Abarbanel and the Censor*

FEW biblical commentaries have been accorded the acclaim and popularity enjoyed by Don Isaac Abarbanel's commentary on the Pentateuch.¹ Later Jewish exegetes, including S. D. Luzzatto, M. L. Malbim, and D. Z. Hoffmann, cite extensively from it.² But Abarbanel's sphere of influence was not limited to Jewish circles; his commentaries exercised a lasting influence on the Christian world as well.³ With a tolerance unprecedented in the history of biblical exegesis, he did not hesitate to draw freely upon Christian sources.⁴ When citing Christians, his comments occasionally took the form of an acute polemic which the Church found embarrassing and offensive. The Church retaliated via censorship of his works.

* I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Moshe Greenberg of the University of Pennsylvania, who read the typewritten draft and suggested many valuable improvements. Moreover, it was due to his initial encouragement that this paper was written.

¹ Although modern scholarship (via Graetz and Baer) has adopted the spelling Abravanel, the traditional pronunciation and spelling, Abarbanel, has been preferred throughout this discussion. Cf. B. Netanyahu, Don Isaac Abravanel (Philadelphia, 1953), appendix A, p. 261, who admits that Don Isaac's son Judah "seems to have insisted on the form Abarbanel". Further support in favour of this form appears in Elijah Levi's סופר התשבי, published at Isny in 1541. It was vocalised by Levi himself and includes a list of corrigenda which takes into account errors in vocalisation, also prepared by Levi, as he indicates both in his introduction כורכיה (Abarbanel) and in the list of corrections. Levi (1468–1549) was a younger contemporary of Abarbanel, and taught at Padua from 1504–8, the very years during which Abarbanel, then at the peak of his fame, was residing at the neighbouring Venice. Even if he was not in direct contact with any of the Abarbanel's, it is a fair assumption that Levi was familiar with the correct pronunciation of their name. In סופר התשבי, under the heading באבניא, he cites Abarbanel and vocalises אברבניא. Under the heading אברבניא, he vocalises אברבניא. Netanyahu's otherwise full treatment neglects Levi's vocalisation, although it had been alluded to, albeit with a slight error of transcription, in an earlier work. See H. Loewe in J. B. Trend and H. Loewe, Isaac Abravanel—Six Lectures (Cambridge, 1937), p. xx. It might also be noted that M. Gaster, as cited ibid, p. x, preferred the pronunciation Abarbanel. The etymological significance of the name remains uncertain. See now Netanyahu's 2nd edition (1968), p. 261.

² Malbim, in the introduction to his commentary on Joshua, states that only Abarbanel and several of his contemporaries "succeeded in instilling a living spirit into Scripture in accord with the plain sense".

³ Most of Abarbanel's commentaries were translated into Latin. There were numerous Christian admirers and many who opposed his theological views, but all perused his writings diligently. Cf. Netanyahu, op. cit., pp. 251 and 323.

⁴ On one occasion, after having cited the opinions of both Jewish and Christian scholars, Abarbanel adds: "Truthfully, I find their [the Christians'] interpretation more satisfying than all the interpretations of the aforementioned Jewish scholars". Commentary on Early Prophets (Jerusalem, 1955), p. 520.
It is intended here to trace the history of Abarbanel’s commentary on Deuteronomy; to show while so doing that Abarbanel’s commentary on the Pentateuch, as we have it, is an expurgated text; and to restore the censored passages of the commentary on Deuteronomy.

Abarbanel conceived and began writing his commentary on Deuteronomy even before completing his first major work, the סדרות הבשורה. Various financial responsibilities interrupted his exegetical work, and in a letter of 1472, addressed to Yeḥiel of Pisa, he pledged to complete his commentary as soon as time would permit. The unfinished manuscript was lost during Abarbanel’s flight from Portugal in 1483. In 1495 Abarbanel arrived at Corfu, where he discovered a copy of his unfinished commentary on Deuteronomy. With renewed spirit, he vowed that he would complete his commentary, expanding and revising it. The task was finally completed on 6th February, 1496 at Monopoli, the Adriatic seaport which then belonged to the Kingdom of Naples.

The editio princeps of Abarbanel’s commentary on Deuteronomy was published posthumously at Sabbionetta, Italy, in 1551. It was entitled המכתב המשנה by the author. The editio princeps of Abarbanel’s commentary on the other four books of the Pentateuch appeared together with the commentary on Deuteronomy at Venice in 1574. Most scholars have assumed Abarbanel’s סדרות קנין to represent his first literary effort. NETANYAHU, op. cit., p. 268, note 34, proves that the סדרות הבשורה appeared earlier.

Abarbanel writes in his introduction to Deuteronomy:

"The text is arranged in chapters, each beginning with the words 'ויהי בְּשֵׁי לֹא קָרֵ֖פָּר וּאֶשֶׁ֣ר מַה־חֹבֵ֑ל' (Deut. 1:2). This is followed by a commentary in praise of the sages, and then the sages are quoted in the text. The commentary is divided into sections, each beginning with the words 'ויהי בְּשֵׁי לֹא קָרֵ֖ר פֹּ֣ה וּאֶשֶׁ֣ר מַה־חֹבֵ֑ל' (Deut. 1:2). Each section is further divided into paragraphs, each beginning with the words 'ויהי בְּשֵׁי לֹא קָרֵ֖ר פֹּ֣ה וּאֶשֶׁ֣ר מַה־חֹבֵ֑ל' (Deut. 1:2). The commentary is completed with a final section on the purpose of the book."  

This list is appended to Abarbanel’s סדרות הדשא (Rödelheim, 1828). In it the commentary on Deuteronomy is not designated with a specific title. The later printed editions of Abarbanel’s commentary on the Pentateuch, which incorporated the commentary on Deuteronomy, refer to it as המכתב המשנה; But cf. Abarbanel’s commentary on Ezek. xxxiv: 24, where he cites the המכתב המשנה by me.
1579. It is this latter edition that became the *vorlage* for all printed editions of Abarbanel’s *הוסרץ תורתה*, the most recent editions of which are faithful reproductions of the Venice edition with only minor variations, mostly printers’ errors that have accrued through the years.

We are now confronted with the problem of ascertaining the dependability of the Sabbionetta and Venice editions, and determining whether or not they were faithful reproductions of Abarbanel’s autograph copy. No holograph of a work by Abarbanel is known to exist. The only way in which we can proceed is to compare the first two editions of Abarbanel’s commentary on *Deuteronomy* (the second being included in the Venice edition of the *הוסרץ תורתה*). One can also subject Abarbanel’s commentary to internal criticism, seeking to determine whether or not it is likely, or even possible, that Abarbanel could have written what our printed text exhibits.

A comparison of the first two editions clearly indicates that all our present editions of Abarbanel are abridged through censorship.

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10 *Netanyahu*, *op. cit.*, p. 325, lists all the first editions of Abarbanel’s works, except for the commentary on *Deuteronomy*. He mentions only the Venice edition of Abarbanel’s commentary on the Pentateuch (and hence *Deuteronomy*), even though at the bottom of the very same page he states that “first editions were always consulted”. Indeed, nowhere in his book does *Netanyahu* distinguish the *הוסרץ תורתה* from the commentary on *Deuteronomy* which was included in the Venice 1579 edition. This is all the more remarkable considering that almost every earlier work on Abarbanel mentions the *הוסרץ תורתה* and *הסבונטיה*. Cf. Jacob S. Minkin, *Abarbanel and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (New York, 1938), p. 221; Trend and Loewe, *op. cit.*, p. 78, plate III. Since the *הסבונטיה* reflects a more complete text of the commentary on *Deuteronomy* than does the Venice edition, *Netanyahu*’s omission is not insignificant (as will be further shown below) and should be rectified, particularly since *Netanyahu*’s work remains the definitive study of Abarbanel.

11 See below in this paper, p. 54 for details regarding two recent editions. In 1959, a photograph (3 vols.) of an earlier printed edition was issued by the Saphrograph Co., New York.

12 Some minor but obvious additions are: (a) the opening words to the commentary on *Deuteronomy*, which read: "אמר דברי דוד צמח אברבנאל וּזְלֵל לְאָלֶ֑ף תֹּלֶ֖כֶת מַעֲרַבּוֹתָּהּ שָׁמְשֵׁנֶֽהָּ", and (b) the colophon to the commentary on *Genesis*, which reads: "ובית המ Mariners אברבנאל לְאָלֶ֑ף אָלֶ֖פֶת לַעֲלֹת שָׁמְשֶׁנֶּֽהָּ". The year 5282 (1522) was fourteen years after Abarbanel’s demise. A printer’s error must be precluded because of the complementing "לַעֲלֹת שָׁמְשֶׁנֶּהָּ". The passage is clearly a copyist’s addition to the text. This was first noted by de Rossi; see Conforte’s *Kara Yedidah*, ed. Cassel (Berlin, 1846), p. 29b, n. 5. Compare *Netanyahu*, *op. cit.*, p. 288, n. 16.
The Sabbionetta edition, although on the whole comparing favourably with the Venice edition, contains references to political events contemporary with the author, as well as references to Christianity in general and its founder in particular, that did not find their way into the Venice (and hence all future) editions. That later editions of Abarbanel’s commentaries were both censored and confiscated by the Church has long been established. It can now be asserted that the very first edition of the commentary on the entire Pentateuch was also a censored text. The Sabbionetta edition of the מראבנאל המשנה preserves the original text of the commentary on Deuteronomy. Many of the copies were later censored, with the expurgated passages being blotted out with dark ink. Whether or not the Sabbionetta edition was itself a faithful copy of the holograph is difficult to determine. When one considers the length of time that had elapsed between the authorship and printing (over fifty years), and the difficult circumstances that encompassed the Jews of Italy in the sixteenth century, it appears likely that the original manuscript underwent numerous changes of hand, and that its copyists inadvertently introduced errors into it. The editors of the Sabbionetta edition confessed their difficulty in coping with the many errors in the manuscript they used. Furthermore, there are occasional unwarranted lacunae in the text which seem, both structurally and contextually, to indicate an intentional omission by the printer. The printers may have exercised self-censorship in order to protect themselves—a phenomenon not

13 Thus in 1753 two Church censors, Ruffini and Venturini, requested that all of Abarbanel’s works be prohibited because in one of them he had expressed certain offensive ideas. In 1738, Abarbanel’s מתורטגא יר.reactivex היהודא was allowed to circulate; in 1748 it was forbidden; in 1753 it was once again permitted. See William Popper, Censorship of Hebrew Books (New York, 1899), p. 121, n. 463, and p. 124. Cf. A. Berliner, תקביים יתוייר (Jerusalem, 1949), Vol. II, pp. 49, 69–73. Cf. L. Rabinowitz in Trend and Loewe, op. cit., p. 88, who notes that the popes did not allow Abarbanel’s commentary on Isaiah to be studied.

14 The copy of the מראבנאל המשנה at the New York Public Library was expunged by the notorious censor Fra Luigi da Bologna, and bears his dated autograph. On his activity, cf. Popper, op. cit., pp. 99, 101, 145, and plate IV. Of the three copies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, only one is uncensored.

15 See end of מראבנאל המשנה, where Joseph b. Jacob Ashkenazi, one of the printers, writes: “... it is true that he [Abarbanel] wrote a commentary on the other four books of the Pentateuch, which however has not come into my possession ... and when I examined it carefully, I found the manuscript before me replete with errors.”

16 This assumption is strongly supported by the incoherency of flow between the words before and after the lacunae. Occasionally, the missing link is easily restored, as in expurgated passage no. 33 below.
uncommon in the early days of the Hebrew printed book.\textsuperscript{17} Samuel Archevolti, the proof-reader of the Venice edition, also noted the poor condition of his manuscript, especially the section containing the commentary on \textit{Exodus}.

Since the \textit{editio princeps} of the commentary on \textit{Deuteronomy} is no longer readily available to the general public, the expurgated words and passages are reprinted below for the benefit of the reader. Many of the passages throw new light on various aspects of Abarbanel’s thought. It may suffice to mention that several scholars have marvelled at Abarbanel’s seemingly sympathetic view of Ferdinand, despite the latter’s role in the expulsion of the Jews from Spain.\textsuperscript{18} One of the expurgated passages that appears below is of particular importance in that it is the only passage in all of Abarbanel’s writings that reflects a diabolical image of Ferdinand.\textsuperscript{19} The historical significance of the various passages dealing with apostates, \textit{conversos}, mixed marriage, and Christianity is self-evident.

A scholar who wrote during the first decade of the present century aptly remarked that “the censors of the Church have inked the pages in thousands of volumes and the paper has proved more durable than the ink, for the ink has faded and the once deleted printed words are now again legible, to prove that Dominico Ierosolomitano, Fra Luigi da Bologna and Giovanni Dominico

\textsuperscript{17} This suggests a possible explanation for an otherwise difficult passage in Ibn Verga’s \textit{شبש ירדוין} \textsc{baer-shochet} edition, Jerusalem, 1947, p. 120. This passage reads:

\begin{quote}
...אפורתי לחתום ההמה, אלא שרפתני ל’אשרヒוהד אברבסים בפيستן
\end{quote}

\textsc{shochet} correctly notes that Ibn Verga has mistakenly substituted Judah for Isaac; and he refers the reader to Abarbanel’s commentary on \textit{Deut.} xxviii: 15 ff., adding that the passage in question discusses the expulsions in general terms, whereas Ibn Verga claims it discusses them in greater detail. Chapter 28 contains several expurgated passages, and it is possible that the printers applied self-censorship for obvious political considerations and deleted the very passage that Ibn Verga had seen in manuscript form. Since the \textit{شبש ירדוין} was probably written and published before the Sabbionetta edition appeared (\textsc{baer} suggests 1550), Ibn Verga could only have seen the fuller manuscript of Abarbanel’s commentary on \textit{Deuteronomy}. For another approach to this problem, see Usque’s \textit{Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel}, trans. by \textsc{martin a. cohen} (Philadelphia, 1965), appendix B, p. 286.

\textsuperscript{18} See L. Rabinowitz in \textsc{trend} and \textit{loewe}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 89, and n. 19 below.

\textsuperscript{19} \textsc{netanyahu}, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 185–6 and especially p. 312, n. 163, adduces this very passage (the abridged text as it appears in the Venice edition) among others, in support of his contention that Abarbanel does not exhibit anywhere in his writings a personal animosity toward Ferdinand. Had the \textit{editio princeps} been consulted, this passage could not have been adduced.
Carretto (three of the most active expurgators) lived and inked in vain.”20

* * *

The expurgated passages are most meaningful when read in context. In order to facilitate the insertion of the expurgated passages into the received texts, the parallel loci in the Venice edition (and all subsequent editions) are cited according to the pagination of the Jerusalem 1964 edition, ספראים נביא יראقبال, 3 vols. (the most recent, and finest of the three editions of Abarbanel’s commentary on the Pentateuch which have appeared during the last decade), as well as according to the somewhat erratic pagination of the Warsaw 1862 edition (reissued by Torah Vadaath Publishers, Jerusalem, 1955), an edition that has received wide circulation. The pagination of the Sabbionetta and Warsaw editions allow for four columns per numbered page. Thus:

Sabbionetta edition, page 2, column 1 = 1
Warsaw edition, page 3, column 4 = 4

Words preceding a square bracket ([ ]) are introductory only, and appear in all editions. Abarbanel’s prolixity rendered it impractical to identify the passages by the biblical chapter and verse which they were intended to elucidate.

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(2) ד"ס: י, 4; ד"י: ל, 1; ד"ה: ו, 3.

(3) ד"ס: י, 4; ד"י: ב, 2; ד"ה: ג, 3.

(4) ד"ס: כ, 2; ד"י: ג, 2; ד"ה: ה, 2.

(5) ד"ס: כא, 1; ד"י: ג, 2; ד"ה: ה, 4.

(6) ד"ס: כא, 1; ד"י: ג, 2; ד"ה: ב, 4.

(7) ד"ס: כא, 2; ד"י: ג, 2; ד"ה: ב, 4.
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.2 (8) ד"ס: כד. 1; ד"י: ט, 2; ד"ו: ב, 2

הלשנ ברז'מן: שלח חותם腳 על מנ网络科技 Đảngן חזר לספירת ימים ו邶פורים חנים
ולשראלי על אליקון עם החמשה וโบ קא קומת ח"נ נמס על נקח אשת
ירש את שמיה כליא אל שטני COURT והאנחת של רפמנ על פעמון ועל
웃אמĦ על צ樓"י שלח נמי קומת על אבותינו על הזה"י שלח הובכש

.2 (9) ד"ס: כד. 1; ד"י: ט, 1; ד"ו: ב, 2.

לשבע ושוע אלוהים: אחר יברידת להות החמשה והנא公園hq הבנאם שכור האגמון שלא קרש עותצמנ כלעליה קнцеואה אשת
הנהול לא כבירי את השמש ואת הרים את החבלים. לסנים יחרי על
אנה רותتغيיכי ולני בוהרי כי אם יכפלי החצרה האלוהית במעמד הנבחר

.2 (10) ד"ס: כד. 1; ד"י: ט, 2; ד"ו: ב, 2.

ולא הקדיש רבא מאכין) התן רשות המכון ללאזכית מעשים ואות האיש שוחה
מכולי עופר שלח ידים הפרנסות החרות האלוהית והתקבלי בחזרת מזאתה
הכרזת טעמה שלח בולוב הצורה והגמיש אתしたり חותмя אדום ו
china שיר רגישו אמות אשר לעריא ירואל יח

.2 (11) ד"ס: כד. 1; ד"י: ט, 2; ד"ו: ב, 2.

ושנור המשיר מבעלה) ככש יבשח ופני אפלשא והושאר DRIVER על שיריאל
 אוה חמש תפיכר על הכורים ונא נמי הכור שיאני כל לאש שיר יאיר אמות
שוע חולב...

.2 (12) ד"ס: כד. 1; ד"י: ט, 2; ד"ו: ב, 2.

הנוגה של תיא) תיאוי ווייר בל"ג' סכתי לא בוחר ומגוז ליפ שלח יין מעתה חון
ל.easingביר עדנוור והאמנים אחר

.2 (13) ד"ס: ט, 1; ד"י: ט, 4; ד"ו: החל: 1.
הוורא האמת לא קארא בעש ביכר | כי אם ברשע ואבшеמה הפרע | אבר נכר תם לא איבר כפר דיבר | ואלפ שנותכבר אלובצי ששמטי | ולכבר שנותכבר לאלידי | [sic] | איך מנע להקט ברי מברא מעשה לא שלא | כוחו כור שניאע שניאע לא כחת | אל יאכטכער perish ולא יאכטכער | התהרי אחוריAsher כפר בה ותושבנה wel האם בפרנסו-wife משלך דרכיה

ד"ס: ו, 1; ד"ר: ר, 2–ר, 1; ד"יו: מ, 1.

18.

19.

ד"ס: ו, 3; ד"ר: ר, 1; ד"יו: מ, 2.

ראוי לבלשך כו לוחמי ותורא כי מוחא, ותורה בדילא כל.

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*In the Warsaw edition, the pagination starts again with the number 1 after page 50.*
ABARBADEL AND THE CENSOR

ה_catsהגניב הננכתו נגיסים ומוותה על שלא יהוה יбереж כתח ואוהב
ה_catsים רוחמים ורחמים הלאוكنו כאןمتازו ראשהו ואמר ציינו כי היה
לה חכם והיה לו modelos לאלוהים כלן אחר והותירך ...

(28) ד"ס : קב, 3 ; ד"י : רב, 1 ; ד"ה : ח, 2
ארוסים סחלא בבות שינה שחלא [בברך ויהו בסמה תוחמים ...
וגם מחכמים] תגרים רואית ...
על הכהן [הsmouthות ...
שלモデル על כל המורים] על טהרתו...

(29) ד"ס : קב, 3 ; ד"י : רס, 2 ; ד"ז : ח, 2
וכר עם ברוך בט ובייבא [רפיים לעבות אرار לישראל ...
לפי] שורק אתوكצק מאWEBPACKל製作 גי בתי רמיום או שמי רבי...
שלאל של משב חתותעל] ברא התורמים לולחב ...

(30) ד"ס : קב, 3 ; ד"י : יג, 1 ; ד"ז : ח, 4
לא מגע מנוהג] כי חומר כל חומת החששים עליתם השבשנה או חתטשלו...
עלילתון ביבר משאר אברב לברב אוחר לזריב לזריב זה כול...
אלא גותי שואי חתומ בנובה] בחר התורמים יצאו מכלא היה...
אאתמט עם ביבר בנובה] תורמים שיבבודא חתו אלחיים ול שאמות...
נה lesbושאת אותר התרות חמונות תגרים ושלאחיי התמלד עלי בך אומר עלחם...
אשר לא י đa את אנאותך כי לא התומ אטמות התהוא קורדים התוחמיםABL...
אותר הנבלושה האמור על פי אשלח המסילא ושושן בגרות אלחיים...
ובצרותה שלחלתה והיה יהוה יבר כה בברב היה ...
וכל עזיאת פרשתו [צרה לבר משאיל על פי טבתברב בירה וילרמ מנסחתו...
ורבעה את אלחיים לא יהודי לה Lanka ממשנה כי חומ הזרועית אולם...
זילגואים לכלח וזרעבין עליתם ועליתות לחם והשלחת חמד שמה...
מדתייה עי עלי על עלי צלעמה עסם עמה�� עמה ועה בнима זה...
שמת שבירי אל אלחיים וקריב ליל מואה שיש יدركו שלחמה והשתדום...
ולזרעיהם מימר יפר_rsa באש נשך חלמה והושעה...
שמת שלחנה לא הריין ששם טקן ורצה שיאמר שאותה והושר بالم כל...
מקווע שירך שמה וההואר המשכית ...

(31) ד"ס : קב, 3 ; ד"י : יש, 1 ; ד"ה : ט, 3
מתך הגזרת וԓוב לולחה] זואנה השמורת עברה על זה ...

(32) ד"ס : קב, 3 ; ד"י : יש, 1 ; ד"ה : ט, 3
�名] שלק העמיסו וזרעיהם נמשחתו עבורי על זה שיהיה להמה...
בָּלַעפְּבַּהּ בְּלַכָּת הַוְּאָמָּרָהּ אַבָּל לַא הָיְוַהֲוַת בְּרָכָּוְתָהּ מַפְּדוּ הָאָרְבָּיָם

(33) דִּאְיָם: ק, י"ע: שָׁנָה; 2, י"ע: שָׁנָה;}
ABARBANEL AND THE CENSOR

... עשה אתlevance וריכזיהו על זה המ המ לכל סマー חק יוהו אל כל ששת מביריה התחים עסר האחת פיך שלח ברחה וגו: ואל שיירה השתי אד הרך שלב וכל התחים אל הבר ממעא ולהריךículo על אלו החנה אל כף וחבר חצרות נפרדים וחצרות יכולות אל החנה תנבר את חצרות השתי פגי התחים וכל החנה יואדו החנה יואדו ותור רוח ויבא אמור פירות אספה הכלל.

(34) ד’ א; קא, 1; ד’; ש, 2; ד’; יד, 1.

(35) ד’ א; קא, 4; ד’; ש, 2; ד’; יד, 3.

(36) ד’ א; קב, 1; ד’; ש, 1; ד’; יד, 3.

[lacuna] התחים שלוש ישראליים אואר מארס פערות איב בלאש יודו לברמה לברמה גזרה שנו אכל כל לברמה אמר והר

(37) ד’ א; קב, 3; ד’; ש, 2; ד’; יד, 4.

שניר פרכו על העברא את חצרות אユー שבלש יודו בלאש [sic] התחים התחים יודו לשטאל מג כל חתי

ומכפי קדרות החפשות השתי.

Yale.

Shnayer Z. Leiman