Vermigli was as powerful a preacher as he was a scholar.¹ In 1542 he fled Italy and Lucca where he had served as Prior of the Augustinian Canons of San Frediano, and in the early autumn of that year proceeded to Strasbourg, after an initial sojourn in Zurich. After just one month, Bucer invited Vermigli to replace Wolfgang Capito, who had recently died from the plague. Clearly, Bucer thought Vermigli knew sufficient Hebrew to be able to lecture on the Old Testament. We know he had previously spent time learning Hebrew from a Jewish physician named Isaac in Bologna at the beginning of the 1530s.² Vermigli studied in the university in both Bologna and Padua for ten years in order to become a teacher. Emidio Campi, Alessandro Pastore and Marcantonio Flaminio are all persuaded that Vermigli is an exemplary product of the Hebraist culture in Renaissance Italy.³ It is my goal to investigate this question by making three further inquires: first, the state of learning Hebrew in Italy at the beginning of the sixteenth century; secondly, the notably high level of interest in studying the Psalms; and finally, as I have been fortunate enough to have had the opportunity over the period of almost two decades to inspect Vermigli’s annotations on his own copies of the Rabbinic Bibles (now housed in the library at Geneva), I shall conclude with some remarks on Vermigli’s reading and use of the commentaries of the medieval rabbis.

¹ I warmly thank Anne E. McBride who read and corrected my paper. All remaining mistakes are mine.
² See ‘Simler’s Life of Peter Martyr Vermigli’ in LLS 17. See also ‘Letter No. 6: To the Church at Lucca’ of Christmas Eve 1542 in LLS 98: ‘Because many in this academy know Hebrew, I expound the Hebrew text in Latin.’
³ Emidio Campi quoted by Daniel Shute, LAM xxxv.
I. Learning Hebrew in Sixteenth-Century Italy

The Congregation of Santa Giustina of Padua had a very important library, which grew to 1,337 volumes at the time of the last entry in the inventory, shortly after 1484. Monks read classical Latin and classical Greek, and in 1465 the chapter-general admonished its brethren ‘to spend more time in the reading of Holy Scripture than of Cicero and of the Greek poets and literature’. Some taught the Greek language within the Congregation, but only a few knew Hebrew, such as Lucas Bernardus who taught at Padua in 1495. At the time, very few schools or universities taught Hebrew. It is true that Peter Schwartz (Petrus Negri, 1435–1483) taught Hebrew at the University of Ingolstadt in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, and he published in 1477 a Hebrew reader called Stella Meschiah, but he was exceptional.

Among both Italian and German monks, the rediscovery of Hebrew commenced in the context of the significant revival of classical Latin and Greek in the 1480s and ’90s. Wolfgang Musculus discovered Ovid in his youth on the granary floor of his monastery, where he learned, summarized, and abbreviated the Metamorphoses. He later turned his interest to the Bible and to Greek and Hebrew. Ad hebraices fontes began with the revival of classical Latin and Greek.

Daniel Bomberg, the great publisher of Rabbinic Bibles and the Talmud, Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin, Philip Melanchthon’s uncle, received their instruction in Hebrew in Italy on an informal basis, mostly from Jewish physicians. In 1492, Johannes Reuchlin (born in Pforzheim in 1455) secured the services of Jacob Yehiel of Loans, personal physician to Emperor Frederick III. At the end of the century, Reuchlin journeyed to Italy, where Domenico Cardinal Grimani

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4 See Barry Collett, Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation: the Congregation of Santa Giustina of Padua (Oxford, 1985), 32.
5 Collett, Italian Benedictine Scholars, 29.
6 Collett, Italian Benedictine Scholars, 44.