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**Immanuel of Rome as a Translational Jewish Writer of Medieval Italy:**

**Lyrics across Hebrew and Italian**

Though a minor figure among poets the poets of late-thirteenth- and early-fourteenth-century Italy, Immanuel of Rome presents a unique case that enriches our understanding of the multicultural environs of medieval Italy, a topic to which scholars have begun to devote significant attention.[1] Immanuel of Rome, known in Hebrew as Immanuel ha-Romi (lit. Immanuel the Roman) and in Italian as Manoello/Manoel/Manuel/Immanuele Romano or Giudeo, was a poet, philosopher, and biblical exegete. In addition to being the first poet to write a sonnet in a language other than Italian (in this case Hebrew), Immanuel is the only Jewish poet whose Italian lyrics from this period are extant, surviving in six manuscripts.

In this preliminary paper, I aim to provide background on secular literature written by Jews of the medieval Mediterranean so that my presentation in the seminar may build on a shared vocabulary. After introducing background material, this preliminary paper lays the

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groundwork for my more detailed assessment of Immanuel's status as a figure who straddles theological, literary, philosophical, and linguistic worlds. I examine two compositional realities: one is Immanuel's adaptation of the Italian sonnet for use in Hebrew; the other is Immanuel's composition of four sonnets and one *frottola* (a proto-madrigal) in Italian.

The former is a unique moment in literary history that requires examination from the standpoint of literary form, given that Immanuel was the first author to compose a sonnet in a language other than Italian.[2] The latter is not only a striking instance of literary innovation but is also a moment that carries with it complex social, historical, and cultural ramifications: how does Immanuel render his poetic voice, so inevitably inflected with Arabo-Andalusian culture, into the highly codified, post-courtly love world of the *stilnovsti* and *poeti giocosi* of late-thirteenth- and early-fourteenth-century Italy? Was Immanuel able to bridge the cultural and literary gaps seamlessly?

Immanuel's Italian poems are readily available today in Italian anthologies of the Italian poets *del due e trecento*, which means that many of today's students in Italy are likely to have come across his poems.[3] The same could not be said for Hebrew-language students: the secular Hebrew text for which Immanuel is best known and which was widely disseminated throughout the Early Modern Jewish world (from the Mediterranean to Northern Europe, i.e., Ashkenaz) is not conventionally studied now. In fact, most Hebrew readers today who have heard of Immanuel likely associate him with intrigue rather than poetic prowess: in the famous 16th

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[2] Bregman argues that since Immanuel did not take credit for the invention of the Hebrew sonnet as he did for another Italian poetic form that he rendered in Hebrew, the *sirventese*, it is likely that other Italian-Hebrew poets also composed sonnets in Hebrew that did not survive (16).
[3] Immanuel's Italian lyrics are found in Marti and Vitale.

century *Shulhan Arukh*, the Code of Jewish Law, the *Maḥbarot Immanuel* is banned for reading on the Sabbath due to its licentious contents.[4]

**Immanuel's Life and Works**

We know frustratingly little about Immanuel's life; much of the biographical information that has been accepted as fact originated in Immanuel's fictional writings. Immanuel ben Solomon was born in Rome in 1261 and lived until roughly 1335, fourteen years after Dante's death. He acted as head of correspondence for the Jewish community of Rome and might have held a more permanent high post in the Jewish community.[5] He likely left Rome in 1321, perhaps in response to the 1321 papal edict to expel the Jews from Rome, though there is little evidence regarding the extent to which the Church enforced the edict. Scholars suppose that Immanuel moved among Perugia, Fabriano, Fermo, Camerino, Ancona, Gubbio, and Verona, having gleaned this itinerary from Immanuel's fictional writings. Gubbio is a plausible location, given Immanuel's *tenzone* (sonnet exchange) with Bosone da Gubbio and given that he is referred to as "Manuel Giudeo da Gobio" in the Vat. Barb. Lat. 3953, folio 128.

Immanuel is best known for his *Maḥbarot Immanuel*, a Hebrew-language collection of stories in rhymed prose and poetry often referred to as a *maqāma.* Aside from the *Maḥbarot Immanuel*, Immanuel also wrote: a treatise in Hebrew on the symbolism of the Hebrew alphabet

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[4] Known in English as the Code of Jewish Law, *Shulḥan ʿArukh* by Joseph Karo literally means *Prepared Table*. The particular passage in which Immanuel's poetry is mentioned is SA ʿOraḥ Ḥayim 307.16.

[5] In Hebrew, *ben* literally means son, thus Immanuel son of Solomon. In Hebrew, Immanuel is usually referred to as Immanuel ha-Romi; 'ha' means 'the' in Hebrew. Many Jews living in Islamic Spain adopted Arabized names that included the Arabic terms for 'son' (*ibn*) and 'the' (*al-*). For instance, in this paper I refer to Judah al-Ḥarizi. For general background on Immanuel, see Cassuto, Umberto, and Angel Sáenz-Badillos. "Immanuel (ben Solomon) of Rome." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 9, Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, pp. 740-741. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX2587509509/GVRL?u=columbiau&sid=GVRL&xid=880cbc4d. Accessed 24 Jan. 2018.

(not extant); a hermeneutic work in Hebrew entitled *Even Boḥan* (Examination of Stone);

Hebrew commentaries on nearly the entire Bible; a philosophical epistle in Hebrew to

philosopher, physician, and biblical exegete Hillel ben Samuel of Verona; and five poems in

vernacular Italian (four sonnets and one *frottola*).


**Immanuel's Languages**

Hebrew was not a spoken language at this time; Immanuel's Hebrew writing follows in

the tradition of Andalusian Jews who, in the Golden Age of Hebrew letters (ca. 950-1150), spoke

Arabic, wrote poetry in biblical Hebrew, and wrote philosophical, medical, scientific,

grammatical, literary, and mathematical treatises in Judeo-Arabic (i.e., Arabic in Hebrew letters).

By Immanuel's time, grim realities had pushed Jews out of Southern Spain to Northern Spain

(though not hospitable for long), Southern France, Italy, North Africa, and elsewhere. Learned

Andalusian Jews brought scholarly works with them and translated them from Arabic and Judeo-

Arabic into Hebrew to reach non-Arabic readers. Though we have no evidence that Immanuel's

family came from Iberia (Jews were established in Rome as early as 139 BCE; see Stern,

"Roman Literature," *Encyclopedia Judaica*), Immanuel's generation of Roman Jews studied and

embraced Andalusi intellectualism via its Hebrew translations. Thus, when writing in Hebrew,

Immanuel, like his Andalusian predecessors, relied on biblical Hebrew and was well aware of

philosophical translations and commentaries.

While the Hispano-Hebraic authors from whom Immanuel gleaned many literary

techniques spoke Arabic in their daily lives (which becomes clear in their Judeo-Arabic writings

and at times in their occasional Arabic-language calques in Hebrew compositions), Immanuel

clearly conversed in Italian. As I hope to show when I explain certain aspects of Immanuel's

Hebrew and Italian writings, Immanuel seems to have been speaking, thinking, and dreaming in Italian, even if Hebrew was deeply theologically and philologically ingrained in him. In other words, Immanuel's case adds additional layers to the already complex diglossic reality of Andalusian Jewry: keep the biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew; take away the spoken Arabic, but keep the Classical Arabic poetic forms, meters, and themes, along with Andalusian culture of intellectualism without the Arabic language itself; and add spoken and written Italian. This multilingual scenario carries with it significant hermeneutic implications that I attempt to address in my presentation to the Fellows and in my continued work on Immanuel.

For further explanation of influences on and analyses of Immanuel's writing and for manuscript and incunable images, please visit my essay on Immanuel on Digital Dante: https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/history/immanuel-of-rome-and-dante/

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