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Arguments for a Judeo-Christian Identity in the Writings of Antonio de Ferrariis: Pro-Converso Polemics in Southern Italy

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ABSTRACT

In the letter titled *De Neophitis*, Antonio de Ferrariis, Galateo (1448-1517) counters entrenched prejudices against conversos in southern Italy. The letter is addressed to Duke Belisario Acquaviva in response to critique over the marriage of one of the duke's sons to a conversa. The letter emphasizes the Jewish roots of Christianity, and perhaps also calls for a Judeo-Christian religious identity. The author also accentuates the Jewishness of Christ, the Virgin, and the first apostles. The present article attempts to analyze Galateo's arguments in favor of the New Christians, examine his religious notions, and identify his sources. As yet, the Italian "converso question" and its polemics have so far eluded the attention of scholars who mapped various aspects of this very question in Spain and Portugal.

KEYWORDS: Antonio de Ferrariis (Galateo), Belisario Acquaviva, conversos, religious polemics, Humanism, jews.

RESUMO

Na carta intitulada *De Neophitis*, Antonio de Ferrariis, Galateo (1448-1517) combate preconceitos enraizados contra os conversos no Sul de Itália. A carta é endereçada ao Duque Belisario Acquaviva em resposta às críticas contra o casamento de um dos filhos do duque com uma conversa. A carta enfatiza as raízes judaicas do Cristianismo e talvez também evoque uma identidade religiosa judeo-cristã. O autor sublinha igualmente o judaísmo de Cristo, da Virgem e dos primeiros apóstolos. O presente artigo tenta analisar os argumentos de Galateo a favor dos cristãos-novos, examina as suas noções religiosas bem como as suas fontes. Até ao momento, a "questão conversa" italiana e a polémica em torno desta tem escapado aos historiadores que traçaram os vários aspectos desta mesma questão em Espanha e em Portugal.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Antonio de Ferrariis (Galateo), Belisario Acquaviva, conversos, polémica religiosa, Humanismo, judeus.

Political and theological debates concerning the social status or the sincerity of conversion of New Christians hardly preoccupied Italian humanists, and if these topics were mentioned all in the literature of the period, it was usually in the Hispanic context.¹ A notable exception is the letter of Antonio de Ferrariis titled “*De Neophitis*” where the author counters entrenched prejudices against those called ‘*neophiti*’ (the usual term for converted Jews in southern Italy) and puts in evidence the Jewish roots of Christianity.

Antonio de Ferrariis (1448-1517), who chose to be known as Galateo (for Galatone, his place of birth in southern Italy), a physician and a humanist, was a prolific writer.² He is the author of several philosophical-theological treatises – *Dialogus de Heremita* (Dialogue of the Hermit),³ *Esposizione del Pater Noster* (Exposition of Our Lord’s Prayer), *De nobilitate* (On nobility), *De Educatione* (On Education),

¹ See Arturo Farinelli’s classic study on the use of the epithet “Marrano” in Italy: Arturo Farinelli, *Marrano (Storia di un vituperio)*, Geneve, L.S. Olschki, 1925 (esp. pp. 43ff.). See also the discussion in Felipe Ruiz Martín, “La expulsión de los judíos del reino de Nápoles,” *Hispania*, vol. 9, 1949, pp. 28-240 (esp. pp. 32-35). A good example of the confusion of Italian thinkers regarding the “marrano” question is Niccolò Machiavelli’s praise for Ferdinand the Catholic in *The Prince* for his “pious cruelty,” referring thus to the expulsion of the ‘marrani’ from his reign: “Oltre a questo, per potere intraprendere maggiore imprese, servandosi sempre della religione si volse a una pietosa crudeltà, cacciando e spogliando el suo regno de’ Marrani: né può essere questo esempio più miserabile né più raro,” Niccolò Machiavelli, “*Il Principe*”, ed. Mario Bonfantini, in R. Mattoli et al. (ed.), *La letteratura italiana: Storia e testi*, vol. 29, Milan, R. Ricciardi, 1954, p. 72. For an English translation, see Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*. Translated and edited by William Connel, Boston, Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2005, p. 109.

² Although there are many studies on Antonio de Ferrariis and his works, not all of them are of equal value. Moreover, recent research has demonstrated that earlier studies contained many errors, among them his actual date of birth and other details: Donato Moreo, “Tre note per la biografia di Antonio de Galateo”, *Esperienze letterarie*, vol. 4, 1979, pp. 89-97. For a critical history of his works, see Paola Andrioli Nemola, *Catalogo delle opere di Antonio de Ferrariis (Galateo)*, Lecce, Milella, 1982.

³ In this lengthy treatise, written in the form of a dialogue, the protagonist is the Hermit, whose soul faces the punishments of Hell. Nonetheless, thanks to his dialectic arguments and his reason, he succeeds in convincing his celestial judges to permit him to enter Paradise: Antonio Galateo, “Eremita”, Latin original and translation into Italian by Leonardo Stampacchia, in Eugenio Garin (ed.), *Prosatori latini del quattrocento*, vol. 13, Milan-Naples, R. Ricciardi, 1952, pp. 1068-1125 (all further references are to this edition). According to Garin, “Eremita” was written in 1496: Idem, *Ibidem*, p. 1067. The dialogue is adduced by modern scholars as proof of Galateo’s anti-dogmatism, a satirical criticism of the hypocrisy and rigidity that characterized the established church. Pol Tordeur sees in *L’Eremita* “the spirit of religious reform” (le souffle de la réforme religieuse) but considers it still part of the medieval tradition describing the peregrinations of the soul after death: Antonio de Ferrariis, dit Galateo, *De Educatione (1505)*. Texte établi et introduit par Carlo Vecce. Traduction française de Pol Tordeur. Notes de Carlo Vecce et Pol Tordeur, Leuven, Peeters Press, 1993, p. 17. On the *Dialogue of the Hermit*, see Paola Andrioli Nemola, “Letteratura e contestazione nel dialogo «L’Eremita» di Antonio de Ferrariis detto Galateo”, *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, vol. 169, 1992, pp. 481-509.

and *De Neophitis* (On the New Christians) the focus of our discussion.⁴ Galateo's many treatises and letters have been examined in the Italian humanistic-literary context, but less attention has been paid to the political and religious ideas they propagated.⁵ Virtually unknown till the 1930s, *De Neophitis* was brought to public attention by Benedetto Croce, who published it in an attempt to protest the Italian racial laws.⁶ However, Croce presented this text as a "defense of the Jews," whereas it is a letter written "in defense of the New Christians," that is, converted Jews. This letter, or rather a short treatise, emphasizes the Jewish roots of Christianity and perhaps also calls for a Judeo-Christian religious identity.

Since the 1800s, the Latin text of this letter had been published several times, either as a single text or included in collections of Galateo's works; recently, it was translated into Italian.⁷ However, *De Neophitis* has escaped modern analysis, and no attempt has been made to examine Galateo's arguments, trace his sources, or even to discover his motives for introducing the subject. Lately, there has been a renewed interest in this epistle, but also the most recent publications fail to thoroughly analyze the text of the epistle and its context, preferring to dwell only on its spirit of humanity and tolerance.⁸

In the following pages, I would like to analyze Galateo's arguments in favor of the New Christians and try to identify some of his sources. As will be shown presently, many arguments and certain religious notions can be traced to Juan

⁴ An old but still relevant study is that of Dina Colucci, who examined several of Galateo's letters and treatises: Dina Colucci, "Antonio de Ferrariis detto il Galateo", *Rinascenza Salentina*, V, 1937, 2, pp. 97-128; VI, 1938, 1, pp. 1-44, e 2, pp. 212-255; VII, 1939, 1, pp. 24-50. For a biography of Galateo and the full list of writings, see Angelo Romano, "De Ferrariis, Antonio", *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 33, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1987, pp. 738-741.

⁵ There are several relatively recent publications of specific works. Galateo's letters on nobility are published in English translation with commentary: Albert Rabil, *Knowledge, Goodness, and Power: The Debate over Nobility among Quattrocento Italian Humanists*, Binghamton, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1991, pp. 316-362; Galateo's letter "On Education" is published in French translation alongside the original Latin *De Educatione...*, *op. cit.*, (see note 3 above).

⁶ Benedetto Croce, "Un'epistola del Galateo in difesa degli ebrei", *La Critica*, vol. 36, 1938, pp. 71-76; Idem, "Un' epistola del Galateo in difesa degli ebrei", *Aneddoti di varia letteratura*, Napoli, R. Ricciardi, 1942, pp. 104-110.

⁷ "De Neophitis", *Spicilegium Romanum*, vol. 8, Roma, Angelo Mai, 1842, pp. 583-587; Antonio De Ferrariis Galateo, *Epistole*. Ed. Antonio Altamura, Lecce, Centro di Studi Salentini, 1959, pp. 267-289; Antonio de Ferrariis Galateo, *Lettere, testo*. Traduzione e commento di Amleto Pallara, Lecce, Conte Editore, 1996, pp. 173-181.

⁸ Vittorio Zacchino, "Uno scritto di Antonio de Ferrariis Galateo in difesa degli ebrei: De Neophitis (1511)", *Sefer Yuhasin*, vol. 13, 1997, pp. 23-33 and more recently: Antonietta Orrico, "Antonio De Ferrariis Galateo, il duca Bellisario Acquaviva, e gli Ebrei nella Nardò quattro-cinquecentesca", *L'Idomeneo*, n.° 23, 2017, pp. 125-152.

Ramírez de Lucena's *De Vita Beata*.⁹ But some of the author's attitudes towards Jews and Judaism could have been inspired by Italian humanistic writings, such as Gianozzo Manetti's *Adversus Judeos et gentes* (Against the Jews and the Gentiles) and Marsilio Ficino's *Prisca Theologia* (Ancient Theology).¹⁰

Galateo's *De Neophitis* is addressed to Belisario Acquaviva d'Aragona (1464-1528). Belisario Acquaviva became lord of Nardò in 1497, first as count and later, from 1506 onward, as duke. He was one of the most powerful princes in southern Italy. Like Galateo, Acquaviva is known as a man of letters, the author of several treatises and epistles written to well-known humanists of this period.¹¹ Galateo's letter to Acquaviva was apparently penned in response to the criticism voiced in certain circles over the marriage of one of Acquaviva's sons, probably a natural son (i.e., illegitimate) to a *neophita*, a Jewish woman converted to Christianity, or the descendant of converts. The letter gives no clue as to the woman's family or connections beyond the statement that she "was born to a worthy father of good reputation and an honest mother," with whom Galateo says he was well acquainted.¹²

A few recent studies mention Galateo's *De Neophitis*, but they fail to grasp its context mainly because they erroneously identify the New Christians who were living in the Kingdom of Naples at the time as foreigners or as Jews who were forced to convert by the Spanish authorities in the early sixteenth century. In

⁹ *The Vita Beata*, written in 1463, was printed several times. Here the references are to an early printed edition, and a modern classical publication, the latter more accessible to the general public. Sixteenth-century edition: Juan Ramírez de Lucena, *Tractado de Vita Beata*, Medina del Campo, 1543. Modern edition: 'Libro de Vita Beata por Juan de Lucena', *Opúsculos literarios de los siglos XIV a XVI*. Ed. Antonio Paz y Méliá, Madrid, M. Telo, 1892, pp. 105-205.

¹⁰ Gianozzo Manetti, *Against the Jews and the Gentiles*, books I-IV. Eds. Stefano U. Baldassarri and Daniela Pagliara. Trans. David Marsh, The I Tatti Renaissance Library, Cambridge, London, Harvard University Press, 2017, p. 35. And see the discussion of these notions in Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness. Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, vol. 2, London, Constable, 1970, p. 729. On Ficino's thought and its relevance to attitudes towards Judaism in the Renaissance, see Moshe Idel, "Prisca Theologia in Marsilio Ficino and in Some Jewish Treatments", *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*. Eds. Michael J. B. Allen, Valery Rees, Martin Davies, Leiden, Brill, 2002, pp. 137-178; Fabrizio Lelli, "Jews, Humanists, and the Reappraisal of Pagan Wisdom", *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*. Eds. Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson, Philadelphia, University of Philadelphia Press, 2004, pp. 49-70.

¹¹ On Belisario Acquaviva and his humanistic writings, see Domenico Defilippis, *Tradizione umanistica e cultura nobiliare nell'opera di Belisario Acquaviva*, Galatina, Congedo Editore, 1993. Several letters of Acquaviva are published in an Appendix to this book.

¹² All references to the text of *De Neophitis* are from the edition of Pallara, *Lettere*, pp. 173-175 (Latin text), 177-181 (Italian translation). For the full bibliographical details, see note 7 above. The English translations are mine.

an article that analyzes the trials held in Naples against Judaizers between 1569 and 1582, Pierroberto Scaramella mentions Galateo's letter, suggesting that the young daughter-in-law of Acquaviva may have been of Spanish origins since "Spanish families expelled from the Iberian Peninsula chose to settle in Apulia and Calabria."¹³ Shulamit Furstenberg-Levi, in her study on the humanistic academies of southern Italy, refers to the "neophytes" in Galateo's letter as "a pertinent issue at that time in southern Italy under Spanish rule, where Jews were forced to convert or leave..."¹⁴ An important clue to the true identity of all Christians of Jewish origins living at the time in southern Italy is provided by Giuliano Passero, a contemporary writer whose journals supply many important details on the events of the late 1490s and early 1500s. Passero quotes a letter of Ferdinand the Catholic regarding the expulsion of the Jews and *conversos* from the Kingdom of Naples in 1510, explaining that the king made that decision "only for the Jews, the New Christians who were living in that kingdom [of Naples], and also because of the *Marrani* and the bad Christians that his majesty had expelled from the kingdoms of Spain and the island of Sicily" (*solo lo faceva per li Giudei, et christiani novelli, che erano in detto Regno, et anco per li Marrani, et mali christiani che sua Maestà haveva cacciati dalli Regni di Spagna et dall'Isola di Sicilia*).¹⁵ Passero thus identifies the various groups affected by the edicts of expulsion of November 1510.¹⁶ The first are the Jews. Most of them, but not all, were expelled at that time.¹⁷ The *conversos* are divided into several categories, correctly listed by Passero: the *Cristiani novelli* who were indigenous to the kingdom, the *Marrani* who were

¹³ "e segnatamente in quelle regioni, come la Puglia e la Calabria che furono terra di elezione delle famiglie spagnole espulse dalla penisola iberica...". Pierroberto Scaramella, "La campagna contro i giudaizzanti nel regno di Napoli (1569-1582): antecedenti e risvolti di un'azione inquisitoriale", *Atti dei convegni Lincei*, n.° 191: *Le inquisizioni cristiane e gli ebrei*, Rome, Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 2003, p. 358.

¹⁴ Shulamit Furstenberg-Levi, *The Accademia Pontaniana. A Model of a Humanist Network*, Leiden, Brill, 2016, p. 163.

¹⁵ Giuliano Passero, *Cittadino Napoletano o sia Prima pubblicazione in istampa, che delle Storie in forma di Giornali, le quali sotto nome di questo Autore finora erano andate manoscritte*. Ed. Michele Maria Vecchioni, Napoli, Presso Vincenzo Orsino, 1785, p. 172.

¹⁶ Two edicts were issued on the 21 of November 1510, one for the Jews and another for the converts: Cesare Colafemmina, "1510, Novembre 21: le prammatiche di espulsione degli Ebrei e dei Neofiti dal regno di Napoli", *Sefer Yûhasin*, vol. 26, 2010, pp. 1-21.

¹⁷ The Jews in Naples after the expulsion of 1510: Nicola Ferorelli, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia meridionale*. Ed. Filena Patroni Griffi, updated edition, Napoli, Dick Peerson, 1990 [first published: Turin, 1915], pp. 214, 219-233; David Abulafia, "Insediamenti, diaspora e tradizione ebraica: gli ebrei del regno di Napoli da Ferdinando Il Cattolico a Carlo V", *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane*, vol. 119, 2001, pp. 171-200; Cesare Colafemmina, *The Jews in Calabria*, Leiden, Brill, 2012, Introduction.

either Jews or *conversos* of Spanish origins,¹⁸ while the ‘bad Christians’ were also foreigners – Iberian and Sicilian.

Even the first category, however, the local *Cristiani novelli*, belonged to two different groups. The older group was formed by descendants of the Jews who converted during the mass conversion of the late thirteenth century and continued to be regarded as a distinctive community of *neophiti* for generations. Their status as *neophiti* (*neofiti*), even after the passage of one hundred and fifty years, is mentioned in a Bull issued in 1453 by Pope Nicholas V.¹⁹ By Galateo’s time, these *neophiti* had lived as Christians for about two hundred years. A new wave of conversions occurred during the riots and persecutions of 1495 that accompanied the French occupation of the Kingdom of Naples.²⁰ After the Kingdom of Naples came under Spanish rule, the presence of large numbers of converts was noted by Gonsalvo Fernández de Aguilar de Córdoba (the *Gran Capitán*), the first viceroy of Naples. In 1504, in a letter addressed to the Catholic monarchs, he wrote: “there are few *judíos de seña*²¹ in the kingdom [of Naples]; there are many who still are [Jews] in essence, because all of them had been forced to become Christians when King Charles [of France] came to this kingdom, and they call themselves baptized Jews.”²²

Now, although some foreign *conversos* or *marrani* came to the Kingdom of Naples in the wake of the expulsions of 1492 from Spain and Sicily, and a few years later from Portugal, the majority were local. Since Galateo added in his letter that he

¹⁸ See note 1 above on the use of the term “*marrani*” in Italian sources.

¹⁹ On the mass conversions of the 1290s, see Joshua Starr, “The Mass Conversion of Jews in Southern Italy (1290-1293)”, *Speculum*, vol. 21, 1946, pp. 203-211; Umberto Cassuto, “Un ignoto capitolo di storia ebraica”, *Judaica Festschrift zu Hermann Cohens Siebzgstem Geburtstage*, Berlin, B. Cassirer, 1912, pp. 388-404; idem, “Sulla storia degli ebrei nell’Italia meridionale”, *Il Vessillo Israelitico*, vol. 59, 1911, pp. 282-285, 338-341, 422-442; Benjamin Scheller, “The Materiality of Difference: Converted Jews and Their Descendants in the Late Medieval Kingdom of Naples”, *Medieval History Journal*, vol. 12, 2009, pp. 405-430. Bull of Pope Nicholas V: Shlomo Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, vol. 2, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1991, n.º 814, pp. 997-998.

²⁰ Conversions during the French occupation: Ferorelli, *Gli ebrei...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-211, 265-266. However, although Ferorelli mentions the riots and the attacks against the Jews of the kingdom and the resulting conversions, he offers no analysis. This topic is the focus of a new study: Nadia Zeldes, “The Mass Conversion of 1495 in South Italy and its Precedents: A Comparative Approach” (forthcoming in *Medieval Encounters*).

²¹ The term indicates the Jewish badge, a red piece of cloth that Jews were forced to wear on their clothes.

²² New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, MS NH 23. On the appointment of the *Gran Capitán* as viceroy of Naples: Carlos J. Hernando Sánchez, “El *Gran Capitán* y los inicios del virreinato de Napoles: Nobleza y estado en la expansión europea de la monarquía bajo los reyes católicos”, *El Tratado de Tordesillas y su época*. Eds. Luis Antonio Ribot García, Adolfo Carrasco Martínez, Luis Adão da Fonseca, vol. 3, Madrid, Junta de Castilla y Leon, 1995, pp. 1817-1854.

personally knew the young *neophita*'s family, they were likely local, either recently converted, or the descendants of the generations-old group of Italian *neophiti*. In any case, the long-term presence of these converts in southern Italy allows for a comparison with the better-known situation in the Iberian kingdoms. And yet, the Italian "converso question" has so far eluded the attention of scholars who mapped various aspects of this very question in Spain and Portugal.

On the author and the historical background

Antonio de Ferrariis was born to a family that belonged to the old Greek community of southern Italy and was educated at the Greek Basilian monastery of St. Nicola di Casole, near Otranto. Later, he studied Latin and Greek at the humanistic academy of Nardò. As a young man, he joined the Neapolitan humanistic academy headed by Giovanni Pontano, and throughout his life he corresponded with prestigious humanists of his time. In 1490, he was accorded the position of the royal physician by King Ferrante I of Naples. In 1495, during the French invasion of southern Italy, he left Naples for Lecce (in southeastern Apulia). Together with other humanists, he founded the Academy of Lecce, known as the *Accademia Lupiense*. In his *De Neophitis*, he mentions that he had written the second treatise on nobility "under the porch of Hieronymus (*sub hieronymiana portico*)," meaning the Lecce academy.²³ This, by the way, gives us a terminus post quem for the dating of *De Neophitis*.

After the Aragonese dynasty was reinstated, Galateo was recalled to Naples. His stay there was not long as the Aragonese rule lasted only from the summer of 1495 till the forced abdication of the last king, Federico, in 1502. In 1501, Galateo left Naples and returned to Apulia. Around 1503, he settled in Bari under the protection of Countess Duchess Isabella d'Aragona. Between 1495 and 1503, the Spanish armies under the leadership of Gonzalvo Fernández de Córdoba battled the French and conquered southern Italy, and in 1503, the Castilian general became the first Spanish viceroy of the Kingdom of Naples.²⁴

²³ Pallara, *Lettere...*, *op. cit.*, p. 173. *Sub Hieronymiana portico* refers to the academy founded by Galateo and his friends in Lecce after leaving Naples in 1495. The members met in the house of Girolamo Ingenuo (or in Latinized form: Hieronymo Ingenuo), hence the name: Furstenberg-Levi, *The Accademia Pontaniana...*, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

²⁴ The biographical details appear in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani...*, *op. cit.*, For an abbreviated biography in English and a description of some of Galateo's works, see Rabil, *Knowledge, Goodness, and*

Like many humanists of southern Italy, Antonio de Ferrariis was a loyal supporter of the Aragonese dynasty and therefore resentful of the new regime. His feelings are rather obvious in *De Educatione* (written ca. 1505), a letter addressed to Crisostomo de Colonna, the tutor of the young Aragonese prince Ferrante, pretender to the throne of Naples who was at the time exiled in Spain. In this missive, which has much bearing on our discourse, Galateo openly expresses his hatred for Spanish culture, criticizes many of the customs of Spain, and portrays both the Spaniards and the French as barbarians. There are, however, certain exceptions to this opinion which will be noted presently.²⁵

Galateo's Religious Stand and the Defense of the New Christians

Galateo's approach to Judaism and his defense of the New Christians as they appear in *De Neophitis* are not divorced from the religious views he expressed in his other treatises, particularly in the dialogue titled *The Hermit*, written between the years 1496 and 1498, probably preceding *De Neophitis*.²⁶ In this dialogue, Galateo tells of the tribulations suffered by the soul of the eponymous hermit, who is described as "a good man" (*vir bonus*) during his lifetime. Despite this, he is denied entry into Paradise, unjustly accused of crimes he didn't commit: "needlessly, for no wickedness, oppressed for nothing, for having committed not even the slightest sin."²⁷ The soul is disputed by two spirits, Cacodemone (the evil one, or the Devil) and Calodemone (the good spirit, or guardian Angel). But in the course

Power..., *op. cit.*, pp. 316-323. On the history of the kingdom of Naples in this period, see Giuseppe Galasso, *Il regno di Napoli. Il Mezzogiorno Spagnolo (1494-1622)*, Turin, Utet, 2005, pp. 46-188. For the career of Gonsalvo de Córdoba and especially his involvement in the Italian wars, see Luis Maria de Lojendio, *Gonzalo de Córdoba (El Gran Capitán)*, Madrid, Espasa-Calpe, 1952, pp. 50, 93-259; Carlos José Hernando Sánchez, "Los virreyes de la monarquía española en Italia. Evolución y práctica de un oficio de gobierno", *Studia Historica. Historia Moderna*, vol. 26, 2004, pp. 43-73.

²⁵ For instance, Galateo marvels how the Spanish prefer to trace their origins to the barbarous Goths instead of claiming their Roman ancestry, and he mocks the Spanish "hidalgo" mentality, observing that none of them can lose his honor even if he commits crimes, but may lose it if he writes well, Galateo, *De Educatione...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67, 106-108.

²⁶ Text of *The Hermit*, see note 3 above. According to Garin, "Eremita" was written in 1496: *Ibidem*, p. 1067; see also Paola Andrioli Nemola who quotes other studies, suggesting it was composed between 1496 and 1498: Andrioli Nemola, "l'Eremita...", *op. cit.*, p. 484. The English translations are mine.

²⁷ "hic non ob inimiam inopiam, non ob scelera, minimis enim peccatis urgebatur". Galateo, "Eremita...", *op. cit.*, p. 1070.

of the protagonist's attempts to clear his name, he castigates saints and biblical figures for the evil deeds they committed during their earthly lives, emphasizing the sinful nature of all humans. Some of *The Hermit's* strongest diatribes are directed at Saint Peter, the custodian of Paradise, who is presented as hasty of judgment, believing the accusations of the evil Cacodemone without hearing out the accused, menacing him and saying that he has no time for considering his case: "Oh what desperate impudence on part of a man! With these keys, I shall break all your bones... It is not for me to lose time devoting myself to sit now in judgment."²⁸ *The Hermit's* criticism of Saint Peter is nothing short of astounding. To the apostle's claim that he had relinquished worldly goods to follow Christ, he responds with derision, describing his possessions as "the unworthy boat, the broken net and fisherman's bread" and addressing himself directly to Saint Peter: "the staff and the bag [you exchanged] for gilded chairs and opulent treasure boxes, garnished tables everywhere, and rich vestments for no work of your own... The keys that you are carrying were once made of iron, and now they are gold."²⁹ In his introductory letter addressed to the bishop of Lecce, Marc'Antonio Tolomeo, Galateo is careful to describe his *Eremita* as an allegory, a *fabula* intended to caution his contemporaries, and not as a critique of the forefathers (i.e., biblical figures).³⁰ However, Galateo's condemnation of the venality of the papacy in this work is so harsh that it borders on heterodox dissent.³¹ Although further discussion of this text is beyond the scope of the present article, Galateo's acid mockery of the Church should be taken into account when examining his works, and *De Neophitis* in particular.

Galateo's "trial" of the hermit at the gates of Paradise incorporates many elements present in *De Neophitis*: condemnation of false accusations against innocents who had lived a perfect Christian life; presumptions of nobility by

²⁸ "Invalidam cymbam, fracta retia et piscatoris panes... O hominis perditam audaciam! Ego clavibus tibi ossa perfringam... Non est mihi ocium nunc dicundo iuri assidere". Galateo, "Eremita...", *op. cit.*, pp. 1084, 1086. For further analysis of *L'Eremita*, see: Andrioli Nemola, "L'Eremita...", *op. cit.*, pp. 484-489.

²⁹ "pro baculo et pera, auratas sellas et locupletissima gazofylacia, mensas ubique locorum paratas et ineptas vestes sine laborare habuisti... Ferreae erant quondam istae, quam geris, claves; nunc aureae sunt". Galateo, "Eremita...", *op. cit.*, p. 1086.

³⁰ In the dedicatory letter to Bishop Marc'Antonio Tolomei: "Fabellam hanc scripsi, Praesul dignissime, viventibus, non posteribus" (I have written that parable, venerable Bishop, for the contemporaries, not for posterity), quoted by Andrioli Nemola, "L'Eremita...", *op. cit.*, p. 487, note 16.

³¹ Sebastiano Valerio argues that the criticism of Peter the Apostle is directed at Pope Alexander VI Borgia: "Un'allegoria di Alessandro VI nell'Eremita di Antonio Galateo", *Principato ecclesiastico e risuso dei classici: gli umanisti e Alessandro VI. Atti del convegno di Bari, 22-24 maggio, 2000*. Eds. D. Canfora, M. Chiabo, M. de Nichilo, Roma, Roma nel Rinascimento, 2002, pp. 142-150.

the unworthy, revered saints and patriarchs who sinned or are full of vice in the former; uncouth Barbarians and horrifying mythological figures like Tantalos or Medea who are admired because they belong to classical tradition, in the latter.³² Censure of accepted religious norms is apparent in both works, as will also be shown regarding to *De Neophitis*.

Galateo's defense of the New Christians thus rests on the following elements: rejection of common notions of nobility and fame while stressing individual achievement and personal responsibility, opposition to the popular tendency to discredit individuals by their Jewish origins, and emphasis on the Jewish roots of Christianity. The issue of nobility, which had already preoccupied Galateo in his two letters *On Nobility*,³³ is brought up in *De Neophitis* to combat ingrained prejudice against converted Jews and their descendants, or in other words, to show how futile are notions of purity of blood. Galateo ridicules the fascination with noble ancestors:

I think that the human race (*genus*) has many confused ideas, and therefore it often confers honors upon the unworthy, and stupidly lets itself be enchanted by fame. It denigrates as New Men (*homines novi*) those who should be praised, being ignorant of the fact that one who has been the first to achieve a title of nobility, or he who has already produced wealth is more praiseworthy than he who uses it... A wise woman said these words to the king of the Romans: 'Consider what you are, not where you were born.'³⁴

Here Galateo is reiterating his view that the self-made man is worthier than one who follows in the footsteps of another: "the architect is greater than the artisan, and the master greater than the disciple."³⁵ And he applies the same logic to New Christians contrasting popular attitudes with his admiration for those who convert:

But those who descend from the Jews, we detest, and offensively call them "*neophyti*" ...

³² See the identification of classical and mythological figures mentioned in *De Neophitis* in the English translation, in the Appendix to this article.

³³ *On Nobility*: "Almost all nobility had its beginnings in wicked and disgraceful behaviour [including] slaughter and pillage...": Rabil, *Knowledge, Goodness, and Power...*, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

³⁴ Pallara, *Lettere...*, *op. cit.*, p. 173. The wise woman is Queen Tanaquil, wife of Tarquinius Priscus (616 to 579 BCE), fifth king of Rome, and mother of Tarquinius Superbus. Tanaquil was born to an important Etruscan family, but her husband was of lowly origins and an immigrant (see explanatory note and bibliographical reference in the Appendix).

³⁵ "et architectum artifice, et magistrum discipulo". Idem, *Ibidem*, p. 173.

But if one who descends from the noblest and most ancient nation of the Jews should accept the true orthodox faith, I would consider him to be nobler than one descended from barbarians, even if his ancestors were kings.

This particular passage echoes Juan Ramírez de Lucena's *Tractado de Vita Beata*, in the complaint attributed to the bishop of Burgos, Alonso de Cartagena:

if they are [descended] from the Davids, the Levites, the Maccabees, or the twelve tribes of Israel, no matter how virtuous they are, how far are they from vice, [they say] go, go, you are marrano.³⁶

Galateo had, in fact, read the *Vita Beata* and praised its author. In his *De Educatione*, where he communicates his contempt for anything Spanish, he concedes that "certain Spaniards are among the few that I sincerely value, who I do not consider descendent from the Goths or the Hispanics, but from the Romans: Juan de Mena, and Villena in *The Labours of Hercules*, and Lucena in the *Vita Beata*."³⁷ It is, then, quite plausible that *De Neophitis* is, to some extent, inspired by the latter, but Galateo goes much further than the *Vita Beata*. Although *De Neophitis* was written to combat prejudice against Jewish converts to Christianity, a large part of this treatise is devoted to Galateo's views of religion. Galateo insists on the debt Christianity owes to the Old Testament and points out the Jewish elements still extant in the Roman Catholic rite:

From where have we gotten our laws? Who has taught us to worship the true God?
Who has taught us to observe good and holy customs? Who has freed us from horrid

³⁶ "El Obispo – No pienses correrme por llamar los ebreos mis padres... y si de los davitas, de los levitas, de los machabeos ó de los doce tribos de Israel, sea quant virtuoso, quant lexos de vicio sea, Vaya, vaya, qu'es marrano", *Tractado de Vita Beata...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30; 'Libro de Vita Beata por Juan de Lucena', in *Opúsculos literarios...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 146, 148.

³⁷ "Hispani quidam, qui inter caeteros plusculum ingenio valuerunt, et quos puto non a Gothis aut Hispanicis, sed a Romanis ortos, Iohannes Mena, et Villena in Laboribus Herculis, et Lucena in Vita Beata...". *De Educatione (1505)...*, *op. cit.*, p. 108. Juan de Mena (1411-1456) was one of the most important Spanish poets of this period; Enrique de Aragón, marquis of Villena (1384-1434), author of *Los doze trabajos de Hércules* (modern edition: ed. M. Morreale, Madrid, Real Academia Española, 1958), and Juan Ramírez de Lucena (1430-1506), author of the *Vita Beata*. The latter, written in 1463, is considered by some scholars to be a Castilian adaptation of the *Dialogus de Felicitate Vitae*, written in 1445 by Bartolomeo Fazio. Juan Carlos Conde López, "El siglo XV castellano a la luz del Diálogo de Vita Beata de Juan de Lucena", *Dicenda. Cuadernos de filología hispánica*, vol. 4, 1985, pp. 11-34 (on the influence of Fazio's work: p. 13). A comparison of the two works is beyond the scope of the present article, but it is important to note that Fazio's original work lacks the pro-converso arguments found in the *Vita Beata*.

and detestable rites? Who has opened for us the way to the Kingdom of Heaven? Was it not the Jews? What do we read in our churches? The Decades of Livy, the Muses of Herotodus, or the Gigantomachy, or Plato's Laws and his Republic, or the ethical and political books of Aristotle? We read and chant the Pentateuch, the sacred history replete with salutary and divine precepts, and the admonishments of the holy prophets, the Psalms and the Writings, the Acts of the Apostles, and the divine Christian doctrine of the four gospels, which cannot be compared to the laws of the Athenians [...] Even before the destruction of Troy, and well before the first Olympic games, the godly man Moses (*divinissimus vir*) had already given the divine laws (*leges divinas*) to the Jews. That same holy Pentateuch, accepted by all men. except for a very few (who consider themselves too "wise"), [this book] which is the most ancient among the books of the nations, is the first work ever written in the world, the source of all laws. In it, it is written in an elegant and sage manner, as well as truthfully and piously, about the origins of the universe, the beginning of all things, the heavens, the stars, the elements of creation and their distinctions, the origins of man, animals and plants, the division and dispersion of men into the various nations, the confusion of languages, and finally, the sacred and just laws and precepts are inscribed there by God's very finger.³⁸

Galateo, therefore, calls for recognition of the debt Christianity owes Judaism. He also accepts the Old Testament in the literal sense without attempting allegorical or mystical interpretations of the text. In the above-quoted passage, Galateo seems to cross over into heterodoxy while apparently seeking to advocate Judeo-Christianity, a religious stand that could have placed him in opposition to the established Church. And yet, some of Galateo's arguments may not seem

³⁸ "Unde leges habuimus? Qui nos cultum veri numinis docuerunt? Qui nos bonis et sanctis moribus instruxerunt? Qui nos ex foedis sacrorum ritibus liberaverunt? Qui nobis viam ad regnum caelorum aperuerunt? Nonne Iudaei fuerunt? Cur igitur abominamur et turpi nescio qua appellatione notamus quod re et factis probamus? Quid in templis legimus? Livii Decades, an Herodoti Musas, au bella gigantum, ac Platonis Leges et Rempublicam, an ethicos libros et politicos Aristotelis? Legimus, cantamus Pentabibulum et sacram illam historiam salubribus et divinis praeceptis plenam, et sanctorum prophetarum et vaticinia et monita, Psalmos et Epistolas, et Actus Apostolorum, et divinissimam christianam philosophiam quatuor Evangelia, quibus nec Atheniensium [...] Sed multo ante eversam Troiam ac primam olympiadem, leges divinas divinissimus vir Moses Iudaeis dederat. Pentabibulus illa sacratissima, cui omnes homines consentiunt praeter paucos, qui se nimis sapere putant, vetustissima est et omnibus nationum libris antiquissima: prima scriptura omnium quae in orbe terrarum habentur, unde tanquam e fonte leges omnes emanarunt, in qua de origine mundi, de primordio rerum, de caeli, stellarum, elementorum creatione deque eorum distinctione, de ortu hominum, animantium et plantarum tam sapienter et eleganter quam vere et pie scribitur, de separatione humani generis in varias provincias, de idiomatum confusione et de sanctis et iustis legibus et institutis digito Dei scriptis". Pallara, *Lettere...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-175.

quite so extraordinary if considered in the Italian humanistic context of the quest for the sources of Religion, the popularity of Hebrew learning, and the study of Jewish writings to better understand the origins of Christianity. This part can be compared to similar statements present in Galateo's *Hermit*. By stressing biblical evidence and the Jews' contribution to Christianity, Galateo may be echoing some of Manetti's ideas. Gianozzo Manetti (1396-1459) in his *Against Jews and Gentiles*, articulated similar admiration for the ancient Jews' monotheism: "all the peoples of all the gentile nations practiced these and many other such rites... Now, the Hebrews alone... turned to the true and devout worship of almighty God" and also "For the Hebrews alone among the creatures were able to cross over to the knowledge of the true God by natural reason and law..."³⁹ But Manetti distinguishes between ancient Jews or "Hebrews," whom he admires, and contemporary Jews, whom he detests,⁴⁰ whereas Galateo shows his readers that they cannot endorse Christianity's Jewish roots and at the same time despise the Jews themselves: "If we are Christians, and each day we openly profess in our churches being descended from Abraham's seed, if we worship Christ as our Teacher and Lord, why do we hold the Jewish nation to be an abomination, although it surpasses all the barbarous nations in every virtue, and is the most just of them all?"⁴¹ He also accentuates the Jewishness of Christ, the Virgin and the first apostles: "Is our Lord and God not born of a blessed virgin, and a Jewess, the noble descendant of David? Peter, the first apostle, and the rest of the apostles and evangelists were not Trojans, nor Greeks, nor Latins, nor Gauls, nor Germans, but Jews."⁴² This is a recurrent theme in *De Neophitis*:

We Christians must openly acknowledge that all that we possess derives from Jewish sources; that is, if we do not wish to be ungrateful for the good that we have been given. And it is the duty of the honest man to recognize from whom he has benefitted. Therefore, we should cease to denigrate the Jews, our forefathers, whose precepts we follow.⁴³

³⁹ Quote: Manetti, *Against Jews and the Gentiles...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49, 54-55.

⁴⁰ For Manetti's views on Jews, Hebrews, and religion see the discussion in Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 722-734.

⁴¹ "Si Christiani sumus, si semen Abrahae nos esse quotidie palam in templis profitemur, si Christum magistrum et dominum colimus, quare iudaicam originem, inter omnes barbaros in omni virtute praestantissimam et iustissimam, abominamur?" Pallara, *Lettere...*, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

⁴² "Nonne Dominus et Deus noster ex beatissima Virgine, et tamen iudaea, ex Davidis inclyta prole natus est? Princeps apostolorum Petrus ceterique apostoli et evangelistae, non troiani, non graeci, non latini, non galli, non germani fuere, sed iudaei". Pallara, *Lettere...*, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

⁴³ "Omnia, quae nos Christiani habemus, a fontibus Hebraeorum nos illa hausisse ingenue fateri necesse

Thus, Galateo's approach to Judaism and biblical heritage follows some humanistic trends but contradicts others. His interpretation of the Bible is literal and evangelical, as in his quote from Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians: "Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I."⁴⁴ It is diametrically opposed to the approach of other Italian humanists who sought to divine the mysteries hidden in the Holy Scripture, notably Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Both Ficino and Pico believed that certain Hebrew sources and especially Jewish esoteric literature concealed the key to the beginnings of Christianity.⁴⁵ It is, therefore, safe to conclude that Galateo's defense of the Jews and the New Christians draws from his religious convictions. However, he stresses the fact that he has no personal stake in the matter: "None of my ancestors descend from the Jews" (*Nullus meorum ex Iudaeis progenitus est*).⁴⁶ Galateo does not need to resort to an autobiographical discourse, as do Pablo de Santa Maria, his son Alonso de Cartagena and many first- and second-generation Spanish converts. But his arguments recall those used by converso apologues who emphasized the Jewish origins of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Apostles, and the first Christians.⁴⁷ Towards the end of this epistle, Galateo addresses the actual presence of the Jews in his own time, revealing an opinion of them which basically conforms to the traditional attitudes of the Church: "And if contemporary Jews are a stiff-necked and stubborn people and they do not believe in Christ, the fault of the descendants should not be attributed to the holy forefathers, who I have named. Hence, only single individuals should be blamed, not the entire nation."⁴⁸ This statement seems paradoxical, but it is, in fact, reminiscent of Manetti's distinction between ancient Jews (Galateo's

est, si ingrati esse bene merentibus nolumus. Ingenui viri est fateri per quem profecerit. Desinant igitur lacescere Iudaeos, patres nostros, quorum dogmata sequimur". Pallara, *Lettere...*, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

⁴⁴ 2 Corinthians, 11:22. All English translations of the New Testament are based on King James Version of the Bible.

⁴⁵ On Ficino and Pico's views on Jews and Judaism, see Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 734-760. On Ficino's approach to Judaism and religion, see Idel, "Prisca Theologia"..., *op. cit.*, pp. 137-178; For further reading on the belief in ancient transmitted traditions derived from Judaism, see Abraham Melamed, *The Myth of the Jewish Origins of Science and Philosophy* [Hebrew], Jerusalem, Magness Press, 2010; and Guido Bartolucci, *Vera religio. Marsilio Ficino e la tradizione ebraica*, Turin, Paidea, 2017.

⁴⁶ Pallara, *Lettere...*, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

⁴⁷ On converso apologetics, see Claude B. Stuczynski, "Pro-Converso Apologetics and Biblical Exegesis", *The Hebrew Bible in Fifteenth Century Spain*. Eds. Jonathan Decter and Arturo Prats, Leiden, Brill, 2012, pp. 151-176.

⁴⁸ "At si recentiores Iudaei, durae cervicis et pertinacis ingenii gens, ut et non nulli Christiani, Christo non credunt, non id culpa dari debet generi et sanctiis illis quos diximus patribus. Damnandi sunt igitur/ homines quidam, non genus totum". Pallara, *Lettere...*, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

holy forefathers) and the contemporary “stiff-necked Jews.” Admiration for ancient Jews and even the acceptance of “contemporary” Jews who keep their ancient traditions is not foreign to humanistic thought, but it is usually followed by condemnation of Jewish refusal to acknowledge Christian truth. Pico clearly expresses this view in his *Heptaplus* (an exegetic treatise on Genesis proposing an esoteric reading of the Bible), printed in 1489:

[...] and so, when they agree with us on certain matters, we shall command the Hebrews to keep the old traditions of their forefathers; but when they diverge, we shall line up in Catholic legions, and we shall attack them. To sum up, as far as everything we detect as foreign to the evangelical truth, we shall refute it as far as it lies in our power; by contrast, everything that is true and holy, we shall remove from the Synagogue as if from an illegitimate possessor, and transfer it to us, the rightful Israelites.⁴⁹

Thus, Pico’s stand differs markedly from Galateo’s. While Galateo stresses the debt Christianity owes to Judaism, Pico, like Manetti, accepts Judaism only inasmuch as it preserves the ancient biblical traditions, arguing that Christianity is the true Israel, the legitimate heir to the ancient tradition. Logically, it may amount to the same thing, but Galateo’s letter advocates a return to a Judeo-Christianity that is proud of its roots, while Pico’s treatise reiterates the traditional anti-Jewish position of the established Church.

And so, the main point in Galateo’s religious stand towards the Jews is a total rejection of “racial” conceptions, yet not necessarily an outright expression of “Philo-Judaism”; individual Jews may be stubborn, stiff-necked and so on, but no one should be condemned a priori because of his origins. This fits well with Galateo’s views on nobility, descent, and personal achievement. But as a good Christian, a devout Catholic, Galateo still promotes the conversion of the Jews.

As for the concrete case that led to the writing of the epistle, the young girl who married into the family of Belisario Acquaviva, Galateo supports the duke’s decision to cherish her and instruct her in the faith: “You offer to love and hold

⁴⁹ “sicubi quidem concordabunt nobiscum, iubebimus Hebraeos stare in antiquis patrum suorum traditionibus, sicubi dissonabunt, instructi catholicis legionibus impressionem faciemus in eos. Denique quicquid alienum ab evangelica veritate deprehendemus confutabimus pro virili, quicquid sanctum et verum, a synagoga, ut ab iniusto possessore ad nos, legitimos Israelitas transferemus”. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Gian Francesco Pico, “Heptaplus”, *Opera omnia 1557-1573*, vol. I, Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1962, p. 23. See also *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*. Ed. and trans. Eugenio Garin, vol. II, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1942, pp. 346-347. On the Heptaplus, see Crofton Black, *Pico’s Heptaplus and Biblical Hermeneutics*, Leiden, Brill, 2006.

dear that young virgin you have happily joined to your son in marriage, and you are teaching her good manners and the true orthodox faith.”⁵⁰ As noted at the beginning of this article, Galateo writes his epistle in defense of the New Christians, rather than the Jews. He rejects prejudice toward or persecution of the Jews, but he still accuses them of being stiff-necked in their refusal to accept Christianity, and he favors their conversion. Here Galateo expresses a view that is a common humanist attitude towards Jews and Judaism. Finally, despite his criticism of the papacy, Galateo is in full accord with its traditional position that initially opposed the purity of blood laws and the deep-rooted suspicion towards converts.⁵¹ In the end, Galateo remains within the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy and the current attitudes of his time.

Conclusion

Galateo’s epistle in defense of the New Christians has no parallel in Italian humanistic writing. While various elements that appear in *De Neophitis* and Galateo’s other works are clearly influenced by contemporary humanistic thinking in Italy and Spain, the religious ideas he advocates seem to be exceptional for his time and intellectual environment. Taking into consideration his lack of an autobiographical reason to bridge the religious stance between Judaism and Christianity, as converso authors in Spain a generation or so before Galateo penned this treatise, his call for a Judeo-Christian religiosity seems strange, bordering on heresy. But if we are to take into account all of Galateo’s writings on the themes that preoccupied intellectuals of his time, we can discern a common thread: a social, religious, and political critique. During his lifetime, Galateo experienced great political upheavals, a war in which his country was ignominiously defeated, the fall of the Aragonese dynasty he supported, and the rise of a Spanish empire he detested for its arrogance and ignorance (with a few key exceptions). In his pride in his antecedents “priests according to the tradition of Melchizedek” he

⁵⁰ “Virgunculam illam, quam quam bonis avibus filio tuo iunxisti dilige, ama, instrue bonis moribus et orthodoxa et christiana disciplina”. Pallara, *Lettere...*, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

⁵¹ Shlomo Simonsohn draws attention to the vacillating policies of the popes in regard to the discrimination of converts, but the papacy as such was opposed to the exclusion of converts and their descendants based on purity of blood laws. Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 7, pp. 369-391. See also: Vicente Beltrán de Heredia, “Las bulas de Nicolás V acerca de los conversos de Castilla”, *Sefarad*, vol. 21, 1961, pp. 22-47.

reminds his readers of the nobility of the Greek Orthodox tradition and laments its decline in his native Apulia. And yet, Galateo never ceased being a devout Christian. His *Eremita* ends with the compassionate intervention of the Virgin in favor of the poor soul, and he concludes *De Neophitis* with praise for Belisario Acquaviva for taking in a young convert from Judaism. But a full analysis of Antonio de Ferrariis's religious and political thinking still awaits a study dedicated to this topic.

Appendix

De Neophitis, Antonio de Ferrariis, Galateo.

Published: Antonio de Ferrariis Galateo, *Lettere*. Ed. and trans. Amleto Pallara, Lecce, Conte Editore, 1996, pp. 173-175.

Vanissimum esse, illustris princeps, iudicium plurimorum constat, qui de statu hominum secundum vulgi opinionem iudicant. Nos de falsa nobilitatis appellatione satis multa diximus in epistola, quam quondam sub hieronymiana porticu ad Gelasium tuum scripsimus; nec non et alibi hunc locum tractavimus. Quoniam in hac re video caligare humanum genus, quod saepe dat indignis et fame servit ineptum: quae maxime laudi dari deberet, novitatem vituperat; nescit praestantiorum esse nobilitatis aut divitiarum auctorem quam qui vel bene inventis utitur, et architectum artifice, et magistrum discipulo. Facile est inventis addere, at invenire difficile. Et quamvis difficile sit, ut Galenus ait, eundem incipere et perficere, tamen Aristoteles ingenue, ut philosophum decet, fatetur nos aequum esse reddere, non modo habere gratiam, non solum iis qui bene, sed iis qui male dixerunt: moverunt enim mentem nostrum ad speculandum et ad investigandum veritatem. Nationes omnes sua habent vocabula, quibus alienigenas notant: Latini "externos", Graeci "barbaros", Iudaei "gentes", Turcae horrido quodam verbo "gauros" nuncupant, quod a Iudaeis ortum puto: illi enim gentes "goim" appellant. Rabi Moses vir doctus, qui aetate Avenrois floruit, inquit arabicam linguam a iudaica sicut Latinam a graeca originem habuisse, corrupte tamen. Qui veritati serviunt, re ipsa, non nomine, iudicant omnia. Ideo apostolus Paulus dixit: "Inter Iudaeos et Graecos non est distinctio".

Sapientis mulieris ad romanum regem sententia est: "Qui sis, non unde natus sis, reputa". Nec miror si popellus decipiatur; sed hoc mirum est, multos eorum, qui sapientes habentur, in hoc errore volutari. Multi gallicam, non nulli germanicam, clariores troianam originem ostentant. Si nostra ut aliena iudicemus, si genus quisque suum examinaret, inveniret multos Laomedontes, multos Tantalos, multos Giges, multos Sisypchos, complures Dionysios et Autolycos, unde genus duxit ille tot voluminibus

a poeta cantatus Ulysses, multas Medeas, multas Phaedras, multas Helenas, multas Deianiras, Pasiphes, Ariadnas, Tarpeis, Lupas, Ilias et genus invisum et rapti Ganymedis honores. Ingrata certe latinitas est. Quae vicia, quae scelera Graecis non obiicimus, a quibus omnes ingenuas, siquas habemus, disciplinas accepimus? At Graeci, Chaldaeos, Magos, Aegyptios, Iudaeos, a quibus non nulla acceperunt, colunt, celebrant et paternae venerationis nomen illis indiderunt. Nos erga Graecos parum grati animi sumus. Eos vero qui a Iudaeis profecti sunt detestamur ac probrose nominimus *neophytos*. Si Christiani sumus, si semen Abrahae nos esse quotidie palam in templis profitemur, si Christum magistrum et dominum colimus, quare iudaicam originem, inter omnes barbaros in omni virtute praestantissimam et iustissimam, abominamur?

Nullus meorum ex Iudaeis progenitus est, sed ex Italograecis et iis sacerdotibus secundum ordinem Melchisedechi, hoc est secundum ordinem iusti regis, qui ut et nos Christiani panem et vinum sincerum sacrificium offerebat. At siquis ex Iudaeorum nobilissimo et antiquissimo genere ducat originem, dummodo cum Christianorum orthodoxa fide recte sentiat, eum nobiliorem putaverim quam si ex barbaris et iis regibus natus sit. Nonne Dominus et Deus noster ex beatissima Virgine, et tamen iudaea, ex Davidis inclyta prole natus est? Princeps apostolorum Petrus ceterique apostoli et evangelistae, non troiani, non graeci, non latini, non galli, non germani fuere, sed iudaei. Paulus, doctor gentium, vas electionis, ait: “Hebraei sunt? et ego. Israelitae sunt? et ego. Semen Abrahae sunt? et ego”. Idque sibi gloriae dari existimabat, quod erat ipse a stirpe genitus, non in ramis, ut ipse ait, insitus, aut neophytus. Unde leges habuimus? Qui nos cultum veri numinis docuerunt? Qui nos bonis et sanctis moribus instruxerunt? Qui nos ex foedis sacrorum ritibus liberaverunt? Qui nobis viam ad regnum caelorum aperuerunt? Nonne Iudaei fuere? Cur igitur abominamur et turpi nescio qua appellatione notamus quod re et factis probamus? Quid in templis legimus? Livii Decades, an Herodoti Musas, au bella gigantum, ac Platonis Leges et Rempublicam, an ethicos libros et politicos Aristotelis? Legimus, cantamus Pentabibulum et sacram illam historiam salubribus et divinis praeceptis plenam, et sanctorum prophetarum et vaticinia et monita, Psalmos et Epistolas, et Actus Apostolorum, et divinissimam christianam philosophiam quatuor Evangelia, quibus nec Atheniensium, nec Lacedaemoniorum, aut Cretensium, nec Romanorum, nec ipsius Platonis leges, nec duodecimo, quarum memoria abolita est, tabularum comparari possunt. In his multa sunt, quae ad rerum publicarum et populorum, aut ad potentum, aut ad regum utilitatem scita sunt: in illis vero nihil est divinum et sanctum, rectum et pium, nihil quod a vera iustitia discrepet. Cur igitur, ut dixi, eos damnamus et detestamur, quorum religionem, institute et sanctissimos mores amplexamur?

Percurramus veteres historias. Quae gens nobilior, quae antiquior et melioribus orta auspiciis, quae Deo gratior fuerit quam genus Iudaeorum? Ante captam Troiam Graeci rudes et litterarum expertes errant, et ut antiquissimi hominum Aegyptii, apud quod diu versati sunt Iudaei, aiebant: “Semper pueri Graeci, nec quisquam ex Graecia senex”. Linus,

Orpheus, Museus, Homerus, Hesiodus multo post captam Troiam fuisse posteriorem certum est. Tempore belli troiani res Iudaeorum ample ac magnifice florebant. Sed multo ante eversam Troiam ac primam olympiadem, leges divinas divinissimus vir Moses Iudaeis dederat. Pentabibulus illa sacratissima, cui omnes homines consentiunt praeter paucos, qui se nimis sapere putant, vetustissima est et omnibus nationum libris antiquissima: prima scriptura omnium quae in orbe terrarum habentur, unde tanquam e fonte leges omnes emanarunt, in qua de origine mundi, de primordio rerum, de caeli, stellarum, elementorum creatione deque eorum distinctione, de ortu hominum, animantium et plantarum tam sapienter et eleganter quam vere et pie scribitur, de separatione humani generis in varias provincias, de idiomatum confusione et de sanctis et iustis legibus et institutis digito Dei scriptis. Non hic centauros, non gorgonas harpyasque invenies, non portentosam illam metamorphosim ethiorum. Quid plura? Omnia, quae nos Christiani habemus, a fontibus Hebraeorum nos illa hausisse ingenue fateri necesse est, si ingrati esse bene merentibus nolumus. Ingenui viri est fateri per quem profecerit.

Desinant igitur lacescere Iudaeos, patres nostros, quorum dogmata sequimur, Abraham, Isaac, Iacob, Mosen, Christum, et apostolos illius Petrum et Paulum doctores gentium, qui nos docuerunt legem sanctam et orthodoxam, qui sanguine suo regnum caelorum et illam caelestem patriam nobis peperunt. Quibus quantum debeamus ethnicorum impurae leges et nefandi sacrorum ritus ostendunt. At si recentiores Iudaei, durae cervicis et pertinacis ingenii gens, ut et non nulli Christiani, Christo non credunt, non id culpa dari debet generi et sanctis illis quos diximus patribus. Damnandi sunt igitur homines quidam, non genus totum. At si quis ex iudaeo vere christianus effectus, nonne est laude dignior quam nos, qui in alieno solo sati, in aliena stirpe tanquam neophyti, hoc est novelli surculi, insiti sumus? Vir quidam magnus et rex inclytus iure praeposuit duodecim patriarchas duodecim illis, quos Franci pares⁵² appellant.

Eapropter, illustris vir, pro tua sapientia et doctrina neminem aut genere, aut fortuna, aut morbo, aut obscuris natalibus, aut progenitorum scelere vituperandum ducas, quem non sua vi premunt. Virgunculam illam, quam quam bonis avibus filio tuo iunxisti dilige, ama, instrue bonis moribus et orthodoxa et christiana disciplina. Nata enim est ex nobili et bene morato patre, et honesta quam bene novi matre, et ex gente in toto terrarum orbe quondam celeberrima, et non, ut nostri non minus inscite quam impie dicunt, contumelia numinum, immo veri numinis cultu insigni. Tu autem, vir prudens, quoniam res acta est, sis contentus voto tuo et garrulitatem vulgi contemnas. Vulgus autem voco eos omnes, qui non noverunt litteras, quamvis magnates sint et illustres. Nostri enim naturam rumoris hominum et famae; quo malo ut nihil velocius, nihil quod sese in auras attollat vehementius, sic nihil est quod citius languescat et concidat. Si nos viri fortes et

⁵² In one manuscript version, Vatican Lat. 7584, the word appears as "patres" (fathers), in another manuscript, Codex B 83 at the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, the word is corrected to "pares". Pallara, *Lettere...*, *op. cit.*, p. 180, note 10. I believe the latter to be the correct version because it probably refers to the twelve peers of France.

philosophi sumus, nullam vituperationem curare debemus nisi eam quae ex viciis, nullam laudem nisi eam quae ex virtute nascatur.

Bene vale.

English translation

To Belisario Acquaviva

It is in vain, oh illustrious prince, to judge men, as many do, according to the opinions of the vulgar multitudes. We have had much to say on the false notion of nobility in the letter that we wrote under the porch of Hieronymus (*sub hieronymiana portico*) [=the academy of Lecce]⁵³ in answer to your Gelasius,⁵⁴ and I have also discussed this topic elsewhere. As regards this matter, I think that the human race (*genus*) has many confused ideas, and therefore it often confers honors upon the unworthy, and stupidly lets itself be enchanted by fame. It denigrates as New Men (*homines novi*) those who should be praised, being ignorant of the fact that one who has been the first to achieve a title of nobility, or he who has already produced wealth is more praiseworthy than he who uses it, even when the latter makes good use of things that have already been invented [by others]; thus, the architect is greater than the artisan, and the master greater than the disciple. It is easy to add to something that already exists, but difficult to invent anew. And although it is hard, as Galen⁵⁵ has said, to start something and bring it to perfection, as even Aristotle admits (so it is attributed to the sayings of the philosopher), it is equally correct for us to be grateful and give thanks not only to those who have said good things,

⁵³ “Portico” (porch) here refers to the humanistic academy of Lecce. The term has a double meaning: it is derived from classical tradition, as the “portico” meant the school of the Stoics (and other philosophical schools open to the public at large), but it also refers to the actual meeting place of the academy members under the arches of the market in Naples, originally near the house of the humanist Antonio Beccadelli (Panormità). Later it took the meaning of an open academy that follows the Socratic model. See Furstenberg-Levi, *The Accademia Pontaniana...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-66. Sub Hieronymiana *portico* refers to the academy founded by Galateo after leaving Naples in 1495 and settling in Lecce. The members met in the house of Girolamo Ingenuo (or in Latinized form: Heronimo Ingenuo), hence the name. Idem, *Ibidem*, p. 162.

⁵⁴ A letter titled *De Nobilitate* is addressed to Gelasius, and arguably Gelasius who is mentioned in *De Neophytis* could be this correspondent (who remains as yet unidentified). The two letters titled *De nobilitate* were published. Rabil, *Knowledge, Goodness, and Power...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 317-362 (letter to Gelasius: *Ibidem*, pp. 339-362).

⁵⁵ Galen: Galenus, Greek physician who lived between 129 AD and ca. 199/ 216 AD. At the beginning of his career he was the gladiators’ physician in Asia Minor and rose to occupy the position of court physician in the Rome of Marcus Aurelius. He is known for his philosophical autobiography *On My Own Opinions*, revealing the interactions between his medicine and his philosophy. His influence on later generations is compared only to that of Aristotle. Galen’s medical theories dominated medical practice throughout the Middle-Ages and the Renaissance. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World*. Ed. John Roberts, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005.

but to those who have said bad things; they force our minds to exercise themselves and to speculate in order to seek the truth. All nations have words to describe people who are strangers to them: the Latins call them foreigners (*externos*), the Greek – Barbarians, the Jews – Gentiles, the Turks use a horrid word – *gauros* derived, to my thinking, from the language of the Jews, as they refer to the gentiles as “*goyim*”. Rabbi Moses,⁵⁶ the great scholar who lived in the times of Averroes,⁵⁷ says that the language of the Arabs is derived from the Hebrew as the Latin language is derived from the Greek, albeit in a corrupt form.⁵⁸ Those who adhere to the truth do not pronounce judgment on things by virtue of their name; as the apostle Paul stated: “there is neither Jew nor Greek”.⁵⁹

A wise woman said these words to the king of the Romans: “Consider what you are, not where you were born”.⁶⁰ I do not marvel at that the little people are deceived, but I do marvel at those who are considered to be wise, who yet err in this fashion. Many take pride in their Gallic origins, others in their German origins, and the most famous claim to be of Trojan descent. If we are to investigate our own [origins] as we investigate strangers, every nation should examine its own roots, and they would find many Laomedonts, many Tantalus, many Gyges, many Sisyphus, a number of Dionysus and Autolycus (from whom it is said that the famous Ulysses, who is sung by the Poet [Homer] in so many books, has descended), many Medea, many Phaedra, many Helen, many Deianira, Pasiphaë, Ariadne, Tarpeia, Lupa, Iliad, and their detestable descendant [Romulus],⁶¹ and the honor of the kidnapped Ganymede.⁶² The Latin nation is most certainly ungrateful. Do

⁵⁶ Maimonides: Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (1135-1204).

⁵⁷ Averroes: ‘Abū l-Walīd Muḥammad Ibn ‘Aḥmad Ibn Rushd (1126-1198).

⁵⁸ Maimonides’s remark that Arabic and Hebrew are closely related appears in his (Medical) *Aphorisms*. Simon Hopkins, “The Languages of Maimonides”, *The Trias of Maimonides: Jewish, Arabic and Ancient Culture of Knowledge*. Ed. Georges Tamer, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2005, pp. 85-106. It is probable that Galateo, who studied medicine, read this observation in the *Aphorisms* which in his time had already been translated into Latin. For Latin translations of Maimonides’s works, see Görges K. Hasselhoff, *Dicit Rabbi Moses. Studien zum Bild von Moses Maimonides im Lateinischen Westen vom 13. bis zum 15. Jahrhundert*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2004, pp. 280-231 (pages refer to the section dedicated to Maimonides’s medical works).

⁵⁹ Galatians 3:28.

⁶⁰ This refers to the statement of Queen Tanaquil, wife of Tarquinius Priscus (616 to 579 BCE), fifth king of Rome, and mother of Tarquinius Superbus. Tanaquil was born to an important Etruscan family, but her husband was of lowly origins and an immigrant. According to Livy, Tanaquil encouraged her husband to move to Rome, where he became king. In these lines, the queen admonishes her husband the king and urges him to fight on when plotters wound him: “...et nos peregrini regnavimus qui sis, non unde natus sis reputa” (We, too, were foreigners, yet we reigned. Consider what you are, not whence you were born). Latin text and translation: *Livy in Fourteen Volumes*. Trans. B.O. Foster, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, London, Harvard University Press, W. Heinemann, 1967, vol. I, book I, ch. XLI.

⁶¹ Probably referring to the murder of Remus by Romulus.

⁶² All figures are from Greek and Roman mythology. See *Dictionnaire de la Mythologie Grecque et Romaine*. Ed. Pierre Grimal, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1958. Laomedon was a Trojan king, father of Priam. Famous for reneging on his promises; Tantalus, famous for his eternal punishment in Tartarus; Sisyphus, the king of Ephyra (now known as Corinth), who was condemned in Tartarus to an eternity

we not accuse the Greeks of such vices, such crimes, [the selfsame Greeks] from whom we have received all the inventions [or liberal arts] that we have, all the disciplines that we have received? And yet, we respect the Greeks, we laud and venerate the Chaldeans, the Magii, the Egyptians and the Jews, from who we have received so much, considering them as [our] fathers.⁶³ We Greeks, are, therefore, very grateful.⁶⁴ But those who are descended from the Jews, we detest, and offensively call them “*neophyti*”. If we are Christians, and each day we openly profess in our churches being descended from Abraham’s seed, if we worship Christ as our Teacher and Lord, why do we hold the Jewish nation to be an abomination, although it surpasses all the barbarous nations in every virtue, and is the most just of them all?⁶⁵

of rolling a boulder uphill; Gyges, a giant who had a hundred arms, imprisoned in Tartarus by the god Chronos, or the founder of the third or Mermnad dynasty of Lydian kings, 716 BC-678 BC., a ruler who supposedly usurped the throne; Dionysius, either the Greek god, or one of the tyrants of Syracuse; Medea, a sorceress who was the daughter of King Aeëtes of Colchis and the wife of Jason, portrayed as the murderess of her sons in Euripides’s play; Phaedra, daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë, wife of Theseus, who fell in love with Hippolytus, Theseus’s son by another woman, and later accused her lover of rape; Helen of Troy, also known as Helen of Sparta, whose abduction by Paris, Prince of Troy, brought about the Trojan War; Deianeira, a figure in Greek mythology whose name translates as “man-destroyer” or “destroyer of her husband”, poisoned Hercules with a magic tunic; Pasiphaë, daughter of Helios, the Sun, and mother of the Minotaur after being cursed to mate with a white bull; Ariadne, daughter of Minos, King of Crete, who helped Theseus find his way in the labyrinth; Lupa, the “she-wolf” who suckled Romulus and Remus; Ilia, another name for Rhea Silvia, mother of Romulus and Remus; Autolykus, a son of the Olympian god Hermes, who according to Homer, fathered Anticlea, wife of Laertes of Ithaca, and mother of Odysseus (Ulysses); Laomedon’s son, Ganymede, was kidnapped by Zeus, who had fallen in love with the beautiful boy, hence Galateo’s condemnation of this figure. On the Renaissance conception of Ganymede as a symbol of homoerotic love, see James M. Saslow *Ganymede in the Renaissance: homosexuality in art and society*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986.

⁶³ Seems to allude to the idea of the *Prisca Theologia* expounded by Marsilio Ficino. Marsilio Ficino, “*Theologia platonica de immortalitate animorum*”, in *Opera omnia*, (photocopy of the Basel edition of 1561), Turin, Bottega d’Erasmus, 1962, pp. 381, 386 (and see note 10 above).

⁶⁴ I believe that here Galateo is ironic. However, it may allude to the Greek cultural revival following the coming of Cardinal Bessarion and other Byzantine scholars to Italy, and particularly to the monastery of St. Nicola di Casole, where Galateo studied in his youth. Daniele Arnesano, “San Nicola di Casole e la cultura greca in terra d’Otranto nel quattrocento”, *La Conquista Turca di Otranto (1480) tra Storia e mito. Atti del convegno internazionale di studio, Otranto-Muro Leccese, 28-31 marzo 2007*. Eds. Hubert Houben and Francisco de Araujo, vol. I, Galatina, Congedo, 2008, pp. 107-140.

⁶⁵ Don Isaac Abravanel who was familiar with humanistic thinking and philosophy expressed similar ideas, particularly on the superiority of Judaism over pagan philosophy. See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011, pp. 164-176. It is not inconceivable that Galateo met with Isaac Abravanel in Italy and knew his views. On the possibility of Jews participating in the discussions held at the Accademia Pontaniana, see Fabrizio Lelli’s review of Furstenberg-Levi, *The Accademia Pontaniana*: Fabrizio Lelli, “Intellettuale ebrei e Accademia Pontaniana: alcune considerazioni alla luce di due recenti pubblicazioni”, *Sefer Yuhasin*, vol. 5, 2017, pp. 159-169. However, an examination of Jewish views on the “Ancient theology” and Greek wisdom goes beyond the scope of the present article. See also Melamed, *The Myth...*, *op. cit.* (note 46 above).

None of my ancestors is descended from the Jews. My forefathers were Italian Greeks, and they were priests according to the tradition of Melchizedek, the just king, who, as it behooves us Christians, offered bread and wine in sacrifice.⁶⁶ But if one who is descended from the most noble and ancient nation of the Jews should accept the true orthodox faith, I would consider him to be more noble than one descended from barbarians, even if his ancestors were kings. Is our Lord and God not born of a blessed virgin, and a Jewess, the noble descendant of David? Peter, the first apostle, and the rest of the apostles and evangelists, were not Trojans, nor Greeks, nor Latins, nor Gauls, nor Germans, but Jews. Has not Paul, learned doctor of the nations, the chosen vessel, said: “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.”⁶⁷ He thus considered it an honor to have descended from that stock, rather than having been grafted onto one of the branches,⁶⁸ as he said, [that is] not a “*neophyta*.”⁶⁹ From where have we gotten our laws? Who has taught us to worship the true God? Who has taught us to observe good and holy customs? Who has freed us from horrid and detestable rites? Who has opened for us the way to the Kingdom of Heaven? Was it not the Jews? And if so, why do we disparage and detest and designate by such outrageous names (that I wouldn’t know them all) that selfsame people that we admire for its deeds and for being such as it is? What do we read in our churches? The Decades of Livy, the Muses of Herodotus, or the Gigantomachy,⁷⁰ or Plato’s Laws and his Republic, or the ethical and political books of Aristotle? We read and chant the Pentateuch, the sacred history replete with salutary and divine precepts, and the admonishments of the holy prophets, the Psalms and the Writings, the Acts of the Apostles, and the divine Christian doctrine of the four gospels, which cannot be compared to the laws of the Athenians, nor those of the Spartans, nor the Cretans, nor the Romans, not even Plato himself, or the Twelve Tables,⁷¹ whose very memory is forgotten. Those [contained] many [customs and norms] to serve the state, the people, the powerful, or the kings. And yet they have nothing that

⁶⁶ Galateo’s pride in his origins may have to do with the bitterness he felt at the condition of Greek culture in the Salento area that suffered destruction and loss during the Turkish conquest of Otranto (1480). The Catholic church too was hostile to the Orthodox minorities in the Salento. Arnesano, “San Nicola di Casole...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-140; André Jacob, “Culture grecque et manuscrits en terre d’Otrante”, *Atti del III congresso internazionale di studi salentini e del I congresso storico di Terra d’Otranto*. Ed. Pier Fauso Palumbo, Lecce, Centro Studi Salentini, 1980, pp. 51-77. Galateo’s own views regarding the situation in the area of his birth are strongly expressed in his *De situ Iapygiae*: Antonio de Ferrariis Galateo, *La Iapigia (liber de situ Iapygiae)*. Ed. Domenico Defilippis, Galatina, Congedo, 2005.

⁶⁷ 2 Corinthians, 11:22.

⁶⁸ Referring to the parable of the olive tree: “Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then. The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in”, Romans, 11:18-19.

⁶⁹ The Greek term from which “*neophytus*” is derived, means newly planted [in the faith].

⁷⁰ Gigantomachy: the battle between the Giants and the Olympian gods. A popular theme in sculpture and literature, see “Géants”, *Dictionnaire de la Mythologie Grecque et Romaine...*, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ The legislation that formed the foundation of Roman law (in Latin: *Leges Duodecim Tabularum*).

contradicts the divine and the sacred, the just and the pious, and there is nothing that disagrees with true justice. If so, why – as I have already said – do we condemn and loathe those whose institutions and sacred customs we have adopted? Let us consider the hoary histories. Which nation is more noble, more ancient, born under better auspices, and more dear to God, than the Jewish people? Before the capture of Troy the Greeks were rude and illiterate, and according to the ancient inhabitants of Egypt, among whom the Hebrews lived for a long time, the Greeks were still in their infancy;⁷² no wise elder had yet emerged from Greece. It is certain that Linus,⁷³ Orpheus,⁷⁴ Musaeus,⁷⁵ Homer, Hesiod,⁷⁶ lived long after the capture of Troy. Yet, at the time of the Trojan War the Jewish civilization was already flourishing in a full and magnificent manner. Even before the destruction of Troy, and well before the first Olympic games, the godly man Moses (*divinissimus vir*) had already given the divine laws (*leges divinas*) to the Jews. That same holy Pentateuch, accepted by all men except for a very few (who consider themselves too “wise”), [this book] which is the most ancient among the books of the nations, is the first work ever written in the world, the source of all laws. In it, it is written in an elegant and sage manner, as well as truthfully and piously, about the origins of the universe, the beginning of all things, the heavens, the stars, the elements of creation and their distinctions, the origins of man, animals and plants, the division and dispersion of men into the various nations, the confusion of languages, and finally, the sacred and just laws and precepts are inscribed there by God’s very finger. One will not find there centaurs, Gorgons, Harpies,⁷⁷ nor the portentous metamorphoses of the pagans. What more can be said? We Christians must openly acknowledge that all that we possess is derived from

⁷² See Plato, *Timaeus*, 22: “O Solon, Solon, you Greeks are always children: there is no such a thing as an old Greek”. See Plato: *Timaeus, Cleitophon, Critias, Menexenus, Epistles*. Ed. R.G. Bury, The Loeb Classical Library Cambridge, vol. 7, London, Harvard University Press, W. Heinemann, 1942, p. 33. Amleto Pallara identified this reference as based on Ficino’s Latin translation of Plato. Pallara, *Lettere...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-180. Ficino’s translation runs as follows: “O Solo Solo, Graeci pueri semper estis, nec quisquam e Graecia senex”, *Omnia divini Platonis opera tralatione Marsiliū Ficini: emendatione et ad Graecum codicem collate*, Basileae, In officina Frobeniana, 1539, p. 705. It thus seems likely that Galateo read Ficino’s translation.

⁷³ Linus, in Greek mythology the son of Oeagrus (Apollo) and the Muse Calliope, considered the inventor of melody and rhythm. See *Dictionnaire de la Mythologie Grecque et Romaine...*, *op. cit.*

⁷⁴ Orpheus, legendary musician, poet, and prophet in Greek mythology. He is said to have been able to charm all living things, and even stones, with his music. Orpheus is known for his attempt to retrieve his wife, Eurydice, from the underworld. See *Ibidem*.

⁷⁵ Musaeus, legendary polymath, philosopher, historian, prophet, seer, priest, poet, and musician, He is thought to inspire all poems of a mystical nature. See *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶ Hesiod, a Greek poet, father of Greek Didactic Poetry, who authored the *Theogony*, an account of the gods, the *Works of Days*, and *The Shield of Heracles*, generally thought by scholars to have lived between 750 and 650 BC, around the same time as Homer. See Zimmerman, *Dictionary of Classical Mythology...*, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷ Gorgons: Three monstrous sisters with serpents for hair, whose glance could turn men into stone. Harpies: winged monsters with female faces, bodies of vultures and sharp claws. They snatched souls and children. The Harpies appear in the legend of King Phineus, whose food they snatched and what was left, they soiled with their excrement. See *Dictionnaire de la Mythologie Grecque et Romaine...*, *op. cit.*

Jewish sources; that is, if we do not wish to be ungrateful for the good that we have been given. And it is the duty of the honest man to recognize from whom he has benefitted.

Therefore we should cease to denigrate the Jews, our forefathers, whose precepts we follow: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Christ and his apostles Peter and Paul, learned doctors of the nations, who have instructed us in the sacred laws and the true orthodox faith, who by spilling their blood unlocked for us the Kingdom of Heaven and by doing so have earned the heavenly patrimony (*caelestem patriam*). The fact that we owe them so much is demonstrated by the impure laws and obscene rites of the pagans. And if contemporary Jews are a stiff-necked and stubborn people, as not a few Christians are, and they do not believe in Christ, the fault of the descendants should not be attributed to the holy forefathers, who I have named. Hence, only single individuals should be blamed, not the entire nation. And if one of the Jews becomes a true Christian, none is more admirable, even more than us, who were born from a different stock and were grafted onto a new plant, as the *neophyti*. A great man and illustrious king justly compared the twelve patriarchs to the twelve who the Franks call “peers”.⁷⁸

For this, great lord, in your sagacity and learning you do not disparage anyone who has himself committed no crime, for his origins, condition, infirmity, or obscure birth, or for the wickedness of his ancestors. You offer to love and hold dear that young virgin you have happily joined to your son in marriage, and you are teaching her good manners and the true orthodox faith. She was born to a worthy father of good reputation and an honest mother with whom I am well acquainted. She is descended from a people that was once of great renown, not as some of us iniquitously say, for rebellion against the Divine, but remarkable for worshipping the true God. But you, as a wise man, since the matter is an accomplished fact, you are at peace with your decision, and contemptuous of the chattering of the mob. By mob I mean all who are uneducated, even if they are powerful and illustrious. You know well the nature of rumors and defamation. [quote] “Rumor – the swiftest of all evils. Speed lends her strength, and she wins vigor as she goes; small at first through fear, soon she mounts up to heaven, and walks the ground with head hidden in the clouds.”⁷⁹

But nothing loses force so quickly and languishes. If indeed we are mighty men and philosophers, we should not care for that which is drawn from evil, nor for praise, unless it is born of virtue.

Farewell.

⁷⁸ See note 52 above. It seems to me that in this context the correct version should be “pares,” meaning the twelve peers of France, the highest nobility of that land.

⁷⁹ Galateo paraphrases the *Aeneid*, book IV, lines 174-176: “Fama, malum qua non aliud velocius ullum: mobilitate viget virisque adquirit eundo, parva metu primo, mox sese attollit in auras”. Translation: “Rumor the swiftest of all evils. Speed lends her strength, and she wins vigor as she goes; small at first through fear, soon she mounts up to heaven, and walks the ground with head hidden in the clouds.” Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI*. Trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, revised by G. P. Goold, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, London, Harvard University Press, W. Heinemann, reprint. 2001, book IV, lines 174-176, p. 435.