

From Maimonides the Physician to the Physician at Maimonides Medical Center: A Brief Glimpse into the History of the Jewish Medical Student throughout the Ages

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Introduction

This is the third issue of a medical *halakhah* journal edited and written primarily by a group of Jewish medical students at a medical school in the Diaspora under Jewish auspices, the Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University. To my knowledge, this is the first such endeavor of its kind in all of Jewish history. Of course, there have been Jewish medical students in previous generations; of course Jewish medical students have contributed articles to the literature of Jewish medical ethics; but never before has there been a student publication of Jewish medical ethics

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at a Jewish medical school in the Diaspora published under the press of a Jewish university. My purpose in writing this brief essay is to give historical context to this publication, and to give the reader an appreciation of the challenges that faced our predecessors in their attainment of higher education, in particular, medical training. In addition, our discussion will reveal that the unfettered religious expression in this generation would have simply been unthinkable in previous centuries. Ultimately, it is the establishment of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine by Yeshiva University that has created the milieu that has made this publication possible.

Within the vast field of medical history, we find a significant chapter devoted to the Jews and medicine. This rich and fertile field of Jewish medical history, to which has been devoted numerous volumes and dedicated journals,¹ is little known to the modern student of medical *halakhah*.

1 The journal *Koroth*, whose first issue appeared in April, 1952, is devoted to Jewish medical history and presently under the editorship of the Jewish medical historian Professor Shmuel Kottek. Its previous editors, Dr. Sussmann Muntner, Professor Joshua Leibowitz, and Dr. David Margalit were all prominent contributors to the field of Jewish medical history. The journal *Medical Leaves*, of which five volumes appeared between 1937 and 1943, was devoted to Jewish medical history. See H. Friedenwald, *The Jews and Medicine*, 3 vol. (Johns Hopkins Press, 1944); N. Berger, *Jews and Medicine: Religion, Culture and Science (Beth Hatefutsoth: Tel Aviv, 1995)* (volume accompanied the *Beth Hatefutsoth* exhibit on Jews and medicine); F. Heynick, *Jews and Medicine: An Epic Saga* (Ktav Publishers, 2002). See also the works of Zohar Amar, Ron Barkai, Eliakim Carmoli, John Efron, Aaron Feingold, Sander Gillman, Solomon Kagan, Michael Nevins, David Ruderman, Harry Savitz and Joseph Shatzmiller. For works on Biblical and Talmudic medicine, see E. Reichman, "Biblical and Talmudic Medicine: A Bibliographical Essay," in F. Rosner, *Encyclopedia of Biblical and Talmudic Medicine* (Jason Aronson, 2000), 1-9. Though not generally considered part of the Jewish medical history literature, the work of H. J. Zimmels, *Magicians, Theologians and Doctors: Studies in Folk Medicine and Folklore as Reflected in Rabbinical Responsa* (Goldston and Sons: London, 1952) is an invaluable resource for the Jewish practice and response to medicine from the 15th-18th centuries.

This brief excursion into Jewish medical history, as it relates to the training of the Jewish medical student throughout the ages, will hopefully suffice to entice the reader to mine and explore its depths. The references herein to the classic works in Jewish medical history will provide the reader with a good starting bibliography. As I have endeavored to illustrate in previous contributions, the study of medical *halakhah* can be immensely enhanced in many ways by an historical perspective.

Middle Ages

We begin our historical journey in the Middle Ages, the time of one of the greatest physicians in Jewish history, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (1138-1205), known as the Rambam. Rambam took up the practice of medicine after the death of his brother in order to support his family. While many are familiar with the accomplishments and writings of the Rambam in the fields of *halakhah* and philosophy, lesser know is the Rambam's contribution to medicine. He authored numerous treatises on topics such as asthma, hemorrhoids and sexual health, and his medical works, written in Arabic, have been translated into many languages, including Hebrew and English.² One of his works is entitled *Pirkei Avukrat*, a commentary on the works on none other than Hippocrates (5th century B.C.E). Rambam also wrote a commentary on the writings of Galen (2nd century C.E.). This gives us an insight into the

2 Sussmann Muntner, one of the editors of *Koroth*, translated the Rambam's medical works from Arabic into Hebrew. Dr. Fred Rosner, who has written extensively on the medical works of the Rambam, translated Muntner's Hebrew into English. Gerrit Bos is presently translating the Rambam's medical works from the original Arabic into English in what will be the definitive academic English translation.

training and practice of medicine in the Middle Ages. The works of Hippocrates, Galen and Aristotle, whose works the Rambam was also intimately familiar with, served as the core curriculum for medical training from Antiquity through the period of the Renaissance, in addition to more contemporary authors like Averroes and Avicenna.

How did the Rambam obtain his medical training? While we have no clear record of the Rambam's medical training, it is certain that it was not accomplished in a university setting. There simply were few major medical centers in Egypt on its environs in this period of time. It is more than likely that the Rambam apprenticed with an expert physician and read the extant medical literature, as was the common practice at that time.³

The Cairo Genizah, a rich repository of documents housed in the Ben Ezra Synagogue of Old Cairo from roughly the 9th to the 19th century, gives us a glimpse into some aspects of medical training⁴ and the practice of

3 For the training of Jewish physicians during this period, see J. Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1994), esp. 14-27; S. D. Goiten, "The Medical Profession in the Light of the Cairo Genizah Documents," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 34 (1963), 177-194, reprinted with minor additions in *idem.*, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Genizah* 2 (University of Berkeley Press: Berkeley, 1971), 240-261 (see 248ff. regarding medical training).

4 For a history of the discovery and subsequent research of the Cairo Genizah, see A. Hoffman and P. Cole, *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Genizah* (Schoken Books, 2011).

medicine⁵ in Medieval Egypt. In fact, the over 1600 medical fragments of the Cambridge Genizah have been compiled into an annotated catalogue.⁶ Among the documents of the Genizah we find the very writings of the Rambam himself, as well as letters addressed to him. While we possess no evidence that the Rambam acquired his medical education through apprenticeship, we do have record of others wishing to obtain their education by apprenticing with the Rambam. A letter by Meir ben al-Hamadani to Maimonides asks him to accept his son as his assistant for the study of medicine. He stresses that he dared to apply to him only because he had heard that Maimonides' own nephew, who had worked under him thus far, now practiced elsewhere. He promises to pay Maimonides a higher honorarium than the former apprentice.⁷

We also find in the Genizah records of the libraries of physicians, including the sale of a physician's library, which

5 For studies on the practice of medicine by Jewish physicians in the Middle East in the Medieval period, see, for example, M. Meyerhof, "Mediaeval Jewish physicians in the Near East, from Arabic sources," *Isis* 27-28 (1937-1938), 432-460; M. Meyerhof, "Jewish Physicians under the Reign of the Fatimid Caliphs in Egypt (969-1171 C. E.)," *Medical Leaves* (1939), 131-139; H. D. Isaacs, "Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Medicine as Described in the Cairo Genizah," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 83 (November, 1990), 734-737; P. Fenton, "The Importance of the Cairo Genizah for the History of Medicine," *Medical History* 24 (1980), 347-348; S. D. Goiten, "The Medical Profession in the Light of the Cairo Genizah Documents," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 34 (1963), 177-194; Moshe Perlmann, "Notes on the position of Jewish Physicians in Medieval Muslim countries," *Journal of Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972), 315-319; J. Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1994).

6 H. D. Isaacs, *Medical and Para-Medical Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, England, 1994).

7 The Friedberg Genizah Project (<http://www.genizah.org/>) is devoted to digitizing all extant Genizah fragments throughout the world and making them freely accessible on the internet. This fragment is available on this site under the following reference number- Cambridge, CUL: T-S 16.291.

provide insight into the standard textbooks for medical practice at that time. Among the library volumes, we find Arabic translations of the works of Galen, as well as works by Hippocrates, Aristotle, Averroes and Avicenna.⁸

From the Middle Ages and onward, there were a number of major impediments that made the practice of medicine difficult for Jews in Christian Europe.⁹ First, Jews were prohibited from treating Christian patients. For example, the decrees of the Council of Vienna of 1267 forbade Jews from treating Christian patients. Similar decrees were repeated and reaffirmed throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁰ Sometimes even the acquiring of textbooks required great effort. For example, the physician Leon Joseph of Carcassonne learned Latin and attended the lectures at the university in order to obtain medical texts for the use of Jewish medical students. For ten years he tried in vain to secure copies of some of the core medical texts, but their sale to non-Christians was forbidden. Finally, in 1394, he

8 See D. Banat, "The Library of an Egyptian Physician in the Times of the Rambam," (Hebrew) *Tarbitz* 30 (5721), 171-185; J. Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1994), 36-55.

9 For the following discussion, see H. Friedenwald, "The Jewish Medical Student of Former Days," *Menorah Journal* 7:1 (February, 1921), 52-62; C. Roth, "The Qualification of Jewish Physicians in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 28 (1953), 834-843; J. Shatzmiller, "On Becoming a Jewish Doctor in the High Middle Ages," *Sefarad* 43 (1983), 239-249. See also C. Roth, "The Medieval University and the Jew," *Menorah Journal* 19:2 (November-December, 1930), 128-141; J. Efron, "The Emergence of the Medieval Jewish Physician," in his *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2001), 13-33.

10 See, for example, J. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2001), 17. Parallel decrees were enacted against Jews in Medieval Muslim countries. For example, in the twelfth century a *fatwa* was issued against permitting a Jew from wearing the special medical attire worn by the Muslim scholars. Jews were also not permitted to treat Muslim patients. See Moshe Perlmann, "Notes on the Position of Jewish Physicians in Medieval Muslim Countries," *Journal of Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972), 315-319.

succeeded, though he had to pay double the normal price.¹¹ Despite the ban on Jewish physicians treating Christian patients, virtually every pope had a Jewish physician on their staff.¹²

Second, university education was generally off limits to Jews throughout this period. Most major universities were under Christian auspices and acceptance was predicated upon acceptance of Christian beliefs. This, in addition to official university policies barring Jews from entry, precluded Jewish attendance. In special circumstances, existing laws were suspended, with papal or governmental permission, to allow the occasional Jewish student to attend a European university.

In addition, by the thirteenth century, doctors had to obtain a medical license in order to practice medicine.¹³ In general, licenses were granted to those who had completed a university education, though licensing was possible through other means as well. Jews, as mentioned above, were restricted from university attendance. Despite this hurdle, Jews still managed to obtain licenses to practice medicine throughout the centuries, as the documentary evidence indicates.

In fourteenth century Valencia, Spain, Jews were

11 C. Roth, "The qualification of Jewish physicians," op. cit., 838, n. 8a.

12 See J. Pines, "*Des Medecins Juifs au Service de la Papeaute du XII au XVII Steele*," *Le Scalpel* 114 (May, 1961), 462-470; E. Mendelssohn, *The Popes' Jewish Doctors 492-1655 C.E.* (self-publication: Lauderhill, Florida, 1991).

13 On licensing, see J. Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1994); L. Garcia-Ballester, et. al., "Medical Licensing and Learning in Fourteenth Century Valencia," *Transactions on the American Philosophical Society*, new series, 79:6 (1989), 1-128; Y. Assis, "Jewish Physicians and Medicine in Medieval Spain," in S. Kottek and L. Garcia- Ballester, *Medicine and Medical Ethics in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: An Intercultural Approach* (Jerusalem, 1996), 33-49.

granted medical license, though often restricted in their practice to treating fellow Jews.¹⁴ A formal medical degree was required for licensure, but Jews were unable to obtain such degrees as the doors of the universities were generally closed to them. Alternate provisions were made for Jews, and they were allowed to apply for licensure as long as they met the requirement of an examination. In some cases, the Jewish students were required to be examined by a fellow Jewish physician, in addition to a Christian physician. For example, in May, 1346, Pere IV granted the Jew Jaffuada Abenvives a license to practice medicine in the kingdom of Valencia, accepting a verification of his qualifications based on an examination performed by two royal physicians, one Christian and one Jewish.¹⁵

Furthermore, the oath of Jewish graduates was sometimes tailored to their faith and made in the name of God whose precepts were given to Moses on Mount Sinai.¹⁶

We also have record of Jewish women receiving licenses for the practice of medicine.¹⁷ For example, a woman by the name of Floreta received a royal license in 1374 to practice medicine throughout the territories of the Crown of Aragon.¹⁸

14 On the licensing of Jews in Valencia, see Garcia-Ballester, *op. cit.*

15 Garcia-Ballester, *op. cit.*, 27.

16 Assis, *op. cit.*, 45.

17 See Roth, "The Qualification of Jewish Physicians," *op. cit.*, 841-842 and J. Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1994); J. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2001), 19-21.

18 Garcia-Ballester, *op. cit.*, 32, n. 54.

The Renaissance

The early Renaissance period represented a new era in the medical training of the Jewish medical student. We find the occasional Jewish student attending universities in Europe and encountering great difficulty in doing so. For a Jew to attend medical school, it was required to obtain no less than papal permission, or occasionally higher governmental permission. One of the most famous Jewish physicians of this period was Tobias Cohen, author of *Ma'aseh Tuvia* (Venice, 1707). Although he attended medical school, he is quite emphatic about the primacy and importance of Torah study:

For those who come from Italy, Poland, Germany and France, they should not even think of studying medicine until their bellies are first full with the study of the written Torah and the oral Torah.¹⁹

Tobias records how he obtained permission from the Great Elector of Brandenburg in order to study medicine at the University of Frankfurt on the Oder in Germany. He was apparently the first Jew to ever attend a German medical school,²⁰ which was reflected in his less than warm welcome. The mutual discomfort for both Tobias and the university led to his transfer to an institution more tolerant

19 *Ma'aseh Tuvia* (Venice, 1707), 82b, introduction to the medical section, *Eretz HaChadashah*.

20 On the discriminatory admission policies of German and other European universities with respect to the Jews, see J. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2001), esp. 43-46.

of Jews, the University of Padua (more on the University of Padua below).²¹

Tobias Cohen wasn't the only Jewish student whose social unease led to his transfer to another institution. In 1731, the Prussian King Frederick William I ordered the medical faculty of the University of Konigsberg to accept Abraham Moses Levin as a student. He was made to feel so unwelcome in Konigsberg that he transferred to the medical school in Berlin. He was the last Jewish medical student at the University of Konigsberg for many years. It wasn't until 1781 that another Jewish student, Yehuda Jacob Hirschberg, completed his studies there.²²

The first Jewish medical student in Germany to complete his studies, apparently uneventfully, was clearly concerned with the *halakhic* ramifications of his training.

21 See introduction to Tobias Cohen's *Ma'aseh Tuvia* (Venice, 1708). On Cohen and his work, see A. Levinson, "A Medical Cyclopedist of the Seventeenth Century," *Bulletin of the Society of Medical History* (January, 1917), 27-44; D. A. Friedman, "*Tuvia HaRofeh*," (Hebrew) (Palestine Jewish Medical Association, 1940); M. J. Mahler, *A Precursor of the Jewish Enlightenment: Dr. Tobias Cohen and his Ma'aseh Tuvia* (unpublished thesis for ordination, Hebrew Union College, NY, 1978); N. Allan, "Illustrations from the Wellcome Institute Library: A Jewish Physician in the Seventeenth Century," *Medical History* 28 (1984), 324-328; D. Ruderman, "On the Diffusion of Scientific Knowledge within the Jewish Community: The Medical Textbook of Tobias Cohen," in his *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1995), 229-255; S. G. Massry, et. al., "Jewish Medicine and the University of Padua: Contribution of the Padua Graduate Tovia Cohen to Nephrology," *American Journal of Nephrology* 19:2 (1999), 213-21; E. Lopicard, "An Alternative to the Cosmic and Mechanic Metaphors for the Human Body? The House Illustration in *Ma'aseh Tuviah* (1708)," *Medical History* 52 (2008), 93-105; *Koroth* 20 (2009-2010) where five articles are devoted to Tobias Cohen and his work *Ma'aseh Tuvia*. On the relationship of Cohen with the Jerusalem physician Rabbi Dr. David de Silva, as well as for information about the death of Cohen, see Z. Amar, *Pri Megaddim by Rabbi David de Silva Physician of Jerusalem* (Yad Ben Tzvi Press: Jerusalem, 2003), 41-45. For other references on Cohen, see Ruderman, op. cit., at n. 2.

22 H. H. Beck, "Neither Goshen Nor Botany Bay: Hippel and the Debate on Improving the Civil Status of the Jews," *Lessing Yearbook* 27 (1996), 73.

In 1737, a young medical student at the University of Gottingen in Germany by the name of Benjamin Wolff Gintzburger queried the great Rabbi Yaakov Emden about the permissibility of performing dissection on Shabbos,²³ in particular dog dissection if human cadavers were not available.²⁴ The masterfully poetic prose of the question, as well as the attempt at *halakhic* analysis, is testimony to the quality of the student's education. Oft ignored in the medical *halakhic* literature is the identity of this student. The student, Benjamin Wolff Gintzburger, is known to us from another source as well.

The common practice to this day in universities of higher learning is to require the completion of a dissertation as a prerequisite to graduation. Gintzburger's dissertation for the completion of his medical studies at the University of Gottingen in 1743 was a study of Talmudic medicine, one of the earliest contributions of its kind in the history

23 *She'eilat Ya'avetz*, 41.

24 With the establishment of routine dissection in medical training in the Renaissance, cadaver supply became a continued problem until laws were eventually introduced in many countries in the 19th century. Coincidentally, the supply of hospital cadavers to the University of Gottingen anatomy lab was first allowed in 1737, the very same year the young Benjamin Gintzburger posed his question to Rabbi Emden. See T. Buklijas, "Cultures of Death and Politics of Corpse Supply: Anatomy in Vienna 1848-1914," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 82 (2008), 570-607, at n. 42.

of medical *halakhic* literature.²⁵ The work is extant and has been translated into English.²⁶

From the diary of Judah Gonzago, an Italian student born around 1700, we learn a first hand account of the trials and tribulations of a Renaissance Jewish student in medical training.²⁷ Judah's early education was confined to Mishnah and Torah studies. He later developed an interest in medicine. In order to attend the Sapienza University of Rome, he was required to obtain papal permission. He was clearly a learned and talented young man, for after he delivered a eulogy for his teacher, the rabbi of the community, he was appointed to a lectureship in the Talmud Torah.

His fees at the university were triple the average student.

25 On the history of works on Biblical and Talmudic medicine, see E. Reichman, "Biblical and Talmudic Medicine: A Bibliographical Essay," in F. Rosner, *Encyclopedia of Biblical and Talmudic Medicine* (Jason Aronson, 2000), 1-9; Benjamin Mussafia, a graduate of the medical school of Padua, wrote *Dicti Sacro-Medicæ Sententiæ* (Hamburg, 1640), the earliest known work by a Jewish physician on the Bible, collecting and explaining medically related passages from *Tanakh*. See H. Friedenwald, *The Jews and Medicine* 1 (Ktav Publishing House, 1967), 112. Benedetto Frizzi, a physician in Mantua in the late eighteenth century, wrote a magnum opus of over one thousand pages, called *Petach Einayim* (published from 1787-1799), on Biblical and Talmudic medicine. On Frizzi, see S. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua* (Kiryat Sefer: Jerusalem, 1977), 649, n. 226; Friedenwald, op. cit., 115. On his work, see B. Dinaburg, "Ben Tzion Hakohen Frizzi and His Work *Petach Einayim*," (Hebrew) *Tarbitz*, 20 (1948/49), 241-64.

26 F. Schiller, "Benjamin Wolff Gintzburger's Dissertation on Talmudic Medicine," *Koroth* 9:7-8 (Fall 1988), 579-600. For biographical notes on Gintzburger, see N. M. Gelber, "History of Jewish Physicians in Poland in the Eighteenth Century," (Hebrew) in Y. Tirosh, ed., *Shai Li-Yeshayahu: Sefer Yovel L' Rav Yehoshua Wolfsberg*, (*HaMercaz le-Tarbut shel ha-Poel ha-Mizrachi*; Tel Aviv, 5716), 347-371, esp. 356; *Koroth* 9 (Special Issue, 1988) [Proceedings of the Third Symposium on Medicine in the Bible and Talmud], 255-261; J. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2001), 190-197.

27 See A. Berlin, "Memoirs of a Roman Ghetto Youth" (German) *Jahrbuch für Jüdische Geschichte und Literatur* (Berlin, 1904), 110-132. H. Friedenwald summarizes and excerpts from this article in "The Jews and the Old Universities," in his *The Jews and Medicine* 1 (Ktav Publishing, 1944), 221-240.

Though one teacher made accommodations for his Sabbath observance, most were not nearly as forgiving. When time came for final examinations, which were performed on an individual basis, he was required to visit all thirteen examiners to plead his case. One examiner told him candidly that he had passed two Jewish candidates the year before, and there was no need for another as this would set a bad precedent. With much effort and assistance from a local rabbi physician he was able to secure permission for the exams.

His last oral exam was on Rosh Hashanah, and Judah recounts how he attended the early service, left after *shacharit*, and returned just in time to hear the blowing of the shofar.

In this period, one of Europe's premier institutions, the University of Padua, opened its doors to Jews, though not without some rather disturbing discriminatory practices.²⁸ In addition to paying higher tuition fees, Jews were required to provide sweet meats for the entire faculty on the first snow of the season each year.²⁹

28 On the Jews and the University of Padua see, A. Ciscato, *Gli Ebrei in Padova* (1300-1800) (Arnaldo Forni Editore, 1901); Cecil Roth, "The Medieval University and the Jew," *Menorah Journal* 9:2(1930), 128-41; S. Dubnov, "Jewish Students at the University of Padua," *Sefer Hashanah: American Hebrew Yearbook* (1931), 216-219; Jacob Shatzky, "On Jewish Medical Students of Padua," *Journal of the History of Medicine* 5 (1950), 444-47; Cecil Roth, "The Qualification of Jewish Physicians in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 28 (1953), 834-43; David B. Ruderman, "The Impact of Science on Jewish Culture and Society in Venice (with Special Reference to Jewish Graduates of Padua's Medical School) in *Gli Ebrei e Venezia* Secoli xiv-xviii (*Atti del Convegno Internazionale Organizzato D'all'Istituto di Storia della Sociata e della Stato Veneziano dell a Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia*, 1983), 417-48, reprinted in *idem.*, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven, 1995); S. G. Massry, et. al., "Jewish Medicine and the University of Padua: Contribution of the Padua Graduate Tovia Cohen to Nephrology," *American Journal of Nephrology* 19:2 (1999), 213-21; S. M. Shasha and S. G. Massry, "The Medical School of Padua and its Jewish Graduates," *Harefuah* 141:4 (April, 2002), 388-394 (Hebrew).

29 See Friedenwald, op. cit. For similar discriminatory practices endured by the Jewish students in Germany, see J. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2001), 60-61.

Jewish students now descended upon Padua from other European countries, such as Germany and Poland.³⁰ This was the first encounter for these Jews with the secular world, having come from insular communities. The contrast was made more stark by the fact that Padua was finest institutions in the world. The likes of William Harvey, Galileo, Vesalius, Morgagni, and Fallopius lectured there. The transition must have been traumatic and overwhelming for the average Jewish student, whose background for university study was sorely lacking. Some offered training in languages and rhetoric to bring the Jewish students up to par with their Italian peers. Perhaps the most famous of these programs was run by Solomon Conegliano, the teacher of Tobias Cohen.³¹ The language of this preparatory instruction was usually Hebrew or Yiddish.³² This is evidenced by an exceptionally rare manuscript in Yiddish of a digest of the works of Andreas Vesalius.³³

30 For a list of Jewish graduates of the University of Padua from past centuries, see Abdelkader Modena and Edgardo Morpugo, *Medici E Chirurghi Ebrei Dottorati E Licenziati Nell'Universita Di Padova dal 1617 al 1816* (Bologna, 1967); E. V. Ceseracci, "Ebrei Laureate a Padova nel Cinquecento," *Quaderni per la Storia dell'Universita di Padova* 13 (1980), 151-168; D. Carpi, "Jews Who Received Medical Degrees from the University of Padua in the 16th and early 17th Centuries" (Hebrew), in *Scritti in Memoria di Nathan Cassuto* (Ben Tzvi Publishers: Jerusalem, 1986), 62-91.

31 On Conegliano, and on others filling a similar role, see D. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven, 1995), 111-113.

32 See J. Shatzky, "On Jewish Medical Students at Padua," *Journal of the History of Medicine* (Autumn, 1950), 444-447.

33 <http://www.textmanuscripts.com/home/archives/archivesdescription.php?m=251#>, accessed May 3, 2007. According to this website, this extremely rare manuscript of a unique and unpublished Yiddish translation of Vesalius's work on anatomy is one of only 50 surviving manuscripts in Yiddish dating before 1600, of which only five are on medical subjects, the other four containing medical recipes and folkloric cures. For more on Vesalius, his Jewish connections, and on the history of anatomical dissection in general in rabbinic literature, see E. Reichman, "The Anatomy of *Halakhab*," in Y. Steinberg, ed., *Beracha LeAvraham* (Jerusalem, 2008), 69-97.

Unique problems were faced by the Jewish medical students of Padua. For example, the students of medicine were required to provide bodies for dissection. The Jewish students, who objected to this practice based on *halakhic* grounds, paid large sums of money for the privilege of having the deceased bodies of the Jewish community left untouched. Despite this privilege, non-Jewish medical students often forcibly claimed the bodies of Jews from their burial places.³⁴

Despite the difficulties in attending the University of Padua, accommodations were made for the Jewish students. For example, the Jews at the university were exempted from the obligation of wearing the red hat, which was required to distinguish every Jew from the rest of mankind. They were permitted to wear a black head covering like the other students.³⁵ Another deviation from the normal university practice was the alteration of the text of the graduation diploma for the Jewish students. The standard diploma formula, which began by invoking the names of the Christian deities, was obviously not acceptable to the Jewish students. The text was thus amended for the Jews to read “In Dei Aeterni Nomine, Amen,” in the name of the Eternal God. A number of such diplomas are extant

34 H. Friedenwald, “The Jewish Medical Students of Former Days,” *Menorah Journal* 7:1(1921). See the remarkable account by Isaac Cantarini describing the events of August, 1684, of the kidnapping and successful recovery of the body of Chananel Levi in *Pachad Yitzchak* (Amsterdam, 1685), 45a ff. For more on the history of dissection and grave robbing in rabbinic literature, see Reichman, *op. cit.*

35 See C. Roth, “The Medieval University and the Jew,” *Menorah Journal* 19:2 (November-December, 1930), 128-141, esp. 137. This article discusses general university training, with a focus medical education.

today.³⁶ This is similar in concept to the Jews in the Middle Ages taking their oath in the name of the God of Moses as discussed above.

We have evidence of at least one student in Padua who followed the same path as Tobias Cohen and vigorously pursued his Torah studies while attending medical school in Padua. Avtalyon Modena,³⁷ a brilliant Talmudist and student at the University of Padua Medical School, learned with Meir ben Isaac Katzenellenbogen (1473-1565), known as the *Maharam MiPadua*.³⁸ It is quite possible that other Jewish medical students may have left the anatomical theater of Vesalius to attend a shiur in the yeshiva of the *Maharam MiPadua*.³⁹ Rabbi Yehuda Arye De Modena, another prominent Italian rabbinic figure, also had significant contact with the Jewish medical students of Padua.⁴⁰

The graduation of Jewish students from the medical school

36 See Bruno Kisch, "Cervo Conigliano: A Jewish Graduate of Padua in 1743," *Journal of the History of Medicine* 4 (1949), 450-459. Conigliano's diploma bears the signature of Giovanni Battisti Morgagni, a professor at the University of Padua and considered the father of anatomical pathology. The diploma of Israel Barukh Olmo, who graduated from Padua's medical school in 1755, was auctioned at Sotheby's auction of important Judaica on November 24, 2009, Lot 160.

37 Avtalyon is the uncle of Rabbi Yehuda Arye De Modena mentioned below.

38 See Judah Salтары Fano, *Mikveh Yisrael* (Venice, 1607), 35a and 36b.

39 Rabbi Katzenellenbogen's own grandson, Shaul Wahl, attended the University of Padua. See Byron L. Sherwin, *Sparks Amidst the Ashes: The Spiritual Legacy of Polish Jewry* (Oxford University Press: 1997), 68.

40 M. R. Cohen, ed. and trans., *The Autobiography of a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Rabbi: Leon Modena's Life of Judah* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1988), 30 and 190. In the introduction to his *Ziknei Yehudah*, Rabbi Modena mentions a number of physicians with whom he had contact. Perhaps his most famous student was Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo, the author of *Sefer Elim*. On Delmedigo, see D. A. Friedman, "Joseph Shelomoh Delmedigo," *Medical Leaves* 4 (1942), 83-95; G. Alter, *Two Renaissance Astronomers* (Czechoslovakia Academy: 1958); I. Barzilay, *Yosef Shlomo Delmedigo (Yashar of Candia): His Life, Works and Times* (Brill Academic Publishers: 1997).

of Padua was often met with great fanfare by the Italian Jews.⁴¹ From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, the Jews of Italy often composed occasional poems to celebrate a variety of communal and private events, including circumcisions, marriages and the deaths of prominent personalities. These literary offerings, usually composed in Hebrew, were authored by some of the most prominent Jewish writers of the period. This poetic literary form was also applied to graduation celebrations for the Jewish medical students of Padua. For example, a broadside of a beautifully illustrated celebratory poem was designed in honor of the graduation in 1734 of Shmuel Lampronti, son of the famous Rabbi Isaac Lampronti, also a graduate of Padua's medical school.⁴² A similar broadside was designed in honor of the graduation of Isaac Consigli from the University of Padua Medical School in 1757.⁴³ The tradition of magnificently illustrated poems celebrating Jewish medical student graduations in Padua continued into the 19th century, as evidenced by the broadside honoring the graduation of Dr. Isaac Luzzatto in 1836.⁴⁴ Five

41 For the stark contrast between the responses of the Italian and German Jewish communities to the medical school graduates, see J. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2001).

42 The broadside was on display at Sotheby's as part of the Valmadonna Trust Library exhibit in February, 2009. Unfortunately, there is no comprehensive catalogue of this exhibit.

43 See the Tajan Auction House catalogue for the Judaica auction held June 27, 2006. The illustration of a winged angel with trumpet and wreath which accompanies the poem is remarkably similar, though not identical, to the illustration on the Lampronti broadside. I as yet have been unable to find the significance of this image.

44 This item was auctioned at Sotheby's Judaica auction in 2006, Lot 191. The poem was composed by Rabbi Mordecai Samuel Ghironi, a noted intellectual and a collector of rare Hebrew books, as well as the brother-in-law of Isaac Luzzatto. Ghironi served as Chief Rabbi of Padua and is the author of *Toldot Gedolei Yisrael*, a classic biographical dictionary of Jewish rabbis and scholars.

generations of the prestigious Luzzatto family received medical degrees from the University of Padua between 1687 and 1836.

Some of the collections of poems were published, such as the cleverly titled volume “*B’leil Chamitz*,” honoring the graduation of Yosef Chamitz in 1624.⁴⁵ This work was edited by Chamitz’s teacher, Rabbi Yehuda Arye De Modena, who also contributed a poem to the volume.

The Late 19th- Early 20th Century in Europe

By the late nineteenth century Jewish admissions to universities and medical schools had significantly increased.⁴⁶ In Vienna, around 50% of the medical students were Jews.⁴⁷ The overt anti-Semitic sentiment, however, had not waned. For example, after the publication of Theodor Billroth’s polemic against Jewish medical students in 1875,⁴⁸ anti-Jewish riots erupted at the University of Vienna.⁴⁹

Another indication of the anti-Jewish sentiment is

45 On Chamitz, see D. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven, 1995), 100ff. The book of poems honoring Chamitz, along with Chamitz’s own works, were published together in N. Leibowitz, ed., *Seridim* (Darom Publishers: Jerusalem, 5697). For another example of such poems, see M. Benayahu, “Songs on the Occasion of the Graduation of the Physician Yehuda Matzliach Padova,” *Koroth* 7:1-2 (April, 1976), 39-49.

46 See I. Singer, ed., *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s. v., universities.

47 J. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2001), 240, writes that nearly forty percent were Jewish. T. Buklijas, “Cultures of Death and Politics of Corpse Supply: Anatomy in Vienna 1848-1914,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 82 (2008), 570-607, writes that fifty five percent were Jewish around this time.

48 Billroth’s work was entitled, *On the Teachers and Students of Medical Science in the Universities of the German Nation, with General Observations on Universities: A Culture-Historic Study*. On Billroth and the impact of his anti-Semitic diatribe, see J. Efron, op. cit., 240-243. See review of his book, “Professor Billroth in Hot Water,” *Medical Times and Gazette* 1 (1876), 46, which references his attacks on the Jewish students, commenting that Billroth himself was of the Jewish persuasion.

49 J. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish doctors and race science in fin-de-siecle Europe* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1994), 156.

reflected in a chapter eerily reminiscent of some two hundred years earlier at the University of Padua. The issue of the Jewish community's refusal to provide bodies for dissection, which plagued the Jews in Padua in the seventeenth century, resurfaced in the early decades of the twentieth century in pre-World War II Europe, when it had a significant impact on the Jewish medical students.⁵⁰ This time, however, the attacks were more widespread. What exactly precipitated this vitriolic, and almost unified response by diverse medical establishments, is unclear, but a number of medical schools across Europe began to demand that the respective Jewish communities provide bodies for the local university anatomy lectures.⁵¹ Refusal to accede to this request meant, at best, denied admittance to anatomy class; at worst, expulsion from medical school. In at least one case, in Romania, the animosity and resentment that was generated erupted into full-scale riots and university closures. In the student publication of Klausenburg University, an article called for wholesale pogroms against the Jews. The writer maintained that the pogroms would serve a dual purpose – the extermination of the Jews, and the plentiful supply of corpses.⁵²

Rabbi Chaim Schor, chief rabbinic judge of Bucharest, sent a question to the Sigheter Rav, Rabbi Chaim Tzvi Teitelbaum, asking for his sage *halakhic* advice as to how to

50 On this chapter, see N. Graber, "Anatomical Dissection for Medical Education and Research," (Hebrew) (Mada Publications: Jerusalem, 1943), esp. 28-59. Most of the material in this article is not found in Graber and should be considered a supplement to his excellent work.

51 This chapter must be viewed in the context of general anti-Semitic currents throughout pre-World War II Europe.

52 "Kill Jews So You May Have Corpses for Dissection," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Jewish News Archive* (<http://archive.jta.org/>), Bucharest (February 5, 1923).

control the explosive situation, and as to whether allowing dissection of Jewish bodies might be allowed in such a case where harm might befall the entire Jewish community.

While most rabbinic authorities simply rejected outright the option of providing bodies to the medical school, Rabbi Teitelbaum considered another option, albeit with great hesitation and trepidation. As the concern for *pikuakh nefesh* was only theoretical, he could not justify allowing the active transfer of Jewish bodies for dissection to the medical school. However, he found it somewhat less objectionable to have the local *Chevrah Kadishah* simply refrain from collecting the bodies of those who died in the hospital, a passive act. The bodies of those who died in the hospitals would then be taken by the medical school for teaching purposes instead. Even this compromise, which involved no active violation of Jewish law, but rather passive allowance, he offered with hesitation.

There is indirect evidence that the ruling of Rabbi Teitelbaum may have been followed from the responsa of another Romanian rabbi of that time, Rabbi Yehudah Leib Zirelsohn.⁵³ The question posed to the latter involved the case of a family outside of Romania who had heard of the passing of their relative who lived in Romania. The family began the *shiva* observance upon hearing of the death, assuming the burial would follow forthwith. Upon arrival in Romania, however, it was revealed that the body was sent to the medical school for dissection since no one had presented to claim the body in a timely fashion. The *Chevrah Kadishah* would routinely collect even the unclaimed bodies of Jews who had died in local hospitals.

53 *Má'archei Lev*, n. 77.

Perhaps this very case is a reflection of the acceptance of the *pesak* of Rabbi Teitelbaum.

In fact, Rabbi Zirelsohn was directly involved in the dissection controversy. In 1926, the Romanian Parliament passed a bill excluding Jewish students from attending Romanian universities if the Jewish community refused to furnish a corresponding number of Jewish corpses.⁵⁴ Rabbi Zirelsohn was a member of the Romanian Parliament of Bessarabia and testified that Jews were beaten, houses destroyed and synagogues ransacked as a result of the ongoing anti-Semitism.

A similar story played out in Cracow. The head of the prosectorium of the medical school demanded that Jewish corpses be supplied. The Jewish students requested to perform autopsies specifically on Jewish bodies arguing that it would lead to saving human lives. They further claimed that refusal would result in exclusion of Jewish students from medical schools and weaken their attachment to Judaism.

The famed Rabbi Meir Shapira, founder of the *Yeshivat Chakhmei Lublin*, who introduced the study of *daf yomi*, responded to the query and points out that the issue was addressed at the previous year's rabbinic conference in Warsaw. The answer was clearly in the negative, that autopsies were not allowed. Rabbi Shapira rejected the claim that such a stance might lead to the alienation of students from Judaism claiming a form of slippery slope argument that if we allowed abrogation of the law in this

54 "Jewish Students Barred from Medical Colleges in Romania Unless Jewish Corpses are Submitted," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Jewish News Archive* (<http://archive.jta.org/>), Bucharest (March 8, 1926).

case, it would lead to the wholesale abandonment of the Torah.⁵⁵

The actual delivery by the Warsaw Burial Society of a Jewish woman's corpse for dissection led to a great upheaval at the time. Rabbi Chaim Elazar Spira, the Munkatcher Rav, strongly condemned this action and referred to the burial society, known as the "*gemach shel emes*," as the "*gemach shel sheker*," the society of lies.⁵⁶

Similar dilemmas in other cities throughout Europe, including Vilna and Kovno, led members of the Jewish communities to seek *halakhic* responses from prominent rabbinic figures throughout Europe. The expressed fear was that refusing to allow dissection of Jewish bodies would possibly lead to: 1) the absence of Jewish physicians altogether, 2) the extension of anti-Semitic sentiments to physical pogroms which could take the lives of other Jews, and 3) students who wish to pursue medicine, but who could not do so as Jews, turning away from Judaism altogether.⁵⁷ Both the reality and consequence of these claims was addressed in the responsa literature of the time. Despite the fact that the majority of rabbinic opinion refused to allow dissection of Jewish bodies, even under these dire circumstances, many of the *Chevrah Kadishah* organizations in Europe ultimately

55 See E. Urbach, "The History of Polish Jews After World War I as Reflected in the Traditional Literature," in R. Brody and M. D. Herr, *Ephraim E. Urbach: Collected Writings in Jewish Studies* (Magnes Press: Jerusalem, 1999), 203-226, esp. 211-212; Graber.

56 *Minchat Elazar* 4:28. The reference to the case from Warsaw appears as a footnote in the index to the responsa at the beginning of the volume. The responsum itself discusses the laws of dissection, but makes no reference to the case. Assumedly, the case arose between the writing and the printing of the volume, as reflected in the text of the note that this was a very recent event.

57 "Rabbis' Ban on Jewish Corpses Causes Baptism, is Charge," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Jewish News Archive* (<http://archive.jta.org/>), Warsaw (June 22, 1923).

arranged provisions with their respective local medical schools for the delivery of Jewish bodies.⁵⁸

America in the 20th Century

In the United States, in the early 20th century, the number of applications of Jewish students to medical schools was remarkably high. In 1934, according to the secretary of the Association of American Medical Colleges, over 60% of the 33,000 applications on file were from Jews. Covert, though sometimes explicit, quotas limited the number of these students who were actually able to attend medical school. The history of the unofficial quota policies of many American universities that restricted Jews from admission has now been well documented.⁵⁹ In fact, one author in 1939, after reviewing the statistics of Jewish student acceptances to medical school, wrote:⁶⁰

Now that the evidence is in, I may indulge in a few words of interpretation... First, to the individual student. We must discourage Jewish young people and their parents from the exclusive hope for medical careers. We must encourage them to consider other ... fields. ... These quotas are a danger to the medical profession, as they mark the

58 See Graber, op. cit. Often it was the unclaimed bodies, criminals or suicide victims that were given over to the medical schools.

59 See N. Ratnoff and I. W. Held, "Some Problems of the Jewish Medical Student," *Medical Leaves* 4 (1942), 146-151; L. Sokoloff, "The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Quota in Medical School Admissions," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 68:4 (November, 1992), 497-518; E. C. Halperin, "The Jewish Problem in U.S. Medical Education: 1920-1955," *Journal of the History of Medicine* 56 (April, 2001), 140-167.

60 L. J. Levinger, "Jewish Medical Students in America," *Medical Leaves* (1939), 91-95.

introduction of prejudice into a field that should be totally without it.

It is in fact this continued discrimination against the Jewish student that led President Samuel Belkin of Yeshiva University to charter the Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University in 1951.⁶¹ At the dedication of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine on January 21, 1955, Dr. Belkin remarked:

We will have an opportunity to appoint men to the faculty that can do research and teach; men of outstanding caliber who at this moment do not have opportunity at other schools. All of you know the problems that exist.⁶²

Thankfully, today we are beyond the age of formal quotas. To be sure, there are cases of discrimination or anti-Semitism in medical training today as well, but they are not systemic or institutionalized. Jewish medical students attend the country's finest institutions, without governmental permission, and without paying higher fees or providing meats for the faculty at the first snow of the season. Established laws and religious protections and freedoms obviate the need for the Jewish community to provide bodies for dissection. Jewish physicians also frequently attain positions of leadership in hospitals and medical associations.

61 See Sokoloff, *op. cit.*, 512-514.

62 http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/754670/Rabbi_Shmuel_Belkin/Dedication_of_Albert_Einstein_College_of_Medicine

Today, the struggle of the religious Jewish medical student can now properly focus on the *halakhic* aspects of the practice of medicine, as opposed to peripheral obstacles to attaining medical training. We began our study with Maimonides the physician and we conclude in the present, with Jewish students training at institutions like the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and those named after Maimonides, such as Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, not to mention dozens of other medical schools across the country. Many of these students are immersed in Torah study and seeking the Torah's approach to issues such as the practice of medicine on Shabbos, treatment at the end of life, organ transplantation and the definition of death. This journal is a remarkable reflection of this new chapter in the Jewish history of medicine and it behooves us to appreciate just how far we have come from the times of the Rambam.

