

News

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The Latin Talmud and Its Influence on Christian-Jewish Polemic

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1 Introduction

In October 2014 the ERC Research Project ‘The Latin Talmud and Its Influence on Christian-Jewish Polemic’ (CoG 613694, FP7/2007–2013) started working at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Over the next four years, the principal investigator, Prof. Alexander Fidora, and his team will study the reception of the Talmud in the Latin Middle Ages and its place in Christian-Jewish polemic. The members of the team are Dr. Ulisse Cecini (Medieval Latin), Dr. Óscar de la Cruz Palma (Classical Philology) and Dr. Eulàlia Vernet i Pons (Jewish Studies) as well as two doctoral students who shall join the project in October 2015. In addition, Prof. Harvey J. Hames (Beersheba) and Dr. Görge K. Hasselhoff (Dortmund) will spend one year each at the project in Barcelona as visiting fellows.

2 The Talmud in the Latin Middle Ages

The importance of the project, which is, in essence, to document and examine the Christian discovery and use of the Talmud through the ages, is that it addresses questions of identity, religious and cultural, which are highly relevant to the twenty-first century as well. Christian identity in medieval and early modern Europe was defined, to a large extent, not only through religious praxis and orthodoxy, but on the basis of polemic and through interaction with the other. Christian use and interest in the Talmud, including the translation of hundreds of passages into Latin known as the *Extractiones de Talmud*, increased when doubts

regarding the veracity of Christianity emerged as a result of the incremental expansion of its world, intellectually and geographically. New formulations and questions arose out of this encounter with the extra-biblical Jewish materials.

The first Christian figure to be aware of the Talmud was the ninth-century Carolingian bishop Agobard of Lyon, who mentions it in a letter he wrote to the emperor, Louis the Pious. However, the first serious engagement with the Talmud was by the twelfth-century convert Petrus Alfonsi, who in a very popular work (*Dialogus contra Iudaeos*) justifies his conversion by vilifying his old faith, Judaism, along with Islam. He does this by sharply attacking the Talmud and ridiculing many of the teachings found in it. While Petrus Alfonsi would be the first in a long line of Christians who quoted the Talmud for polemical purposes, there were other approaches towards the Talmud in the twelfth century, such as that of the school of Saint-Victor in Paris. The Victorines availed themselves of the new commentaries being written on the Bible, such as that of Rashi (Solomon Yitzhaki, 1040–1105), who also wrote an extended commentary on the Talmud. This attempt to try to understand the original meaning of the biblical text (“Hebraica veritas”) in order to make more sense of Christianity also implied using the Talmud which elaborates on the meaning of that text. However, the Victorines did not make translations of the Talmud and the extent of their contact would have been in oral conversation with rabbis. It is significant that Paris in this period was one of the centres of Tosafist production (Jewish medieval explanatory and legal glosses on the Talmudic text).

One of the most significant moments for the more intensive engagement by the Christian world with the Talmud is the approach made by a Jewish convert, Nicholas Donin, to pope Gregory IX in 1239 with a list of 35 articles against the Talmud. The immediate result of this was the inquisitorial process against the Talmud which took place in 1240 in Paris under king Louis IX and which led to the burning of the Talmud in 1241/1242. Both the Hebrew and Latin accounts of this disputation show that Christians had become uneasy about this post-biblical Jewish literature and how it portrayed Christianity. Though the Talmud went up in flames in Paris, it was not the end of the story, as the Jews approached pope Innocent IV in order to get the ruling against the Talmud revoked. These events constitute the context of the very first translation into Latin of hundreds of citations from the Talmud aptly entitled *Extractiones de Talmud* from 1244/1245. This extraordinary collection, extant in at least eight manuscripts (in particular Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. 16558), was fundamental for future Christian usage of and citation from the Talmudic literature; it is not only the first but also the largest corpus of Latin Talmud translations; hence its edition and study are at the core of our research project.

What is interesting is that while the procedure in 1240 marked the Talmud as a heretical work needing expurgation, by the 1260s, some Christians, particularly in the Dominican order, had realized that this literature could also be used in affirmative manner in order to substantiate Christian truths. Hence, the (in)famous Barcelona Disputation of 1263 pitted another Jewish convert, friar Paul, against one of the greatest Jewish figures of his time, Nahmanides, with the former wishing to prove some of the central tenets of the Christian faith using the Talmud as his proof text. Both disputations are closely connected since friar Paul was a protégé of king Louis IX; it is therefore not unlikely that Paul knew the *Extractiones de Talmud*.

Following the Barcelona Disputation, a Catalan Dominican, Ramon Martí, completed (in ca. 1280) his magisterial *Pugio fidei* ('Dagger of Faith')¹ containing innumerable citations from the Talmud and further rabbinical writings proving that the Messiah had already come. Unlike his earlier work, the *Capistrum Iudaeorum* ('Muzzle of the Jews'),² where he also included Latin quotations from the Talmud, here he first cites the texts in their original language and then provides Latin translations, which in their entirety constitute a considerable corpus that is also deserving of our close attention.

While the core of our research programme focuses on medieval Christian use of the Talmud, in particular the *Extractiones de Talmud* and the *Pugio fidei*, we will also send out feelers to the later periods in order to map out the discussions about the use of, and citations from, the Talmud particularly in relation to the early-modern fascination with Kabbalistic (Jewish mystical) texts. This will give a broader picture of the Christian usage and understanding of this seminal corpus of Jewish writings.

3 State-of-the-Art and Objectives

At present, there are no studies covering all aspects of the research subject. As for the *Extractiones de Talmud*, Isidore Loeb carefully examined Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. 16558 and Gilbert Dahan gave a useful introduction to the study of the text but never edited it.³ Some brief specimina of the Latin text have been published by Jacques Échard, Joseph Klapper, Erich Klibansky, José

1 RAIMUNDUS MARTINI *Pugio fidei* 1687.

2 RAIMUNDUS MARTINI *Capistrum Iudaeorum*.

3 LOEB 1880–1881; DAHAN 1999.

María Millás Vallicrosa and Gilbert Dahan;⁴ yet they only make available a very small fraction of the complete text. With regard to Ramon Martí, Saul Lieberman gave a survey of Jewish texts employed by the Catalan Dominican,⁵ but that survey is incomplete, since Lieberman relied solely on De Voisin's humanistic edition of the *Pugio fidei* from 1651 (in its second edition prepared by Benedict Carpzov, Leipzig 1687). As Pier Francesco Fumagalli, Gorge Hasselhoff, Ryan Szpiech and others have shown, Martí's autograph kept in Paris (Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Ms. 1405) contains many more texts still unedited.⁶ Moisés Orfali provided a useful list of the Hebrew quotations in Jerónimo de Santa Fe's works, as compared to Ramon Martí and others.⁷ One major contribution which sets the standards for all further research is Chenmelech Merchavia's book *The Church versus Talmudic and Midrashic literature (500–1248)*.⁸ However, since it was published in Hebrew and not translated into English, its audience was relatively limited. Merchavia ends his analysis with the Parisian Talmud Trial. He does not include the Barcelona Disputation and only gives an overview of Ramon Martí's collection. Recent literature has not filled these gaps.

The objectives of the project are both philological and historical. In order to be able to examine the use of the Talmud in the Latin Middle Ages, the first objective is to make the *Extractiones* available in a reliable critical edition along with a carefully annotated English translation and to compare them to other translations such as those contained in the *Pugio fidei*.⁹ The historical objectives of the project, which are closely connected to its philological outcomes, are to study the *Extractiones* in the context of the Christian-Jewish disputations. To this end, it is of paramount interest to analyze the relationship between the Talmud translation of the *Extractiones* and Nicholas Donin's letter to pope Gregory IX on the one hand and Thibaud de Sézanne's *Pharetra* on the other. First steps into this direction suggest that the Talmud translation is indeed strongly dependent on Nicholas Donin's list, while it has no direct relation to the *Pharetra*.¹⁰ At the

⁴ ÉCHARD 1708; KLAPPER 1926; KLIBANSKY 1933; MILLÁS VALLICROSA 1960; DAHAN 1999.

⁵ LIEBERMAN 1970.

⁶ FUMAGALLI 1986; HASSELHOFF 2002; SZPIECH 2011.

⁷ ORFALI 1998, p. 104 sq.

⁸ MERCHAVIA 1970.

⁹ To this end, we are preparing an edition of Ramon Martí's autograph, see RAIMUNDUS MARTINI *Pugio fidei* 2014.

¹⁰ See the paper "The Latin Talmud and its translators. Thibaud de Sézanne vs. Nicholas Donin?" given by Alexander Fidora at the 10th Congress of the European Association for Jewish Studies, July 20–24, 2014, École Pratique des Hautes Études/École Normale Supérieure, Paris. To be published in *Henoch*.

same time, we compare the *Extractiones* to the overall structure and sources of the Christian-Jewish disputations held in Paris in 1240 and in Barcelona in 1263 respectively. This procedure will shed new light on the possible context of composition of the *Extractiones* and their author's identity and intention. On the basis of the analysis of the role of the Talmud in these disputations, we shall also survey the further evolution of different attitudes towards the reception of the Talmud in the Latin Middle Ages, looking particularly at the historical context.

Apart from describing the various attitudes, the nature of the relations between Jews and Christians which led to partial translations of the Talmud will be examined along with the impact of these translations on the formation of Christian religious identities and subsequent relations and changes in attitude towards the Jewish minority in the Middle Ages and beyond.

For further information on the ongoing activities of the project, please visit: <http://pagines.uab.cat/lattal/>.

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