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πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη
כִּי אִם־הָאֱמוּנָה הַפֹּעֶלֶת בְּאַהֲבָה
вѣра любовїю поспѣшествуема
faith working through love

Ediția a doua, revizuită și adăugită

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Cuprins

Istoricitate și identitate religioasă

Pedagogie divină și axiologie

Kerygma și paradigme misionare

Hebrew Inscriptions
in Christian Themed European Art

Dr. Linda-Saskia Menczel

Timișoara

In a deeply anti-Semitic Europe, which gave rise to the mass expulsion of Jews and created the first ghettos for them, marginalizing Jewish culture and traditions, an obscure element of Renaissance art managed to create an organic unity between Judaism and Christianity, though to a small extent and often clumsily. These are Hebrew inscriptions that appear in paintings, decorative arts, manuscript illustrations and even in some sculptures. Because the knowledge of the Hebrew language was and is a rarity, art historians ignored the Hebrew inscriptions in European arts or thought them to be decorative elements, simple graphic signs. But these inscriptions began to be studied as more and more works of art with this peculiarity were discovered, and Hebrew speaking researchers recognized the markings as being or resembling Hebrew.
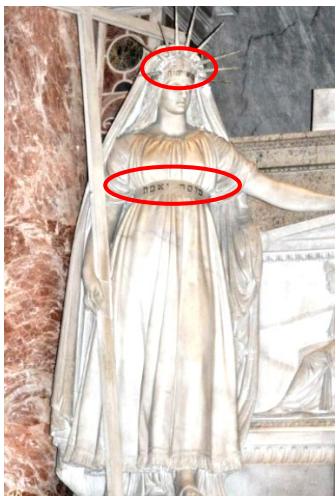
Fig. 1. Canova Antonio, (1757-1822) *Allegory of Religion, Tomb of Pope* Clemens *XIII* (1783-1792) Basilica dei Santi Apostoli în Roma

Fig. 2. details of Hebrew text:
above: s Kadosh Y-H-W-H קדש יה-ו-ה /
Holy is the Lord
below: Moser veEmet מוסר ואמת / morality and truth

Without exaggerating the role of these inscriptions in the interfaith relations between Jews and Christians and given that the images used to illustrate the Jewish people were often inflammatory, one can at the same time find examples of works of art which shows due respect for the chosen nation that generated the Messiah and Christian fascination with the Hebrew language, the language of the Old Testament, giving rise to unexpected juxtapositions and fascinating ciphers. It is unclear who is the author of the rare intelligible texts, the artist or sponsor, but collaboration with a learned Jew is plausible in these cases.

In the vast majority of cases, the artist wrote random Hebrew letters with more or less accuracy, meant to identify the subject of the work as being of Jewish origin. Hebrew inscriptions in Christian-themed works of art are mostly pseudo-inscriptions, graphic signs that mimic Oriental writing, or well-written letters often lined the hems of clothing like decorative embroidery with no intelligible meaning. Some inscriptions barely resembled Hebrew letters, others are well-written letters, copied by the artist from a text or model of the alphabet, and even fewer are intelligible, carrying a meaningful message.

The first Jewish inscriptions in the visual arts appeared with the migration of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula to the European space. Christians had access through Jewish communities, to the rightful interpreters of the Old Testament and to first-hand connoisseurs of the language, considered by many Christians Hebraists, but also the fathers of the church, as sacred. Collaboration with the Jewish diaspora and especially with Jews converted to Christianity, provided a basis for the study of early humanists, providing access to the secrets of interpreting the sacred text, correct translations and access to manuscripts of Jewish mysticism (The Zohar, The Bahir, Sefer Yetsira etc).

At the Council of Trent (1545-1563) Pope Gregory I stated that "art is like Scripture for the illiterate", and artists must render the biblical scenes with care and fidelity to the text.[1] Gabriele Paleotti, argues in his treatise from 1582 that painters are "silent preachers". So, art takes over the interest for the Hebrew language by integrating it discreetly in the narration of Christian-themed scenes in order to add clues to the origin of the characters through the inscriptions.

The most widespread Hebrew inscription is the Ineffable Name, The Tetragramaton Y-H-W-H, which is still found in abundance in the art of churches in northern Europe, in fresco, easel painting, sculpture, in ecclesiastical and secular decorative arts, book graphics and engraving.

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[1] *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Rockford, Illinois, 1978) 215-127.

Also abundant is the Hebrew inscription on the cross of the crucifixion or *Titulus Crucis*, presenting a wide range of representations, ranging between indecipherable graphic signs to the correct text, with Masoretic signs. However there are interesting variations of the name Jesus in the Hebrew form, varying between artist, possibly having access to different sources, either texts or the oral tradition of the Jewish community. In Fra Angelico and Gabriel Metsu we have Yehoshua יהושע, Michelangelo and Bramantino prefer Yeshu ישו, Velasquez, Van Dyck, Rembrandt, El Greco, Rubens, Luis, Vouet, Bayeu y Subias, and Nesterenko choose the version Yeshua ישוע, Dieric Bouts in his *Passion triptych* writes Ysha[2] ישע, the anonymous author of the Norfolk triptych seems to transcribe the name of Jesus from Yiddish יהעשו, the van Eyck brothers seem to write the name of the Savior in Latin but with Hebrew characters יעש on the altar in Ghent, and at the Master of Suffering Man of Oberaltaich we have יאושע for the name of Jesus.

Fig. 3. Di Bondone, Giotto (-1337), *Crucifix* 1290-1300, tempera on wood, 578 cm x 406 cm, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, the oldest known Hebrew inscription in European Art
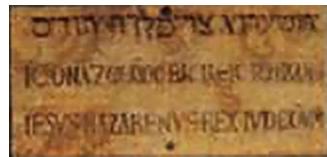
Fig. 4. Fra Angelico (1395-1455), *Christ crucified* 1433-1434, Fresco 363 x 212 cm, Chapter House, San Domenico, Fiesole

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[2] Image here: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dieric_Bouts_-_Passion_Altarpiece_(central)_-_WGA02989.jpg, accessed 20.05.2020

Fig. 5. Hopfer, Daniel (1470-1536)
Crucifixion, 1500-1536,
engraving 34.3 × 21.6 cm, Detroit Institute
of Arts, example of pseudo-script
resembling hand-written Hebrew
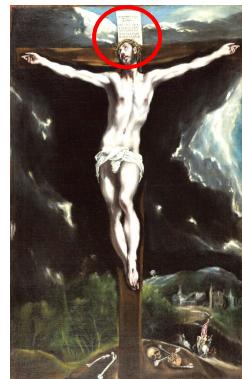
Fig. 6. El Greco (Domenico Theotokopoulos)
(1541-1614), *Christ on the Cross*, 1600-1610,
oil on canvas, 82.6 × 51.8 cm, Getty Center,
Los Angeles, SUA. El Greco feels at ease
with Hebrew script stylizing
some of the letters.

Fig. 7. Van Dyck Anthony,
Christ Crucified with Saint John and Mary
1617-1619, oil on canvas, 3.3 x 2.8 m,
Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.
The text reproduces the Aramaic version

Fig. 8. López Juan Manuel Miñarr, (1954),
Cristo de la Séptima Palabra 2014, Basílica del
Pilar, Zaragoza. Example of adding
the letter waw in order to obtain the Tetra-
gramaton from the first letters of the text

Fig. 10. Anonimus, Crucifix, Chapel of Pöck-
stein Castle, Austria, articulated anagram

Fig. 11. detail showing the inscription in
the Rødding church of Viborg where
the usual inscriptions is replaced
by the Tetragramaton
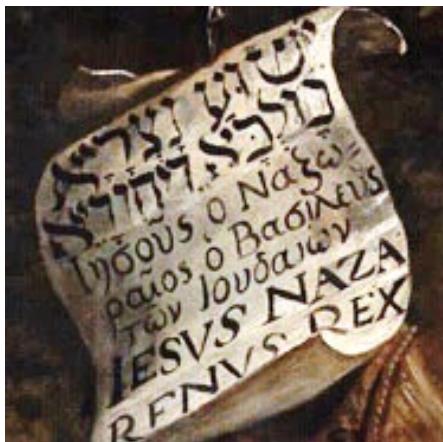
Fig. 9. Rubens Peter Paul (1577-1640),
Erecting the Cross 1610, oil on wood,
460 x 340 cm, cathedral of Our Lady,
Antwerp. The Hebrew inscription shows
the care and accent on realism the artist
aspired to by using the Aramaic source of
the text, which he uses
in multiple compositions.

Fig. 12. Levieux Reynaud, *Crucifiction*,
detail, oil on canvas,
Musée Pierre-de-Luxembourg.
The Inscriptions are the anagrams in Latin
(I.N.R.I.) and Greek (I.N.B.I.); the Hebrew
transcribes the INRI, however written
from left to right, which means that
the artist had access to the Hebrew alphabet
but did not know that it is written form left
to right.

There are various abbreviations of the inscription on the Titulus, such as the acronym ינמי INMI (Joshua Notzri Melech Yehudim), the crucifix in the Chapel of Pöckstein Castle added the article Hey (the) – Nazarean and Jews, resulting in ‏י.הנ. מ.הי‏ (Ieșua *Ha*Noțri Melech *Ha*Yedudim). In the church of Rødding in Viborg the inscription is replaced by the Tetragramaton, so the name of Christ is synonymous to the name of God, in a deeply theological understanding of the Trinity. Also, the addition of the letter *waw* to form the Hebrew inscription ‏ישוע הנצרי ומלך היהודים‏ generates the name of the Lord God through the acronym of the first letters of the text ‏יה־ו־ה‏ (YHWH) an example is the contemporary sculpture of López Juan Manuel Miñarr, (1954), Cristo of the Seventh Word in the Basilica of the Pillar, Zaragoza.

Many of the Hebrew Titulus Crucis are pseudo-inscriptions, but also one can find some inscriptions that show an ease and familiarity with the text, for example in the crucifixions of El Greco, who is comfortable to stylize some letters. In the case of van Dyck and Rubens for example, the inscription is taken for the Aramaic version, a detail that attests to the commitment of the artists to realism of the scene.

The main purpose of the interest of Christians in the Hebrew language has always been a better understanding of their faith. The study of the Hebrew language and its linguistic mysteries has been speculated by Christian Hebraists giving rise to both Hebrew departments in universities as well as for the study of the mystical spiritual texts of Kabbalah edifying the meaning of passages from the Old Testament that only a connoisseur of language can enjoy.

Fig. 13. Ghirlandaio Domenico, *Saint Jerome in his study*, 1480,
fresco, 184 x 119 cm, Church of Ognissanti, Florence
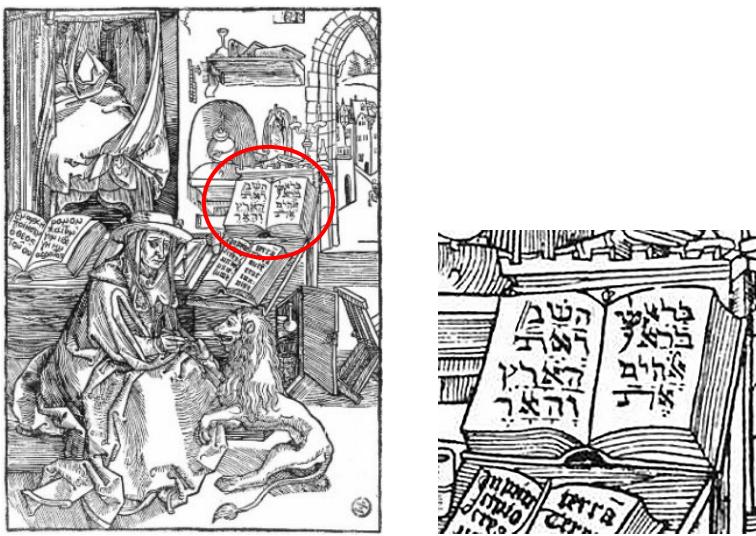
Fig. 14. Albrecht Durer, 1471-1528, *Saint Jerome*, woodcut, 1942, 190 x 133 mm
Kupferstichkabinett, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel

Pico de la Mirandola states in one of the nine hundred theses, seventy-two of which are about Kabbalah, "There is no science that can assure us of about the divinity of Christ more than magic and Kabbalah".[3]

Thus, Jewish mysticism organically permeates Christianity but also other mystical paths of the time. St. Jerome emphasized the primacy of studying the Old Testament text in the original language for a fuller understanding of the sacred text,[4] as pointed out by Durer and Ghirlandaio in their works dedicated to the scholar Jerome (figs. 13 and 14).

In Ghirlandaio the Hebrew text seems only a series of letters, written correctly, but in Durer's engraving we see three open books with inscriptions from Hebrew, Greek and Latin where the Hebrew text transcribed almost accurately the beginning of Genesis, in ashurit script and Masoretic signs.

Hebrew, along with Latin and Greek, became almost mandatory for a nobleman or scholar of the time, but also for the nobility with the desire to show off. Having in a personal collection a painting containing a Hebrew text

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[3] FARMER S. A. *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486). The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems With Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Medieval & Renaissance texts & studies; v. 167), Tempe, Arizona, 1998, 496-497.

[4] Lenowitz HARRIS, *On Three Early Incidences of Hebrew Script in Western Art*, Maven in Blue Jeans – A Festschrift in honor of Zev Garber (Shofar Supplements in Jewish Studies, Purdue University Press, 2009) 441.

could become a subject of theological discussion in the gatherings of the time and a sign of the erudition (false or authentic) of the artist or sponsor. An example is the Latin Creed written in Hebrew transliteration, which could be easily deciphered by a connoisseur of the Hebrew alphabet and the Latin text of the Creed. The Marriage of the Virgin, by the Master of Mary's life painted in 1463 contains the transliteration of the Latin creed, written in Hebrew letters. The inscription has a central position placed unnaturally on the Gothic arches of the altar, urging the viewer to read it. The text is: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth …. And in Jesus Christ, (son), of God …"
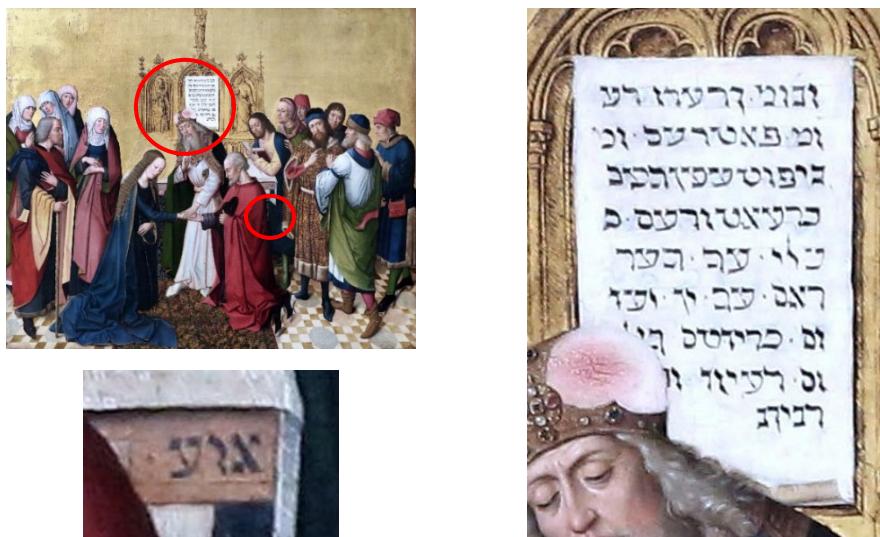
Fig. 15. Master of the Life of the Virgin, *The Marriage of the Virgin, 1463*,
Alte Pinakothek, Munchen, whole and details of the Hebrew inscriptions

UNUM. CREDO.DE	ונום. קרעדו. דע
UM. PATREM. OM	ום. פאטרעם. ום
NIPOTEENHE(N?)	ניפוטעעןהע(ן?)
CREATOREM. C	כרעאטורעם. כ
AELI. ET TER	עלי. עת. תער
RAEM ET IN IEZ	ראם. עת. ין. יעז
UM CRIZTM (FILI?)	ום. כריזטם [פילי]
UM (DEIUZ?)	ום דעיוז
?	רנירנ ?

The inscription of the painting approximates both Latin and Hebrew, choosing for example the letter Ayin to designate the sound E and Aleph for the letter A (Bloch, 1971, 20-22). Sarfatti also identifies on the edge of the holy table the letters אוע which can be read AVE (Maria).[5]

Fig. 16. Durante Alberti, *Bunavestire*, capela Bunei vestiri
în biserica Madonna dei Monti, 1588, Roma, întreg și detalii de text

It is obvious that the number of connoisseurs of the Hebrew alphabet was small, but there was a Jewish community that could easily read a text, and perhaps, through art, could be converted to Christianity. This is the case of the Annunciation by Durante Alberti (c. 1556 - 1623) in the church of Madonna dei Monti in Rome. Here the Hebrew text is aimed at the Jew who knows the Scriptures and whose prophetic fulfillment of the messianic passage in the prophet Isaiah is revealed. In this case we know the origin of the text, it is about Andrea del Monte a convert from Judaism who becomes the Hebraist

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[5] Sᴀʀꜰᴀᴛᴛɪ Gad B., *Hebrew Script in Western Visual Arts, Italia: Studi e ricerche sulla storia, la cultura e la letteratura degli Ebrei d'Italia 13-15* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2001) 451-547.

of the Apostolic Library of the Vatican.[6] He is both the sponsor and the conceptual author of the painting, and places it in the Chapel of the Annunciation, where the new converts and the catechumens came to listen to him. Del Monte, a new Paul, who is named by Pope Gregory XIII as a preacher of the Jews of Rome, often quotes the Old Testament in a messianic key, speaking to the audience in his own language. The painting shows the scene of the Annunciation which seems to have a title in the upper register with the text: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38), and at the bottom, the open book at the feet of the Virgin contains the text: "The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the Virgin will bear in her womb and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel "(Isaiah 7:14). "He will eat butter and honey" (reference to the tradition of offering butter and honey to the newly baptized[7]).

A collaboration between a famous artist and a rabbi gave birth to one of the most famous paintings in the history of art, The Feast of Balthazar by Rembrandt van Rijn, in which the Hebrew letters are the focal point of interest. One of the most famous researchers of the relationship between Rembrandt and the Jewish community in the Netherlands, Shalom Sabar,[8] claims that following the meeting between the great painter and Rabbi Manasse ben Israel on the occasion of his portrait, an intellectual camaraderie developed between the two which became the basis for the arrangement of the Hebrew text in Rembrandt's painting.

The biblical narrative in the book of Daniel tells of the mysterious appearance of a text on the wall of the room where Balthazar used the holy vessels in Solomon's Temple as dishes for the feast he hosted. The prophet Daniel is called to decipher the text that remains recorded as "mene, mene, tekel, ufarsin" ("counted, weighed, divided"[9]). The inscription doesn't follow the rules of Hebrew writing from right to left and from up to down, but vice versa, from top to bottom and then from right to left. Symbolically, this change underscores

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[6] Carolyn H. WOOD and Peter Iver KAUFMAN, "'Tacito Predicatore': The Annunciation Chapel at the Madonna Dei Monti in Rome", *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 90, no. 4 (2004) 634-649. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25026694. accessed 24.03.2020.

[7] Ibidem, 641.

[8] Shalom SABAR, *Between Calvinists and Jews: Hebrew Script in Rembrandt's Art,* în Beyond the Yellow Badge (ed. M. Merback; Leiden, 2008) 371-404; *Rembrandt from right to left*, Segula, nr. 49, Octombrie 2019.

[9] Accordind to the JewishEncyclipedia.com, each of the three words has a double meaning: מנא "to count" și "to end"; תקל "to weight" și "to leave want"; פרס, "to share" și "Persia".

the cryptic message, but there may still be a reason why Rembrandt chose this arrangement of the text.
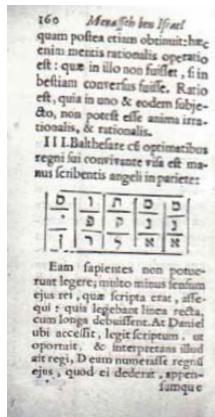
Fig. 17 left: Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, *Belshazzar's Feast*,
oil on canvas, c. 1635-1638, 167.6 x 209.2 cm, National Gallery, London
Fig. 18 right: Reproduction of Menasseh Ben Israel *De Termino Vitae,* page 160, 1639,
in which the letters follow the same arrangement as in Rembrandt's painting

   While Rembrandt was working on *Belshazzar's feast*, Menasse ben Israel was working on his book *De termino vitae*, which was commissioned by the Christian community and in which the author would clarify the issue of divine providence. Page 160 of the manuscript shows the diagram of the text from the book of Daniel arranged in the same registers as in Rembrandt's painting. But the painting was completed between 1635 and 1638 and Ben Israel's manuscript was published in 1639. It is more plausible that the author made the arrangement of the future book available to the painter than that the rabbi was inspired by the painter. A further connection between them was also evident in Rembrandt's illustrations for Ben Israel's 1655 book Piedra Gloriosa.[10]
   In fact, in his painting of Moses with the tablets of the law of 1659, where the Hebrew text of the Decalogue appears, it seems that Rembrandt understood the proper meaning of the word קָרַן (Keren), which means both horns, but also ray of light. Michelangelo sculpted Moses horned, but the Dutch painter depicts the Prophet with his face flooded with light. According to the list of

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[10] https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/samuel-menasseh-ben-israel-rembrandt-harmensz-van-rijn-dutch-b-1606-d-1669-printmaker/lAHHOUKVZk4UfA, accessed 20.03.2021; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1848-0911-22 accessed 20.03.2021

the researcher Gad B. Sarfatti, Rembrandt has eight works that contain Hebrew letters or text.[11]

The presentation at the Temple is a theme in which a number of artists such as Hans Holbein, Master Polling, Hans Pleydenwurff, Hans Schaufelein or Francesco Francia inserted Hebrew inscriptions to emphasize the location of the event described, the great Temple in Jerusalem.

The presentation at the Temple by Lorenzo Costa at the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin, of which only one photograph has been preserved, is a telling example of the use of the Hebrew language in Christian-themed art as a link between the two great religions.

Although Lorenzo Costa signs his name in Hebrew in his other work *Saint Sebastian*, it is likely that he was guided in his inscriptions by the sponsor of the Presentation to the Temple, Anton Galeazzo, vice dean of the University of Bologna who had a chair of Hebrew language, and close relations to the Jewish community.

Moreover, Anton Galeazzo appears in this painting, kneeling in the same plane with Saint Anne, certainly his association with the Hebrew text supported his image as a scholar.

Fig. 19. Costa Lorenzo, *Presentation at the Temple*, whole and detail of inscription

In the foreground, Saint Anne holds in her hands and shows a text deciphered by the researcher Delia Haitovsky as follows:[12]

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[11] SARFATTI, 2001, 467.

[12] Dalia HAITOVSKY, "A New Look at a Lost Painting: The Hebrew Inscription in Lorenzo Costa's 'Presentation in the Temple'", *Artibus Et Historiae*, vol. 15, no. 29 (1994) 111-120. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1483488

nr	Text in Hebrew	Translation
1.	את דורו מי ישוחח	and who shall declare his generation? (Isaiah 53:8)
2.	כי זה הילד יולד לנו	Because *this* child was born for us
3.	וזה הבן ניתן	And *this* son given
4.	לנו אשר	Us, that (partially covered by saint Anne's hand)
5.	הנביאים	The prophets
6.	נגלאותיו or נפלאותיך	Your wonders / his wonders/ their wonders
7.	תודו יי	Thank The Lord (The name of The Lord is abbreviated with: Yod Yod)

Fig. 20. Table of Hebrew inscription in Presentation at the Temple by
Lorenzo Costa, and translation

The signing of the artwork in Hebrew is meant to be a sign of the painter's erudition, but there is a difference between the Costa delicate signature and Marco Palmezzano's ostentatious name the bottom of *The Carrying of the Cross* and the *Holy Family with St. John the Baptist*.
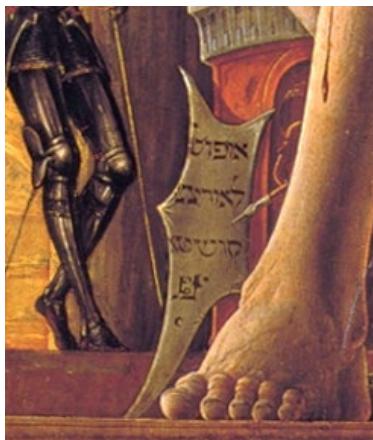
Fig. 21. Costa Lorenzo (1460-1535)
Saint Sebastian 1480-85, 171,7 x 58,4 cm,
tempera on wood, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister,
Dresden, whole (right) and detail of signature

Fig. 22. Palmezzano Marco
(c. 1458-1539), *Carrying of the Cross,*
oil on canvas, 58.5 x 90 cm,
Galeria, Brescia, Italy

Fig. 23. Palmezzano Marco, *Holy family with
John the Baptist,* c. 1530,
oil on wood, Phoenix Art Museum, USA

Perhaps the most representative example of theological scholarship enshrined in the image-text relationship is in the chapel of the Château d'Urfe in Saint-Étienne-le-Molard, France, whose preciousness has given it the name Sacellum Mirabile (Wonderful Chapel). Claude d'Urfé, the creator of the chapel's artistic program and master of the castle, collaborated with the painter Siciolante da Sermoneta to create large paintings with biblical scenes accompanied by oversized quotations that make parallel biblical references for a deeper understanding of Scripture.

In the scene from Genesis 22:11-12 depicting the *Sacrifice of Abraham*, the quote accompanying the painting is from the book of Habakkuk 2:4 "but the just shall live by his faith"[13] and Genesis 14:18 (*Melchizedek making an offering to the Lord*), is accompanied by the text from the Proverbs 9:5: "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine *which* I have mingled".[14] Psalm 104:27: "that thou mayest give them their meat in due season" accompanies the image of the prophet Elijah fed by an angel of the Lord (Kings 19:5-8), and the extraction of honey from the lion's mouth by Samson (Judges 14:8-9) is adorned with

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[13] All quotes are from the King James Bible online: www.kingjamesbibleonline.org

[14] https://patrimoine.auvergnerhonealpes.fr/DOSSNUM/BOEN/im42000733/index.htm

the inscription from Amos 3:8: "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" and also "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! *yea, sweeter* than honey to my mouth!" from Psalm 119:103. Also, above the painting of the apostle the inscription reads: "For the kingdom *is* the LORD'S" from psalm 22 verse 28 (verse 29 în the chapel).[15]

Fig. 24. Château de la Bastie d'Urfé chapel, detail

Fig. 25. Siciolante da Sermoneta Gerolamo *Abraham's sacrifice*, 1549, oil on canvas, 172 x 129 cm

Fig. 26. Siciolante da Sermoneta Gerolamo *Melchizedek offering breas and whine,* 1549, oil on canvas 172 x 129 cm

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[15] Ibidem.

The Eucharistic themed scenes (the main theme of the chapel) are an overview of the whole Scripture. The Passover feast is joined by a quote from Psalm 22:27 (26 in the KJV): "The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live forever".[16] The scene on the south wall depicting the meeting of the patriarch Abraham and Melchizedek from Genesis 14:18-29 has an inscription from Psalm 110:4 "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek".[17] Two large semicircular paintings depict the raining of the manna, Israelites collecting it and Moses receiving water by striking the rock, all images linked to the Eucharist.[18]

For those who cannot read the Hebrew inscription, they are offered the quote in Latin format. The chapel is a masterpiece of erudition, craftsmanship and aesthetics, an increasingly rare combination in contemporary culture.

A similar juxtaposition between theme, text and image I found in the Sacrament of Repentance by Nicolas Poussin painted in 1647.[19] The painter chooses to describe one of the 7 mysteries through a scene from the New Testament, to which he adds a discreet Hebrew text. It is about the supper offered by Simon the Pharisee, at which Christ shows the sinful but humble woman to be more virtuous than the dismayed Pharisees. The sinful woman, the embodiment of repentance, is placed on the left edge of the composition, almost out of sight, but the gesture of Christ brings her back to the attention of the Pharisees and the viewer.

The inscription is a modified version of Psalm 25, verse 15 (or in the Orthodox Bible version, 24:16), "My eyes are ever unto the Lord" which becomes in the painting: "My eyes are always to the letter of the law of the Lord" after the interpretation of the researchers Cropper and Dempsey.[20] The Pharisees cannot go deeper into the letter of the Law and therefore do not recognize the nature of Jesus and his gestures. The small change in text denotes a refined knowledge of the Hebrew language and Christian theology.

Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674), skillful Hebrew inscriptions on the priestly garment, playfully appearing and again hiding between the folds in *Christ in the house of Simeon the Pharisee*. The inscription is *Thou shalt not make*

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[16] https://patrimoine.auvergnerhonealpes.fr/DOSSNUM/BOEN/im42000730/index.htm

[17] Ibidem.

[18] https://patrimoine.auvergnerhonealpes.fr/DOSSNUM/BOEN/im42000731/index.htm

[19] Richard NEER, "Poussin;s Useless Treasurea", în *Judaism and Christian Art*, edited by H. KESSLER and D. NIRENBERG (Philadelphia: University of Penssylvania Press, 2010) 328-358.

[20] The interpretation is of the word חוק which the author translates with חוק /the Law (The letter of the Law).

unto thee any graven image (Exodus 20: 2-4) part of the first commandment and the words *Sh'ma Israel* are written on the priest's headdress. This is not the only time the artist uses these inscriptions; they are also used in *Caesar's Tribute* at the Musée des beaux-arts in Montreal, where the inscriptions are on a yellow background of the garment and headdress in order to be evident, and also three paintings of the crucifixion that contains the Hebrew versions of the Titulus Crucis. Priestly vestments are the elements that contain the most Hebrew inscriptions, either on their hems, where the body emerges from the garment (neck, hands, feet), or only on headdress, where The Ineffable Name is often written, or in some cases just the word *Kadosh* (holy).

Fig. 27. Nicolas Poussin, *Penance*, 1647, whole and detail of Hebrew inscriptions. Duke of Sutherland Collection, on loan to National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh. Used by kind permission

The Hebrew inscriptions also appear in the images of the prophets, in subjects that include the Temple in Jerusalem (the presentation at the temple of the Virgin Mary and the infant Christ, or Jesus in the temple at 12 years old) but also in the parable of the adulterous woman where the Scripture records that Jesus wrote something on ground. In all cases, the artists supplemented and visually enriched the image taken from the Scripture through more or less complex inscriptions.

Fig. 28. Champaigne Philippe de, *Christ in the home of Simon the pharisee*, c. 1656, oil on canvas Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes, France

Fig. 29. Dome of „The descent of the Holy Spirit" orthodox church Timișoara, Romania. The author of the artistic programme is Fr Constantin Jinga PhD.

Hebrew inscriptions are extremely rare in the byzantine art tradition, so finding several of them in an orthodox church painting in Timisoara, Romania, is unexpected to say the least. The church dome contains the ineffable Name (Y-H-W-H) above each evangelist and also the letters making up the appellative Adonai (my Lord) below them, delicately hidden in the plumage of four majestic peacocks.

Angel/man – *Yod* – י – Matthew- Daled – ד
Vulture – *Hey* – ה – John – Nun – נ
Ox – *Wav* – ו – Luke – Yod – י
Lion – *Hey* – ה – Mark – Aleph – א

On the vertical register, the heavenly Liturgy is followed by the four sacred animals, Hebrew letters of the *Tetragramaton*, the four evangelists and again the Hebrew letters of *Adonai*, watching over a representation of the garden of Eden, heaven on earth, where all are invited during each holy Liturgy. Praying "in the name of God" becomes praying within the Name, being immersed in the holiness of the sacred space alongside the holy counterparts. The inscriptions in this church are also exceptional due to being the product of contemporary painting, when although artists have more access to the Hebrew language, they do not show interest in incorporating it in their artworks.

Hebrew inscription often marked the historical, social, and theological context in which they were made, in order to visually illustrate what most viewers could not read, but sometimes to attract new converts. At the same time, they were a form of display of the culture and erudition of the artist or sponsor. The phenomenon of Hebraism in art lasted for several centuries but the premise of the theoretical study preceding the creation of a work of art, its responsible encoding and the artist's return to the role of pedagogue, which can be deduced from the above analysis, can become a model for future visual artists. If art is meant to last over time, the artist's responsibility is even greater, as he is a public figure with an impact on the formation of society, whether he is aware of this role or not.

However, sacred fervor has almost completely disappeared from the contemporary artistic product, being limited to a small niche of "sacred art" that is perceived as obsolete and viewed with suspicion by both artists and art critics. Creating art inspired by Scripture has become an act of courage and a form of testimony of faith. However, visual art is in itself an act of public confession. Whether the artist decides consciously or not, his work has a

pedagogical value. Artists, if they exhibit their work, also present a creed that accompanies the act of creation, and the artwork becomes a public statement. As the late philosopher and esthetician Roger Scruton said: "The sacred and the beautiful stand together, like two doors leading to a single room where we find our home."

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