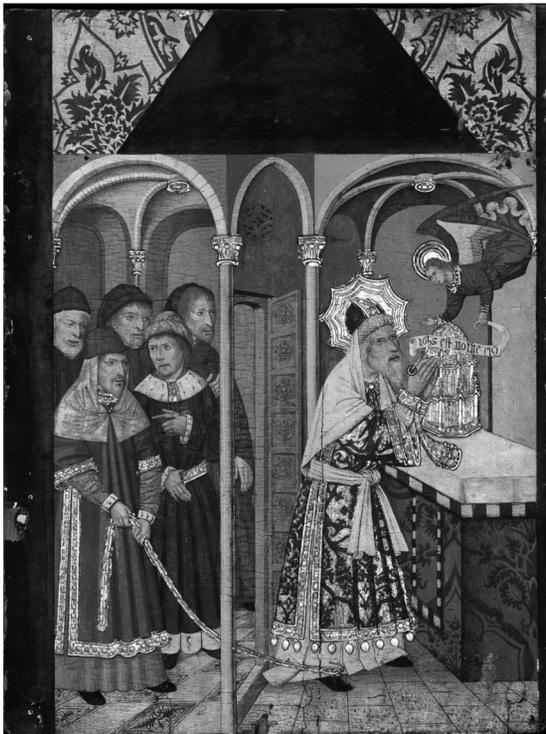


during the early centuries of Church history. As a result, 15th-century Spanish altarpieces are a rich source of information on synagogue interiors and the ceremonial art used there. In the altarpieces, the Jews of Spain become living, breathing individuals, rather than mere names.



Panel with the Angel Appearing to Zacharias (from a Retable depicting Saint John the Baptist and scenes from his life), Domingo Ram (Spanish, Aragon, active 1464–1507), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 1925.120.929. www.metmuseum.org.

The origins of the Christian subject illustrated here, the Annunciation to Zacharias (father of St. John the Baptist), are even more complex. Zacharias is depicted as the High Priest on Yom Kippur, alone in the Holy of Holies. Much of what we know about the Yom Kippur service in the Temple comes from earlier sources such as this week's parashah, but one detail in the painting is derived from a later text. The Zohar, written or compiled in late 13th-century Spain, tells of a golden chain that was attached to the High Priest's leg in order to pull him from the Holy of Holies if he died while performing his duties. The inclusion of that detail in this altarpiece—dated 1464 or later—reveals that some of the contents of the Zohar were known in Spain—by Christians—just 150 years after its compilation.

View a larger image of this painting in color at <http://www.jtsa.edu/the-saint-and-the-zohar>

Aharei Mot 5779

אחרי מות תשע"ט



The Great Escape

Marc Gary, Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer, JTS

Last year, the eminent Bible scholar Robert Alter completed a project that only a handful of people have ever even attempted: a brand-new translation of and commentary on the entire Tanakh (Hebrew Bible). The work comprises more than 3,000 pages and took him almost 25 years to complete. Professor Alter is rightfully the subject of much admiration for this outstanding achievement, but one of his predecessors did not fare as well.

William Tyndale (1494–1536) is often referred to as the father of the English Bible even though the first complete English translation of the Bible was accomplished by John Wycliffe almost 150 years before Tyndale. Nevertheless, Tyndale's achievement was quite singular. He was the first to produce an English translation that drew directly from Hebrew and (in the case of the New Testament) Greek texts. Subsequent translations of the Bible into English have drawn heavily on Tyndale's work, including the King James Bible. The members of the religious establishment of the sixteenth century disapproved strenuously of Tyndale's translation because they believed that Scripture should only be read and interpreted by approved clergy. Ultimately, Tyndale was convicted of heresy, executed by strangling, and then burnt at the stake. Literary critics can be very cruel indeed.

In translating the Bible, Tyndale introduced many new words and phrases into the English language, including a concept that figures prominently in this week's Torah portion and in today's social and political landscape. He was the first person to coin the word "scapegoat."

Our parashah this week, Aharei Mot, contains an elaborate description of the Yom Kippur ritual. A critical part of that ritual is described in Leviticus 16:7–9:

“Aaron [the High Priest] shall take the two he-goats and let them stand before the Lord at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting; and he shall place lots upon the two goats, one marked for the Lord and the other marked for Azazel.” Aaron then must sacrifice the one marked for the Lord as a sin offering, but the other is left alive “to make expiation with it and to send it off to the wilderness for Azazel.”

Much about this ritual is unclear or ambiguous, starting with the phrase “to Azazel.” That phrase appears nowhere else in the Tanakh, so several understandings have been put forth. Rashi thought it was a description of a destination, a desolate area perhaps on the side of a steep ravine where the goat fell to its death. Nahmanides thought Azazel was a demon who had to be either distracted or sated with a sacrifice so that Israel’s sin offering would be received without interference. Robert Alter in his new translation and commentary asserts that Nahmanides’s position—that Azazel is the name of a goatish demon or deity—is the most plausible.

Tyndale, however, approached the word “Azazel” more literally. He saw it as the combination of the Hebrew word for “goat” (*ez*) and “sent away” (*azal*). And so, Tyndale called it the “escape goat”—the goat that was released and escaped—which subsequently became the word “scapegoat.” In this respect, Tyndale differed from the consensus of early rabbis who imagined that the goat was pushed off a cliff. Professor Alter seems to agree with Tyndale in this respect, noting that the text supports the view that the goat was not killed but rather set free and allowed to escape into the wilderness.

Today, of course, we use the term “scapegoat” in much broader contexts. The global rise in anti-Semitism offers almost daily reminders of the many ways Jews have been and remain scapegoats for a variety of societal ills. As the renowned scholar of the Holocaust Deborah Lipstadt points out in her new book, *Antisemitism: Here and Now*, political leaders on two continents have found it expedient to blame our uncertain economic conditions on “international banks” or “globalists” with names like Soros, Yellen, and Blankfein. The Prime Minister of Hungary blames Muslim immigration on these Jewish globalists. So too among the fringe elements of the Yellow Vest movement in France one can hear that the failings of capitalism and the control of the global economy somehow lie in the hands of the Jews. And not too long ago, at a protest by Students for Justice in Palestine at

the City University of New York, activists blamed planned tuition hikes on the “Zionist administration [that] invests in Israeli companies.”

The political utility of scapegoating the Jews for the fallout of prolonged political and economic instability is not new, but it is a far cry from the essential concept underlying the Yom Kippur ritual. In fact, Maimonides in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (III.37) utterly rejects the notion that one can transfer responsibility for our failings to someone else: “There is no doubt that sins cannot be carried like a burden, and taken off the shoulder of one being to be laid on that of another being.” Rather, Maimonides argues, the idea behind the ritual is to allow us to free ourselves from the past so that we do not obsess over it and to allow us to concentrate on our behavior now and in the future. Just as the goat “escaped” (ergo, “scapegoat”), we escape our past and focus on the present and future.

The scapegoating inherent in modern anti-Semitism traps us in the past, seeking to shift responsibility for personal and political failings rather than confront the complex reality we face and seek meaningful solutions. The scapegoating of Leviticus is the exact opposite: it is meant to teach us through ritual that we must face the future freed of the shackles of our past sins, but always mindful that responsibility for our present actions and the type of society we live in lies with us. There is no escape from that responsibility.

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דבר אחר | A Different Perspective



The Saint and the Zohar Dr. Vivian Mann, Professor Emerita of Jewish Art and Visual Culture, JTS

We often think of Jewish life in Spain in terms of the massacres of 1391 and the Spanish Expulsion in 1492. But the art made for the Church between those two dates presents a more nuanced view of Christian–Jewish relations. Many of the 15th-century painters who worked for the Church in Spain adopted the conceit that the communal spaces of Jewish life—the synagogue and the Jewish quarter—could represent the ancient Temple and the Holy Land in paintings of the lives of Jesus and the saints, and that contemporary Jews could be stand-ins for those who lived