

JEWISH CHRISTIAN RELATIONS PAST AND PRESENT

BOOK REVIEW

THE CHURCH VERSUS TALMUDIC AND MIDRASHIC LITERATURE (500-1248)

by

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Any scholar dealing with Jewish history in the Middle Ages must take into consideration the relations between Judaism and the Christian world in the west and the world of Islam in the east. In order to understand this period, we must examine the image of Judaism in the eyes of Christian and Muslim worlds, and the image of Christianity and Islam in the eyes of Jews at that time. Merchavia's book describes the Talmudic-Rabbinical image as perceived by the Church for seven and a half centuries, that is to say from the end of the time of the Church Fathers until after the burning of the Talmud in Paris in 1242.

It becomes evident that a great deal of this period, including Jewish history, is hidden in the general fog of the Dark Ages. Early Jewish settlement in the Christian west is shrouded in obscurity. There is disagreement regarding the cultural state of the first settlers and their dependence on the established centres. Their knowledge of the Hebrew language and Talmudic literature needs more clarification.

The first of the three parts of Merchavia's book is devoted to this subject, and is called *The Talmud and Midrash in the Christian Literature in the Middle Ages*. The first chapter of this part deals with Christian Biblical exegesis from the ban on study of the *Deuterosis* by Emperor Justinian in 553 to the ninth century. In this chapter, Merchavia examines anti-Jewish polemics in Christian interpretations. The other nine chapters in this part deal with Christian writers from the ninth to the thirteenth century, who in their books attacked Judaism and Jews. The second part of the book is called *The Church's War against the Talmud*, and is devoted to the attacks on the Talmud in the middle of the thirteenth century, the Paris Disputation,

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התלמוד בראי הנצרות; היחס לספרות ישראל שלאחר המקרא בעולם הנוצרי בימי הביניים 500-1248.

those responsible for it and the texts involved in that affair. The third part, which is the continuation of the second, provides an index to rabbinical literature whose Latin translation is in the *Paris Manuscript*, that is to say, large excerpts from the works of the Church Fathers and appendices (additional Latin sources, in particular those concerning the Talmud affair in Paris).

Merchavia has collected all the material from ecclesiastical sources (including even the most doubtful) and has examined and analysed them. He had to examine hundreds of large volumes of *Patrologia Latina* by Migne, and extracted all references to Talmudic and Midrashic literature. Although the harvest is meagre, it is good that this thorough piece of work has been done.

A number of problems arise that still have to be solved. One of these is the existence of remnants of the Sadducees in the Byzantine Empire in the sixth century. From Justinian's wellknown *novella* 146, one can gather that there was dissention among the Byzantine Jews, and some demanded that the Septuagint translation of the Torah should be used in the synagogue. There was apparently opposition to the *Deuterosis* or oral law (in its widest sense). There is a disagreement among scholars regarding the meaning of the word *Deuterosis*, and the *novella* implies that there were people who denied the resurrection of the dead, the Day of Judgement and the existence of angels. The question that must be asked is whether these people belonged to sects of earlier periods. This matter has acquired great significance today after the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls in connection with the controversy concerning the time of their writing.

Another problem concerns the channels through which Jewish literature reached Christian writers. The little material on Jewish religion and the Talmud used by Christian writers up to the end of the eleventh century did not always reach them through direct contact with Jews, but rather through their reading of the Church Fathers. We are at times faced with puzzles that cannot be solved. An example of this is the seventh century Anglo-Saxon poet, Caedmon, to whom verse adaptations of Genesis and Exodus have been attributed. These adaptations contain motifs taken from Midrashic literature. Where did this seventh century Anglo-Saxon poet find the legends whose source was in Midrashic literature? At that time there were neither Jews nor proselytes in England. Neither Mirsky nor Merchavia have been able to answer this question. Merchavia's book recounts how, in spite of barriers between the Jewish and Christian worlds, there was nevertheless far more intellectual curiosity among Christian writers concerning Jewry than there was among Jews concerning Christians. Judaism was far more of a challenge to Christianity than vice-versa. Christians were curious to read what was written in Jewish sources concerning Jesus and his teaching. They were unable to comprehend the rabbis' silence, and claimed that the Jews falsified the sources, or else were hiding references to Jesus and his teach-

ing. It was this school that saved the Talmud from destruction. There is no exact answer to the question of when Christian scholars first found proofs for Christianity in the Talmud. Alanus ab Insulis, in the twelfth century, was the first to prove from the Talmud that the Messiah had come. This is the wellknown statement: 'The school of Elijah taught: the world has existed for six thousand years – two thousand years of void, two thousand years of Tora and two thousand of the time of the Messiah'. (Sanhedrin 97, Sefer Eliyahu Raba by Ish Shalom 7.) This statement was quoted in all religious disputations up to the Lwow debate with the Frankists in 1759.

John Reuchlin fought against the burning of the Talmud not because of his love for the Talmud but because he believed it confirmed the principles of Christianity.

I must comment on a few of the numerous problems dealt with in this book. On p. 208 the author writes that in the twelfth century, and apparently in the eleventh too, there were people who called the aggadic part of the Talmud *The Books of Gamaliel* and he goes on to say that a tradition developed in Christian literature that ascribed Jewish post-Biblical literature to Gamaliel and called it after him. The author quotes a number of instances in Christian literature that refer to Gamaliel as the author of Talmudical legends, or of the Talmud. In addition, he quotes from *Minhat Knaot* by Abba Mari ben Moshe of Lunel, a leader of the zealots who opposed the rationalists at the end of the thirteenth century. (letter no. 73, p. 142). The letter tells how the scholars of Montpellier tried to persuade the city governor to banish anyone refusing to have his son, however young, study physical science and theology. The governor's reply was: 'We shall never agree to fix a time when men shall occupy themselves only with the sciences that you call Gamaliel, for that will deterre the Jews from embracing Christianity'. The governor's reply is unclear. The stumbling block is of course in the word 'Gamaliel'. Senior Sachs, of the nineteenth century, has stressed this difficulty. David Kaufmann concludes that 'Gamaliel' refers to the book of medicine by Galen, which in the tenth century was attributed to Gamaliel by Hebrew scholars. It is difficult to determine to whom the governor was referring with 'Gamaliel'. Kaufmann is apparently correct in his interpretation that the reference is to medicine. According to that interpretation, the governor said that he could not permit the young to study only medicine and that he must permit them to study other fields too. It is impossible to conclude from this passage that Christians in the thirteenth century called the Talmud 'Gamaliel'. Merchavia also bases his conclusions on the convert Yehuda (Hermanus) of Cologne, who tells in his autobiography, which was written for Christians, that in the Jewish school at Worms the Five Books of Moses were studied 'with Gamaliel's commentary'. It is worth noting that some modern scholars do not attribute any significance to this autobiography.

There is yet another problem in connection with the convert Dunin, who initiated the Disputation in Paris. The author takes issue with Grayzel who said that the convert Dunin became a Karaite. That is to say that his battle against the Talmud was caused by his interest in Karaism and not Christianity. But this approach is used to explain that Dunin's Christianity was suspect in the eyes of the Church and that in the end he was excommunicated and sentenced to death. As a result of his argumentation against Grayzel, the author arrives at another extreme whereby he belittles and denies all influence on the Church of Karaite anti-Talmud criticism. He also disagrees with the present writer, who found similarities between Karaite anti-Talmud criticism and that of the Church in the Paris Disputation. The question of the channels of the Church's anti-Talmud criticism requires a broader treatment. The Church knew of anti-Talmud trends in Judaism and there is no doubt that the Church drew for support on converts who knew Talmudic literature as well as Karaite criticism. The Karaite movement continued in Spain up to the thirteenth century. According to some scholars, there were groups of Karaites in Germany up to the present century. We must point out that for the Church any anti-Talmudist was considered a Karaite. The Frankists of the eighteenth century were called anti-Talmud disputes. The convert Thomas of Canterbury, who participated in the Paris Disputation, talks of the Karaites' opposition to the Talmud. We must also take into consideration the attachment of the Marranos to Karaism. This attachment requires special study.

In his treatment of the sources of the Paris Disputation, the author refers to the wellknown note by Jacob Ben Elijah of Valencia, in which Dunin is mentioned. The author rejects its importance because Dunin is mentioned in it in connection with blood libel and there was no blood libel mentioned in the Paris Disputation. It is impossible to agree with this conclusion. We believe Jacob Ben Elijah. In the book by Rabbi Joseph the Zealot, secretary to Rabbi Yehiel at the time of the Paris Disputation, we hear of blood libel that must have originated in the convert circles in Paris. In his interpretation of the passage in Numbers 23:24, 'And you shall drink the blood of the slain', Joseph says that the Chancellor of Paris University said to Rabbi Yehiel, 'You eat the blood of the uncircumcised as Balaam prophesied'. The accusation of the use of blood is not mentioned in the Latin protocol of the Disputation because it was not dealt with, but one can assume that the converts discussed it between meetings. In the twelfth century, already, one convert said, in connection with the blood libel in Norwich (1144), that in ancient Jewish books it says that the Jews will not reach freedom or return to the Land of Israel without spilling Christian blood.

The second part of the book under review is particularly important. As already mentioned, it is devoted to a detailed and precise analysis of

the Latin manuscripts in the Paris National Library called *Extractiones de Talmut*. This manuscript was compiled by Christian theologians, with the assistance of converts, according to the instructions of the head of the University of Paris, Cardinal Odo, one of the judges in the Paris Disputation. This manuscript of one thousand columns contains a large collection of Talmudic literature, prayers, *piyyutim* and Rashi commentaries in Latin translation. It also contains the Latin protocol of the Paris Disputation and texts connected with it, and a list of Talmud scholars. The collection was compiled after the burning of the Talmud in 1242 and it is on this that the Christian Church has based its persecution of the Talmud for generations. Raymundus Martini, author of the book *Pugio Fidei* drew on it, and it was used in the disputations of Barcelona and Tortosa. Summaries such as *Pharetra Fidei Catholicae* or *Errores Judaeorum extracti ex Talmut* appeared in the fifteenth century, and it has been used by modern authors in connection with the Paris Disputation. In 1880 A. Lob, who devoted careful research to the manuscript, said it was valuable for an understanding of the Talmud. He wrote, 'One example taken from the book will serve to demonstrate that this book is useful today for textual criticism of the Talmud. This book contains a number of different versions'. In 1933 A. Klibansky, who wrote an introduction to the manuscript, announced that he was preparing a 'scientific edition' (*Wissenschaftliche Auswertung*) of the manuscript. His study was apparently lost in the Holocaust. In 1939 S. Lieberman wrote, 'As far as I know, not a single Talmudist has made use of the Latin translations that were compiled for the Barcelona and Tortosa Disputations for textual criticism. If I succeed in drawing the attention of Talmud scholars to this work, I shall be satisfied'. Lieberman's wish has been fulfilled by Merchavia, who has devoted a number of years to examining the manuscripts. In 1964 he published a study called *Concerning Rashi's Commentary on Chapter Chelek of Tractate Sanhedrin*, based on the Paris manuscript. In 1966 he published a thorough study in English containing a list of 700 Talmudic expressions translated into Latin, 200 explanations of the translations, and 18 translated into Old French. In 1965 he published a study on the transcription of words from Hebrew to Latin in the thirteenth century manuscript. In that work he dealt with all the problems encountered by Jewish scholars using Latin sources of Jewish content; the comprehension of words and phrases from Hebrew literature in Latin transcriptions. In Haim Sherman's Jubilee Volume he published a *piyyut* by an eleventh century French poet with Latin transliteration taken from the Paris manuscript. In *Leshonenu*, XXX, 41-45 Merchavia has published a complete list of first names mentioned in the Paris manuscript in order of the Hebrew alphabet. In the book under review, he has broadened the scope of analysis and content. The biggest contribution of the second half of the book is a complete list of all sections according to first words, its place in Jewish literature and its place in the

manuscript. As well as using the Paris manuscript of the *Extractiones* he has used copies of this compilation in libraries all over the world. Mercha-via's research into the Paris manuscript is a valuable piece of scientific work, and an important contribution to a number of fields of learning: Talmud text, phonetics, the Hebrew language in the Middle Ages, relations between Christians and Jews, etc. Although at times there is a polemical pathos which should be avoided in a scientific book, the work is exemplary in its scientific exactitude, and obviously years of painstaking study have gone into it. The work fully merits an English translation which would make it available to a much wider readership.

The time has now come to make a scientific study of all the texts concerned and make a comparison between them and the accepted Talmud text, thereby completing this excellent work.

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