Jews used to have unleavened bread for the Passover; hence, Jesus and the Apostles abided by the rule of this custom (Nalean 1733, 349–80).

priest Richard Simon wrote that there were “none in the Eastern Church that set a greater value upon fasts than the Armenians; and to hear them speak, one would say that their whole religion consisted in fasting” (Simon 1685, 129). On the same occasion Sir Paul Rycaut (1629–1700), a British diplomat and historian, assumed that “their [Armenians’] fasts are the most rigorous of any nation in the world” (Rycaut 1678, 415). Traditionally, during the Great Lent, Armenians would abstain from meat, dairy, fish, oil, and honey; for some fasts, they would consume only salt and bread, while they usually strictly refused to eat the meat of unclean animals such as hares, snakes, as well as all kinds of seafood like octopus, turtles, and mussels.⁴¹

The abstinence of Armenians from unclean animals incited Western missionaries to elaborate on it as on Armenian ‘Jewishness,’ while more sober minds would assume that it was a general practice for Eastern peoples as “they have always been more abstemious in their diet... than the Western or Northern Nations” (Rycaut 1678, 415). The debate on excessive fasting and abstinence was fueled to the fullest by Catholic Armenians throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Apostolic Armenians, in their turn, would capitalize on the Old Testament to accuse both Western Christians and Armenian converts of deviating from the Law of God, forbidding them to eat unclean animals. As late as 1779, Catholicos Simēon Erewanc’i (1763–1780) expressed his astonishment at those Christians, in particular Armenian Catholics, who consumed meat of unclean animals indiscriminately: Even the Pharisees distinguished between clean and unclean, following the Law of God “likewise the Jews observe nowadays,” let alone Christians who had to “surpass the Jews in everything” (Erewanc’i 1779, 69).

One might collect better-recorded charges on the matter of abstinence from the Ottoman context. Eremia K’ēōmiwrčean refuted a series of allegations against Armenians, among them the mockery of “discrimination in food as [it is] a Jewish thing.”⁴² It was again Catholic Armenians ridiculing Apostolics for rigorous customs, the observance of which had greatly intensified within the Muslim *halāl-harām* (lawful-unlawful) dietary discourse.⁴³ Eremia, in his turn, reproached Catholic Armenians for eating *harām* meals by recollecting his conversation

41 The list of unclean animals varied depending on the location of the respective Armenian community. In Ottoman lands, the list even included cats and sharks, whereas in Iran the most despicable animal used to be the hare.

42 K’ēōmiwrčean V317(1841), 58r–58v.

43 Muslim internal *halāl-harām* debates revolved mostly around wine consumption (Matthee 2014). A more serious discourse was the one between Muslims and non-Muslims. It enclosed a wide range of issues, starting with the kinds of unclean animals and ending with the ‘correct way’ of slaughtering the animal. In the Armenian context, the fourteenth-century theologian Grigor Tat’ewac’i polemicized with his imaginary Muslim interlocutors on *halāl-harām* food. Tat’ewac’i elaborated on the topic of the meat of unclean animals that Muslims consumed, such as horses, to justify pork consumption by the Armenians (Tat’ewac’i 1930, 155–56). His piece against Muslims had numerous copies throughout the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries and became the pattern of Armenian anti-Muslim polemics. There is a gap in producing anti-Muslim Armenian literature between the fifteenth and late seventeenth centuries. In the eighteenth century, it was Step’anos Daštec’i, or Step’anos Basiliow Širip’alankean (1653–1720), who addressed the issue of *halāl-harām* food while engaged in polemic dialogues with Muslims. Step’anos was an Armenian Catholic convert, a merchant, who attempted to justify Catholics indiscriminately eating the meat of unclean animals in one of his *Seven Conversations with Muslims* (Mirzoyan 2009, 123–27). A brief bio-bibliography of this author is found in Bardakjian (2000, 66–67).

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with an Armenian convert “Barseł from Erzurum⁴⁴ who left for Isfahan, [and] died [there],” and who once said that “eating [meat of] a dog is not *harām*.”⁴⁵

There were many other major and minor allegations about Armenian ‘Jewishness,’ the instances of which are spread all over the inter-confessional polemical literature from this period. On the other hand, little is known about the reaction of Jews concerning the intriguing quasi-similarities with Armenians. I leave it to the scholars of Jewish Studies to find out more details on this issue, and turn to another topic, namely, the rising literary interest of Armenians toward Jewish refashioned rites and spirituality as a result of global interactions in the eighteenth century (Weinstein 2017). [24]

Revisiting the Image of Jews in the Eighteenth Century

The lack of Armenian anti-Judaic polemical and apologetical literature in the early modern era was compensated for by Armenians predominantly with the translated literature. In virtue of this, the literary perceptions about Jews were not typically shaped out of the cohabitation modes of the two nations and their engagement in social life. Similar to the Middle Ages, literary perceptions of Jews in the pre-modern age were often influenced by the translations of Western polemical treatises. The side-effect of this process was the borrowed misperceptions about Judaism lavishing in the works of Western authors (La Porta 2009). A widespread misperception can be epitomized in making Islamic and Judaic ‘errors’ equivalent based on their common origin (given the claims that Arabs descended from Abraham’s son Ishmael) and monotheistic views. This was reflected in the fourteenth-century author Peter of Aragon’s heresiological treatise translated from Latin into Armenian by the efforts of the Armenian Dominicans in K’rna (Khachikyan 1977). Peter of Aragon assumed that Muslims erred exactly the way Jews and heretics did.⁴⁶ In the seventeenth century, this idea entered Armenian intellectual circles via the book of Capuchin missionary Justinien de Neuvy (Michael Febvre) titled *Praecipuae Objectiones* (Febvre 1679) and translated into Armenian in 1681 (Heyberger 2012).⁴⁷ On its pages, the author responds to objections of “Muslims, that is Jews,” redirecting his readers to check his objections to Muslims “that could also be utilized against Jews” (Febvre 1679, 96). [25]

The Tridentine propaganda, much less the spread of Global Catholicism, supported the import of misperceptions and brand new or refashioned literary genres. Translations played not a minor role in the transmission of those genres furnished with innovative ideas and approaches. Through the Catholic environment, interest in the rites, rituals, and customs of contemporary Judaism (Weinstein 2011) infiltrated the circle of Iranian Armenian literati. Along the lines of renovated pre-modern European liturgical drama, the genre of *passionistic* [26]

44 This might be the certain “dyophysite” Barseł, an Armenian convert to Catholicism, who settled in Isfahan in the 1680s. We see Yovhannēs Ĵuļayec’i polemicize with him in May of 1682 (Ĵuļayec’i M575, 27r–48r). He was still there in 1687 when Yovhannēs entered a theological debate with the missionary of the *Société des Missions Étrangères* in Isfahan, François Sanson (Ĵuļayec’i M727, 118v). For more details on Sanson’s mission in Persia, see France ii. “Relations with Persia to 1789,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Accessed on January 21, 2022 <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/france-ii>. Judging from Eremia K’ēōmiwrčean’s words, Barseł died in Isfahan before 1694–95, when Eremia wrote his book.

45 K’ēōmiwrčean V317(1841), 60v.

46 Aragonac’i M484, 323r–327r.

47 The Arabic translation was published by Propaganda in 1680, the Armenian translation in 1681. For a bibliographical and bibliographical overview, see Heyberger (2017).

lament was reintroduced into the Armenian ecclesiastical literature, giving a new push to the revival of the image of Jews as deicides to serve specific objectives.

The *passionistic* literature, or *Passions*, as I call it, became central in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, in support of European confessionalization strategies where sermons, laments, and martyrologies became instrumental for the indoctrination of the flock of a respective Church. The genre revolved around the medieval poem *Stabat Mater* that exposed the sufferings of Christ on the Cross and the lament of Mary standing at his feet (Bertoglio 2018).⁴⁸ In 1640, Alessandro Calamato (d. 1648) refashioned the narrative of sufferings in his treatise *Doloroso Spettacolo della Passione* into a lengthy drama to “impress the hearts of the faithful” (Calamato 1640). As refashioned and popularized in the early modern period, the genre found reception in the *dhimmi* Christian ecclesiastical literature, supposedly due to copious Christian martyrdoms under Muslim rule. The Greek theologian, physician Eustratios Argenti (d. 1757), composed two *Sermons on the Passion of Christ* and a *Gospel of the Passion Collected from the Four Gospels* in Greek (Ware 1964, 44). In the Armenian communities of both Ottoman and Iranian lands, refashioned *passionistic* literature circulated under the titles *Testament (Treaty) of Passion*⁴⁹ or *Sermon on Good Friday* (Harut‘yunyan 2020).⁵⁰

The variations of *Passions* in the vernacular and Armeno-Turkish (Turkish written in Armenian letters) gained momentum within the Ottoman Armenian communities.⁵¹ Among Iranian Armenians, it was the same Catholicos Simēon Erewanc‘i—the one reinforcing the self-perception of the Armenian ‘nation’ as of New Israel (Aslanian 2004, 40, 58)—who framed the *Sermon on Good Friday* according to the vogue of the time.⁵² It is partly based on a medieval text compiled by Grigor Tat‘ewac‘i (1346–1409) (Tat‘ewac‘i 1740, 580–83),⁵³ where the Gospel narrative is enriched with the display of customs at odds with the canons of the Apostolic Church, such as Mary’s pulling her hair out and tearing her clothes while mourning her Son.⁵⁴ Simēon greatly elaborates on the topic of Jews as “unjust and shameless judges,” reproaching them for the “unjust justice” they executed over Christ.

Simēon’s anti-Judaic inclination is noticeable throughout the text, but he opposes biblical Jews rather than the actual Jewish people with whom the Armenians interacted in everyday life.⁵⁵ Such tendencies were dictated by the ‘canon’ of the *passionistic* literature, to which depicting biblical Jews as villains was central. At the same time, the *Sermon* was meant to be

48 The poem *Stabat Mater*, written in Latin, is attributed either to Jacopone da Todi (d. 1306) or Pope Innocent III (d. 1216). The Byzantine tradition of this poem-lament begins with Romanos the Melodist’s (d. ca. 556) *kontakion* for Good Friday. For more, see Gador-Whyte (2017). For the Byzantine tradition, see Shoemaker (2011).

49 An allusion to Heb. 9:15.

50 The *Passions* were not based on any particular anti-Judaic text. They were rather rooted in the Western piety literature on *Imitatio Christi*, after Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471) established the standard of devotional literature in the fifteenth century within the *Devotio Moderna* reformatory movement (Kempis 1886). For the Western piety and devotional literature, see Robinson (2013, 31–111). For humanists perceptions of the Passion of Christ, see Perry (2014); Viladesau (2018). For an elaborate discussion on perceptions of the Passion of Christ through the centuries, see Cohen (2007).

51 In the Ottoman Armenian communities, the genre lavished under the pen of Gēorg Mxlayim Oĭli, Patriarch Yakob Nalean, and Yakob Adrianupōlsec‘i.

52 Erewanc‘i M5156, 270v–278v.

53 The fourteenth-century Armenian theologian Grigor Tat‘ewac‘i was the first to fashion the *Sermon on the Sufferings of Christ*. His version is reflected in later variants of *Passions*.

54 At the local Council of Aštišat in 353/4, Catholicos Nerses I the Great (ca. 329–373) forbade pagan mourning customs such as pulling hair out, scratching faces, tearing clothes, and lamenting loudly upon the corps. Tat‘ewac‘i did not indicate his sources. All he mentioned was that he “collected it from others.”

55 For the contradiction between the perceptions on actual Jews and Rabbinic Judaism and biblical Jews and the Christian anti-Jewish literary tradition, see Seppälä (2019).

read from the church pulpits. It could fuel anti-Judaic sensibilities of the populace even if it hardly aimed to do so. Normally, priests would read *passionistic* sermons out loud during the evening Service on Good Friday to make the faithful mourn and lament over the sufferings of God Incarnate.⁵⁶ By and large, the message of the *passionistic* literature was that of endurance, since Christ's followers had to put up with persecutions, sufferings, and martyrdom. Martyrdom was a common occurrence under Muslim rule; meanwhile, seeking martyrdom contributed to the *dhimmi* community-building via the revival of a Christian, and more specifically a confessional, consciousness (Krstić 2011, 143–64).⁵⁷

Jews, as 'eternal enemies of Christians,' typologically represented persecutors in the *Passions*, who might be replaced over time and under different circumstances.⁵⁸ In the New Testament context it was Jews, and now it was Muslims to assume the role of persecutors. Simēon's frequent emphasis on the "unjust judges" gives the impression that it was the Muslim judge (Trk. *kadı*; Ar. *qāḍī*) he attempted to reach out to, given the sociopolitical situation of the time and numerous martyrdoms that Christians underwent irrespectively of their confessional adherence. The Muslim *kadı* were instrumental in giving effect to Christian martyrdoms, adjudicating at the courts Christians were brought to on charges of blasphemy or reneging on Islam. In most cases the *kadı* would find a fault in the accused Christian and would sentence him to death.⁵⁹ In this respect, Simēon's critique is extremely vocal as he demands justice for the accused:

Oh, [you], judge, and lawless high priest, you become shameless, and [you] judge your lawgiver. ... Oh, [you] lawless, if you are [indeed] a judge, [first] find the guilt then subject Him to beating. If He has [done] anything wicked, testify about the wicked [things] and judge Him, and if not, [and] if on the contrary, [He has done] good [things], then why do you allow to beat Him? ... 'Yes, He said, you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of Mighty God and coming on the clouds of heaven' [Mark 14:62]. Then, you will learn who is the [real] judge and what is the [accurate] judgment.⁶⁰

As Jewish priests represented the contemporary *kadı* at the courts, likewise Judas represented a collective image of traitors, his kiss—the act of betrayal. Betrayal was widely attested under Muslim conversion policies, as the conversion of Christians was not only a top-down but rather a bottom-up and horizontal process; a friend, a business partner, a neighbor would

56 Eremia K'ēōmiwrčean testifies that the *Passions* were accompanied by public lament (K'ēōmiwrčean 1939, 480). To make the Christian populace meditate more on the sufferings of Christ on Good Friday, most of the *Passions* incorporated varieties of Mary's lament for the Son written in colloquial Armenian.

57 For more details, see Tzedopoulos, Yorgos. 2018. "Martyrdom and Confessionalization among the Greek-Orthodox of the Ottoman Empire." "Profile." Accessed August 18, 2021. https://www.academia.edu/37378228/Martyrdom_and_Confessionalization_among_the_Greek_Orthodox_of_the_Ottoman_Empire_late_15th_mid_17th_centuries

58 Some scholars argue that anti-Jewish polemics in the early modern period in fact addressed Muslims, not Jews (Karamanolis 2017, 246–47).

59 Although *kadı* was a central figure, the Muslim mob played a pivotal role in Christian neo-martyrologies. It was the mob accusing Christians and demanding from *kadı* to either make Christians convert to Islam or to put them to death. In such cases when a *kadı* refused to decide against the accused Christian, the mob could appeal to the grand vizier and receive permission for execution. Most of the neo-martyrologies revolve around the triangle of the Muslim mob, the *kadı*, and the martyr-to-be. For such instances, see the corpus of Armenian neo-martyrologies by Acharyan, Manandyan (1903). For the parallels in other Christian cultures, see Armanios (2011, 41–64); Sariyannis (2005–2006); Krstić (2011, 121–42); Baer (2008, 13–24).

60 Erewanc'i M5156, 272v–273r.

deliberately indict a Christian for blasphemy or apostasy out of envy, zeal, rancor.⁶¹ Along the same lines, Mary's lament reflected the multiple voices of neo-martyrs' female kin. Having the Gospel narrative as its point of departure, the *passionistic* literature echoed contemporary neo-martyrologies that, in their turn, were anchored on the New Testament *topoi* of sufferings. The martyrology of youth Nikolayos is a good example of such textual impacts. Upon seeing his mother on his way to the place of execution, Nikolayos utters, "Do not stay here, but go home, for I put myself to death for the name and the love of Christ."⁶² Most of the *Passions* imitate this passage, which is not found in the Gospels; in the *Passions* Jesus on the Cross orders Mary, "Do not cry, mother, do not cry! ... Go home, mother ... as your grief hinders me from departing."⁶³ At the same time, Nikolayos's *via dolorosa* is nothing but the crucifixion *topos* in the Gospels with the engagement of a Muslim mob instead of the Jews.⁶⁴

The *Passions* incorporate bits and pieces of polemics with Jews, but all the same, they could hardly be considered as polemical literature *per se*. To the best of my knowledge, there is no solid polemical piece against Jews from the early modern Iranian Armenian context at all.⁶⁵ The rare polemical pieces one might detect are treatises translated into the Armenian language toward the end of the eighteenth century. The Protestant Reformation, followed by the Catholic Counterreformation, enhanced in-depth Biblical studies that catalyzed revisiting the image of Jews both in ecclesiastical literature and in the writings of humanists. New anti-Judaic polemical works started to circulate among European intellectuals, particularly after the printing of Kabbalistic works in Italy (Idel 2004) and placing the *Kabbalah* in the ascendancy over philosophy in Jewish learning (Hacker 2018a, 854–57).⁶⁶ These works aimed to shed light on and refute the 'long hidden customs and rituals' of Jews. Through the workshop of the Armenian Catholic and Apostolic translators in Ottoman lands, the anti-Judaic treatises of Paolo Sebastiano Medici and Neofit Cavsocialviþiu were introduced into the circle of Iranian Armenian intellectuals.⁶⁷

The polemical treatise *Riti, e Costumi degli Ebrei Confutati (Rites and Customs of the Jews Refuted)* of Paolo Medici,⁶⁸ a former Jewish rabbi converted to Roman Catholicism, abridged by

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61 The same conversion policies were applied to Jews and other non-Muslims of the Ottoman and Safavid Empires. Once accused of blasphemy or, more importantly, reneging on Islam, a non-Muslim would instantly be put to death (an exception from this rule was the reign of Shah Abbas I, who ordered to pardon the converts having reneged on Shia Islam (K'anak'erc'i 1870, 1:22–23). On the ways of conversion of non-Muslims, and on so-called 'accidental conversions' as a result of betrayals and tricks that the Muslim populace carried out on quotidian bases, see Krstić 2011, 143–164. For such incidents in the Armenian context, see *codex unicus* V509 by Eremia K'ëömiwerčean.

62 Youth Nikolayos was martyred in 1694 (K'ëömiwerčean V509, 204r).

63 Erewanc'i M5156, 278r.

64 One of the important neo-martyrologies mimicking the Gospel *topos* within a Muslim 'setting' involves Eremia K'ëömiwrčean's brother Komitas K'ëömiwrčean's (1656–1707) martyrdom. Komitas was an Armenian Catholic convert executed by the Ottoman authorities in 1707 upon the accusation of having stirred up disorder among the Armenian community in Constantinople. In 1929 Komitas was beatified by Pope Pius XI. For the parallels between Komitas's martyrdom by the hands of Muslims and the Gospel narrative, see Santus (2017).

65 As for the Ottoman context, we know that Eremia K'ëömiwrčean wrote a solid treatise against Jews. It is reportedly kept in the Library of the Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice. However, it does not appear in current manuscript catalogs of the congregation and remains unreachable and unstudied hitherto.

66 About the subversion of the Jewish tradition by Kabbalah in pre-modern times, see Ruderman (1993). For the publications of Kabbalistic literature in the early modern era, see Gondos (2020).

67 The reception of Kabbalistic writings among Armenians is still to be studied.

68 According to his letter to the Jewish community in Livorno, written in 1715, Paolo Medici converted to Catholicism at the age of sixteen. Still an adolescent, he assumed the duties of the Chair of European Languages in Florence. Medici expressed his anti-Judaic passion during the sermons preached in Livorno, Pisa, Florence, and Bologna. He wrote his treatise sometime before 1715, but due to the intervention of

another Jewish convert, Niccolò Stratta, was translated into the Armenian language (Medici 1742). In 1760, Father Ignatius, an Armenian Catholic priest from the Mekhitarist Order, the pupil of the founder Abbot Mxit'ar Sebastac'i (1676–1749),⁶⁹ translated an abridged version of Medici's treatise from its original Italian. The second translation of the entire treatise was done from Greek by the Armenian Apostolic priest Melk'iset' Banaser (d. 1774) in Constantinople in 1766.⁷⁰

The scandalous treatise by a Jewish convert to the Orthodox faith, monk Neofit or Neofit Cavsocalvițiu,⁷¹ published in Iasi in 1803 under the title *Înfruntarea Jidovilor (Confronting Jews)*, was translated into Armenian in 1808 from the original Romanian (Moldavian) by an Armenian priest in Iasi, Nersēs Harut'iwnean.⁷² [35]

The two treatises share common topics and motives. The extensive chapters speaking about the credibility of the blood libel, an alleged ritual murder of Christians,⁷³ and the detailed description of that 'secret custom' by an insider,⁷⁴ that is, a former rabbi, is just one of the similarities. Besides, the books introduce Jewish festivals and feasts, each from their own author's perspective and purpose. On close inspection, one would detect the gist of both treatises to deal with messianic issues resonating with the apocalyptic anticipations driven by the spirit of the age (*Zeitgeist*). Each of the treatises speaks of patriarchs and prophets who foretold the coming of Christ as the true Messiah. [36]

Paolo Medici aimed to convey the message to his former fellow Jews. He exhorted them to see the root of misfortunes that befell Jewish communities in Europe in the rejection of Christ as Messiah. As for Neofit, apart from praising Christianity as holding the truth about the Messiah, he went beyond Jewish-Christian generic debate. He also engaged in disputation with Christian 'heretics,' narrowing his argument down to the exclusivity of the Orthodox faith. [37]

The comparative analysis of the content of the treatises is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that their popularity earned them translations into many languages and a wide reception among Christian communities. The Armenian translations received reception among Catholic and Apostolic Armenians, but most of the copies come from Constantinople [38]

the influential Jewish community in Rome, its publication was banned. The treatise was first published in 1736. See Steinschneider (1883, 246–48); Deutsch (2012, 2001).

69 The Mekhitarist monastic order was founded in 1700–1701 by an Armenian Catholic, Abbot Mxit'ar Sebastac'i, in Constantinople. It followed the monastic rule of Saint Benedict. Later the order moved to Morea (Peloponnese), from there to Venice, San Lazzaro island, before the schism in 1773 made a group of monks leave for Trieste, then move to Vienna. For Abbot Mxit'ar's biography, see Agonts' (1810); Nurikhan (1915). For the causes of the schism, see Aslanian (2018).

70 For more on this translator, see Ter-Stepanyan (1985).

71 There is uncertainty around the author's name. Neophytos Kavsokalyvites (1689-1784) was a Greek monk, ecclesiastical writer, and one of the initiators of the Kollyvades Movement, who is not the author of this book. According to the introduction of the book, the author Neofit was the son of a Hasidic rabbi who converted to Orthodoxy at thirty-eight and became a monk in Kavsokalyvia on Mount Athos. His Jewish name is said to be Noah Belfer, or according to some sources, Noë Weinjung.

72 Neofit, M935.

73 For an overview, see Smith (2002, 91–133) and Weinberg (2012). For the medieval European context, see Po-Chia Hsia (1988). For the burst of blood libel trials in eighteenth-century Eastern and Central Europe, see Maciejko (2011, 92–126). See, most recently, Teter (2020, 150–207).

74 The blood accusations became a weapon not only in the hands of Christians or converted Jews. At times they were used by Jews against each other in personal vendettas and became a polemical tool in the debates between certain Sabbatean (Frankist) groups and the rabbinic establishment; see Burmistrov (2004); Maciejko (2011, 98–99, 107–26).

in terms of provenance.⁷⁵ This is understandable, first, because due to the location of the Ottoman Empire, its Christian subjects, specifically Constantinopolitans, were more inclined to accommodate European polemical trends; second, because the Ottoman Jews, as Armenians, were essential players in the economic arena of the Empire (Hacker 2018a, 844–54). Thereby, they were regarded as undesirable competitors to defeat (Leber 2021).

The scarce manuscript colophons give insight into the real reasons for translating anti-Judaic pieces into Armenian. In his colophon, the translator of Neofit's treatise, priest Nersēs Harut'iwnean, assumed that Jews had always been the enemies of Christians, whereas Christians had been thinking well of them.⁷⁶ For this reason, when he saw the book, he decided to translate it into Armenian "so that every one of our nation [could] read it and take heed of their wicked deeds and [could] recognize them as the true enemies of ours."⁷⁷ The translator himself was astonished at the treatise's content since he spoke of it as of some kind of revelation. His knowledge about Jews and his attitude towards them in everyday life seems to have been somewhat more positive. Apparently, this was the case for Armenians in general; otherwise, the translator would not have felt the urge to translate the book to inform 'the entire nation' that they had false perceptions about Jews.

So far, no copy of Paolo Medici's and only one copy of Neofit's treatises come from the Iranian context. The latter belongs to the pen of bishop Yovhannēs Šahxat'uneanc' (1799–1849), a member of the Supreme Council and Head of the manuscript repository of the Mother See of Holy Ējmiacin, a member of the Holy Synod, later the prelate of the Armenians in Georgia. Most probably, Šahxat'uneanc' became acquainted with the treatise in Constantinople when he was still an archimandrite. He was dispatched there by order of Catholicos Ep'rem Joragel'ci (1809–1835) to assist the catholicosal legate (*nuirak*). Šahxat'uneanc' copied the book in 1822 but steered clear of indicating his name on the title page.⁷⁸

What compelled Šahxat'uneanc' to copy a treatise adapted more to the polemical needs of Armenian clerics of Constantinople? Perhaps it was due to the willingness to have its copy in Ējmiacin as a 'knowledge reservoir' for later usage (Leber 2021, 72; Grunert and Syndikus 2015), given the gradual strengthening of the Jewish community in Iran in the nineteenth century (Avery, Hambly, and Melville 1991, 7:731). His preference of Neofit's treatise over that of Paolo Medici's could be conditioned with the pages-long question and answer section of the treatise serving as a manual on confronting Jews during debates on faith. It is possible that after the *Polozhenie* was enacted in 1836,⁷⁹ when Šahxat'uneanc' became a permanent member of the Holy Synod, he made use of the treatise while examining the individual petitions from Jews asking to join the Armenian Apostolic Church (Hamed-Troyansky 2021).⁸⁰ However, the fact that he refrained from indicating his name, as well as the absence of other copies of Neofit's treatise among the Iranian Armenians, support the supposition that either there were no serious tensions between Armenians and Jews, or, for various reasons, anti-Judaic

75 It seems that both anti-Judaic books were exceptionally in possession of influential and authoritative Armenians in the Ottoman realm, such as the legates of patriarchs of Constantinople (manuscript J388) or the members of the influential Armenian Catholic Ć'amčeanč' family (manuscript LOB 156 (BL Or. 15631)).

76 Neofit M935, 79r.

77 Neofit M935, 79v.

78 Neofit M935, 4r. Another hand gives away Šahxat'uneanc' 's name on the margin of the title page. The marginal note near the indication of 'fruitless philologist' reads, "It is untrue. The [scribe] is the same bishop Yovhannēs Šahxat'uneanc'."

79 Designed by the Russian authorities, *Polozhenie* was the new Church Constitution the Armenian Apostolic Church had to stick to after Eastern Armenia's annexation to Imperial Russia due to the Russo-Persian war in 1826–1828. *Polozhenie* reduced the political power of Armenian Catholicos of Ējmiacin.

80 I am thankful to Zaroui Pogossian for drawing my attention to this article.

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(anti-Kabbalistic) books were not welcomed among the Armenian ecclesiastical elites of Iran, and later, Russia. Whatever the cause, the Armenian translation of Neofit's book was never published or popularized in the centuries to come, whereas its Russian translation with its several editions became a notorious polemical tool for propaganda against Jews in nineteenth-century Imperial Russia (Burmistrov 2004; Weinberg 2014).⁸¹

Conclusion

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries mark a new era in the coexistence modes for *dhimmi* Armenians and Jews under the Safavid, Afghan, and Qajar religious policies and socio-political agendas that affected both groups' internal affairs, their social status, and cross-communal exchanges. The emergence of new elites in Safavid society, where Julfan Armenians enjoyed relative autonomy, represented by the wealthy merchants as the Empire's trading force and go-betweens in the West and Mughal India, could hardly secure them from coercive conversions that the Armenians underwent in the cities other than Isfahan. It made them co-destined with suppressed communities of Jews engaged mainly in internal commerce as wine traders in the Shiraz region, medicament traffic, and the like. Both peoples survived the side effects of the Safavid Shi'itization policies aimed against Sunni Ottomans and sectarian elements of the Empire, Nadir Shah's (1736–1747) attempts at reconciliation with Sunnis through *Ja'far-i mazhab* (law of Jafar), as well as the tension between the monarchy and the *ulema* in the Qajar period, resulting in political empowerment of the *ulema* and its engagement in everyday life of society. Somewhat resilient to the aftermath of multiple and multi-vector interstate wars, Armenians remained intermediaries between the Christian West and Muslim Iran during the Qajar period. The situation changed positively for the Jews, who were able to enlarge and strengthen their communities in Iran throughout the nineteenth century. Yet, despite the long-lasting cohabitation and an intertwined history, the scarcity of Armenian historical sources about Iranian Jews and their relations with Armenians leads to the assumption that for Armenians, Jews were not a crucial factor in shaping broader communal life within the Empire. Moreover, the absence of Armenian anti-Judaic polemical literature, and its import from Europe via the Ottoman Armenian translators, speaks for the supposition that Jews were not considered a capital threat to the Iranian Armenians. The only threat that caught the historiographers' attention was the Sabbatean movement. Consequently, it was reported and recorded in greater detail by Armenian authors. The realities were slightly different in the Ottoman realm due to several factors—the greater number and higher social status of Jewish communities,⁸² different engagement modes between Jews and Armenians under Ottoman policies, and the impact of anti-Judaic tendencies of the European countries neighboring the Empire. The anti-Judaic European compositions were translated into Armenian within Euro-

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81 In 1844, by the order of the Minister of Internal Affairs of Imperial Russia, the book *Razyskanie ob ubienii evrejami hristianskih mladencev i upotreblenii krovi ih* [Investigation on the Killing of Christian Children by Jews and the Use of their Blood] was published in Saint Petersburg. The book drew heavily on Neofit's treatise. The first part of Neofit's treatise, where he speaks about the blood libel, had many editions in Russian under various titles, such as *Izverskoe ubijstvo: Razoblachenija grecheskogo monaha Neofita, byvshego iudejskogo ravvina* [Brutal Murder: Revelations of the Greek Monk Neophytes, a Former Jewish Rabbi]. These editions supported the rise of anti-Judaic propaganda in the Russian Empire, gradually leading to the Beilis case (Roger 1966). After the Beilis case, in 1914, Neofit's book was published under the title *O tajne krovi u iudeev v svjazi s ucheniem Kabbaly* [On the Secret of Blood among the Jews in Connection with the Teachings of Kabbalah].

82 For an overview of Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire, see Hacker (2018b, 77–112).

pean and Ottoman Armenian communities; meanwhile, a more intense communication on a day-to-day basis supplied the writings of Ottoman Armenians with more details on Jewish customs and cross-communal relations.⁸³ Nevertheless, the literary polemics engaged the ‘confessional others’ more than any other religious group. Likewise, Ottoman Armenians and pre-modern Iranian Armenians directed their entire polemical panoply against the ‘confessional others’, in particular the ‘inner enemies,’ that is Catholic Armenians. The latter, too, were concentrated more with inter-confessional rhetoric due to the specifics of the confessional age expressed in the urge to define one’s confession and constitute one’s confessional identity. Inter-confessional polemics provides us with much data on the perceptions about Armenians and Jews as well as their quasi-similarities as seen through the eyes of confessional rivals. The close affinity of some ancient customs of the Armenian Apostolic Church with the Old Testament context was exaggerated in constant charges of Armenian ‘Jewishness’ by their opponents. Although a groundless product of theological speculations, in real life, those charges could resonate with some peculiarities of other religions informed by the multicultural social fabric, hence, could give an impression of actual similarities. In the light of this, it is not surprising that from the nineteenth century onwards, Jews in the South Caucasus under Imperial Russia, but also the Ottoman Empire (The Mserians 194),⁸⁴ individually appealed to convert to the Armenian Apostolic rather than any other Christian faith. As argued in Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky’s important article (Hamed-Troyansky 2021), economic benefits seem to have been a plausible reason for these conversions. Still, for a bona fide conversion, there should have been something additional and, perhaps, more intimate (such as the alleged similarities) to make an ordinary Jew sincerely prefer Armenian Christianity over imperial Orthodox faith.

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Manuscripts

Aragonac’i, Petros *Girk’ datastanac’* [A Book of Judgment]. Matenadaran Manuscript Repository, Yerevan. M484, 323r–327r. [44]

Erewanc’i, Simēon *Ktak ew k’aroz meci urbat’in i xač’elut’iwn K’ristosi Astucoy meroy* [A Testament and Sermon on Good Friday for the Crucifixion of Christ, our God]. Matenadaran Manuscript Repository, Yerevan. M5156, 270v–278v. [45]

Ĵulayec’i, Yovhannēs Mrk’uz *Hakačarut’yun ənd despan patri Samsonin or ełew i t’ivn hazar ĆLZ. ew marti IE.* [Polemics with the Consul Father Sanson that Happened in the Year of 1687, on March 25]. Matenadaran Manuscript Repository, Yerevan. M727, 114r–122r. [46]

83 For example, see Sanjian, Tietze (1981).

84 We have a petition and a confession of faith by Jews in Constantinople converted to the Armenian Apostolic faith from June 4, 1829. Interrogated by Turkish officials, they expressed their knowledge of the Armenian faith and their sincere desire to join the Apostolic Church. I am thankful to Shushan Khachatryan from the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute for providing information about this document. This subject of research is worth pursuing further.

- Ĵulayec'i, Yovhannēs Mrk'uz** *Yohannu bani əspasaworē ar Barseł traban vepi erkabnaki greč'eloc'd patasxani* [The Response of Yovhannēs, the Servant of the Logos, to Your, Barseł the Dyophysite's Polemical Writing]. Matenadaran Manuscript Repository, Yerevan. M575, 27r–48r. [47]
- K'ēōmiwčean, Eremia** *Ĵatagovut'iwn Hayastaneac' ekelecvoy* [Apology of the Armenian Church]. Library of Mekhitarist Congregation, Venice. V317(1841). [48]
- K'ēōmiwčean, Eremia** *Girk' patmabanut'eanc' i zanazan yałētic'* [Book of Historiographies on Various Disasters]. Library of Mekhitarist Congregation, Venice. V509. [49]
- K'ēōmiwčean, Komitas** *Vasn yetin žamanakis azgis meroy hakařakut'ean, or ənd mimeans, vasn kat'olikutean ev yałags oroy haytneloy umemn yerkrord Lusaworič' koč'eloy yomanc' ev vasn norin gorcoc'n ev varuc'n ev vasn hamaxohic' norin* [Concerning the Confrontation of our Nation against Each Other in the Recent Times, [also] Concerning Catholicism and about a Certain Person who was Called by Some the Second Illuminator and on his Deeds and Attitude, and his Partisans]. Bibliothèque nationale de France. BNF Arm. 196, 18r–52v. [50]
- Medikeanc', Połos** *Ōrēnk' ew sovorut'iwnk' ebrayec'woc'* [The Laws and Customs of Jews]. British Library Manuscript Collection, London. LOB156 (BL Or. 15631). [51]
- Mxlayim Ołi, Gēorg** *Ənddem Yunac' metropolitin* [Against the Metropolitan of Greeks]. Matenadaran Manuscript Repository, Yerevan. M2080, ff. 112r–116v. [52]
- Neofit** *Girk' čakatamartut'ean aynm, or uni hakařakut'iwn ənddēm hrēic' kam mnal azat i č'arut'enē noc'in arareal i Nesbitosē umemnē Yunac' abelayē or erbemn rabuni noc'in* [A Book of Combat which Contains Controversy against Jews, or [a Book] about Steering Clear of their Wickedness Composed by a Greek Priest named Nesfitos, who used to be their Rabbi]. Matenadaran Manuscript Repository, Yerevan. M935. [53]
- Ōjnec'i, Vardan** *Patmut'iwn Hayoc'* [History of Armenians]. Matenadaran Manuscript Repository, Yerevan. M4331. [54]

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