

ABSTRACT

RABBI ISRAELE COSTA'S 'MIḲWEH YISRAEL' (1851):  
THE BEGINNING OF THE ADAPTED JEWISH STORY FOR YOUTH

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*MiḲweh Yisrael* by Rabbi Israele Costa (1819–1879), published in Livorno (1851), is a literary anthology containing one hundred stories. It is one of the earliest Hebrew readers for students, and the very first to include a collection of short stories adapted from Rabbinic and Jewish literature, in many versions, throughout the generations. Despite Costa's affiliation with the circle of enlightened polymathic scholars and poets such as Rabbi Elijah Benamozegh (1823–1900) and Rabbi Abraham Barukh Piperno (1800–1863), *MiḲweh Yisrael* is more than just an educational project by a representative of the Italian Jewish liberal Enlightenment movement (Haskala); the stated purpose of the anthology is to reinforce Jewish identity among students and offer practice translating Hebrew texts to local languages.

This paper traces the poetic characteristics, both in form and content, of the Jewish stories that were adapted in *MiḲweh Yisrael*, and it analyzes the author's editorial considerations and esthetic and ethical choices, based on a comparison with earlier versions of the same stories. The poetic quality of the stories in the volume is unusual compared to earlier previous versions. The liberties taken by Costa in altering the plots of the narratives are particularly striking, and the changes in the messages of the stories are unparalleled. These unusual choices are clarified based on the unique cultural climate of the Jewish Spanish community in Livorno in early nineteenth century and in light of Costa's literary oeuvre.